

BOOK REVIEW

A Review of "Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts."

Brené Brown, New York, NY: Random House (2018)

Review By: Kimberly Dickman. Ph.D.

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again... who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.”

Theodore Roosevelt

In this new book, Brené Brown applies her arsenal of vulnerability research toward leadership and gives a practical, 'no-BS,' actionable book about what it takes to be a daring leader. She holds no punches while using data and the occasional swear word to answer the question: What about the way people are leading today needs to change in order for leaders to be successful in a complex, rapidly changing environment where we're faced with seemingly intractable challenges and an insatiable demand for innovation? One answer emerges from her research: We need braver leaders and more courageous cultures (p. 6). Brown summarizes the quote by Theodore Roosevelt into three lessons that she expands on throughout the book. First, if we are brave enough, often enough, we will fall (p. 19). Second, vulnerability is the emotion we experience during times of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. It is not winning or losing, it's having the courage to show up when you can't control the outcome (p. 20). Third, unless a person is in the arena and willing to "take a beating" on occasion, we should not be interested in or open to their feedback (p. 20).

Brené Brown, Ph.D., LMSW is a research professor at the University of Houston where she holds the Huffington Foundation-Brené Brown Endowed Chair at The Graduate College of Social Work. She has spent the last two

decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame and empathy. She is the author of five #1 *New York Times* bestsellers: *The Gifts of Imperfection*, *Daring Greatly*, *Rising Strong*, *Braving the Wilderness*, and *Dare to Lead*, the last of which was released in October 2018 and is the culmination of a seven-year study on the future of leadership. Brown spoke to the 2019 National Character and Leadership Symposium at the Air Force Academy and is known for producing one of the most highly watched presentations in TED Talk history.

The first part of the book explains the need for leaders to rumble with vulnerability. She begins by presenting the six myths of vulnerability, the first being that vulnerability is weakness. In 2014, presenting in front of hundreds of military Special Forces soldiers Brown asks: Can you give me a single example of courage that you've witnessed in another soldier or experienced in your own life that did not require experiencing vulnerability? After a long silence one man spoke up stating that courage does require managing massive vulnerability (p. 23). Leaders must rumble with vulnerability which means they have to build an environment based on trust and honesty to allow for safety when there needs to be a rumble (p. 37). Brown defines a rumble as a discussion, conversation or meeting where we stay curious and generous to stick with the messy middle or problem identification and solving where we own our parts and listen with the same passion with which we want to be heard (p. 10). She specifically lays out courage as a collection of four skill sets supported by twenty-eight behaviors. Brown provides simple and easy to remember phrases such as "clear is kind," "putting down the armor," and "courage is contagious," all of which are supported by actionable skills development. They are, however, anything but simple and easy. Leaders are required to commit to doing bold work, have tough conversations and show up with whole hearts. In Brown's words, they must embrace the suck (p. 2).

The second part of the book describes the necessity of building trust and living values. Continuing with the arena analogy of Roosevelt's quote, daring leaders leave their weapons and armor at the arena door but must stand in the arena with a clarity of values (p. 186). Brené Brown takes readers through a process to determine the two core values that should be so infallible, so precise, clear and unassailable that they don't feel like a choice but, in hard moments we allow leaders to automatically choose what's right over what's easy (p. 189). Leaders must practice these values and not just profess them, and when leaders live into their values they are never silent about hard things (p. 194). The author steps readers through a BRAVING inventory that she calls the first rumble tool that is needed for daring leaders.

Brown uses several military examples throughout the book and has a few pages written by an Air Force Colonel who describes how the authors work has impacted her command. The shared research finding of this book does not fall far from the original tenets and intent of military leadership. The Air Force's first manual on leadership, Air Force Manual 35-15 written in 1948, states the tenets of leadership as mercy, kindness, and belonging, and love. Specifically, feelings were referred to 147 times; creating a sense of belonging, 21 times. The manual goes on to describe the fear of combat, the fear of exclusion, the fear of life in the profession of arms 35 times, and love, yes, the word love was in this military leadership manual, 13 times to be exact (p. 65). In searching the Air Force's most current manual on leadership, Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1: *Leadership and Force Development* written in 2012, these terms do not show up at all.

Brown develops an argument and backs it up with research that supports a quote from Minouche Shafik, the director of the London School of Economics and Political Science, who states, "In the past, jobs were about muscle, now they're about brains, but in the future they'll be about the heart" (p. 71). *Dare to Lead*

has a great deal to offer about courage and vulnerability in the context of effective leadership. I hope you take the time to read it.

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