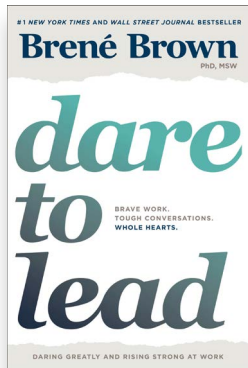


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brené Brown

Brené Brown, PhD, LMSW, is a research professor at the University of Houston and has spent 20 years studying courage, vulnerability, shame and empathy.

Dare to Lead

THE NUTSHELL

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We need braver leaders and more courageous cultures. At the heart of daring leadership is a deeply human truth that is rarely acknowledged, especially at work. Courage and fear are not mutually exclusive. Most of us feel brave and afraid at the exact same time. We feel vulnerable, sometimes all day long. Our research led to the very clear, very hopeful finding that courage is a collection of four skill sets that can be taught, observed, and measured. The four skill sets are: Rumbling with Vulnerability, Living into Our Values, Braving Trust, and Learning to Rise

PART ONE: RUMBLING WITH VULNERABILITY

Adaptability to change, hard conversations, feedback, problem solving, ethical decision making, recognition, resilience, and all of the other skills that underpin daring leadership are born of vulnerability. To foreclose on vulnerability and our emotional life out of fear that the costs will be too high is to walk away from the very thing that gives purpose and meaning to living. As the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio reminds us, “We are not necessarily thinking machines. We are feeling machines that think.”

From what I know to be true from my experience and what I consider to be one of the most important things to learn from this research, leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings, or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behavior.

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What this means is that we must find the courage to get curious and possibly surface emotions and emotional experiences that people can't articulate or that might be happening outside their awareness. If we find ourselves addressing the same problematic behaviors over and over, we may need to dig deeper to the thinking and feeling driving those behaviors.

All of these situations lead to the biggest threat to our ego and our sense of self-worth. Shame is the feeling that washes over us and makes us feel so flawed that we question whether we're worthy of love, belonging, and connection.

Looking for shame in organizations is like inspecting a home for termites. If you walk through a house and actually spot termites, you have an acute problem that's probably been going on for a while. If you walk through an office or school or place of worship and you actually see shame—you see a manager berating an employee or a teacher belittling a student or clergy using shame as a control mechanism or an activist using shame as a social justice tool—you're witnessing a full-blown threat to your culture. You have to figure out how and why it's happening and deal with it immediately (and without shame).

Empathy is one of the linchpins of cultures built on connection and trust. It's also an essential ingredient for teams who take risks and show up for rumbles. Empathy is a choice and it's a vulnerable choice, because if I were to choose to connect with you through empathy, I would have to connect with something in myself that knows that feeling. In the face of a difficult conversation, when we see that someone's hurt or in pain, it's our instinct as human beings to try to make things better. We want to fix, and we want to give advice but empathy isn't about fixing, it's the brave choice to be with someone in their darkness—not to race to turn on the light so we feel better.

PART TWO: LIVING INTO OUR VALUES

Living into our values means that we do more than profess our values, we practice them. We walk our talk, we are clear about what we believe and hold important, and we take care that our intentions, words, thoughts, and behaviors align with those beliefs. Living into our values requires some upfront work: contemplation that most of us have never taken the time to do.

A brave leader is not someone who is armed with all the answers. A brave leader is not someone who can facilitate a flawless discussion on hard topics. A brave leader is someone who says *I see you. I hear you. I don't have all the answers, but I'm going to keep listening and asking questions.* We all have the capacity to do that. We all have the ability to foster empathy. If we want to do good work, it's imperative that we continue to flesh out these harder conversations, to push against secrecy, silence, and judgment. It's the only way to eradicate shame from the workplace, to clear the way for a performance in the arena that correlates with our highest values and not the fear mongers from the stands.

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PART THREE: BRAVING TRUST

We all want to believe that we are trustworthy, even though, ironically, many of us struggle to trust others. Most people believe they're completely trustworthy, yet they trust only a handful of their colleagues. The math just doesn't work, because believing we're trustworthy and being perceived as trustworthy by others are two different things.

Charles Feltman's definitions of trust and distrust are completely aligned with how our research participants talked about trust. In *The Thin Book of Trust*, Feltman defines trust as "choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions." He describes distrust as deciding that "what is important to me is not safe with this person in this situation (or any situation)."

As you begin to address those areas that need improvement, remember this one of the founding concepts. Trust is built in small moments. If you struggle with reliability, make small and doable promises to yourself that are easy to fulfill, until you get a flywheel of reliability going again. If you struggle with boundaries, set small ones with your partner—like you will not be responsible for both cooking and cleaning up dinner—until you are adept at putting boundaries into action in a more meaningful way. Never forget that we can't give people what we don't have.

PART FOUR: LEARNING TO RISE

The Learning to Rise process is about getting up from our falls, overcoming our mistakes, and facing hurt in a way that brings more wisdom and wholeheartedness into our lives. As tough as it is, the payoff is huge. When we have the courage to walk into our story and own it, we get to write the ending. When we don't own our stories of failure, setbacks, and hurt—they own us.

As you think about your own path to daring leadership, remember Joseph Campbell's wisdom: "The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek." Own the fear, find the cave, and write a new ending for yourself, for the people you're meant to serve and support, and for your culture. Choose courage over comfort. Choose whole hearts over armor and choose the great adventure of being brave and afraid at the exact same time.