

HOW EMBRACING VULNERABILITY POWERS INNOVATION

A lot of us have been raised to believe that vulnerability equals weakness. Our formative years were littered with messages from our carers, teachers and, society in general, that we must be strong, brave and tough in order to get on in life. The narrative we heard was that showing vulnerability would make people believe we were weak and that, in turn, would damage our chances of succeeding.

The opposite is in fact true. There is a huge amount of research coming out now that proves that embracing vulnerability powers innovation and creativity and, as a result, huge success.

So, how do you embrace vulnerability?

First of all, let's get clear on what we mean by 'vulnerability'. Renee Brown, a leading researcher and author in the field of vulnerability defines it as "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure". The reason we find it hard to be vulnerable is because we fear the shame and rejection that we assume (often falsely) will come if we expose our weaknesses, concerns, worries and mistakes to others.

This is why being vulnerable is hard. It takes huge courage to open up to others about how we feel and not be 100% in control of their response. To not do it though it to live a life of missed opportunities that fear will rob you of.

Try the following exercises to begin embracing your vulnerability:

1. Learn to recognize your emotions

Becoming more present about your specific emotions can help you to start using them as a force for good in your life.

Rather than grouping all negative feelings into a 'I feel like shit' or 'I feel low' headline, start getting more familiar with each different negative feeling you might have. For example, do you feel angry, anxious, disappointed, scared, embarrassed, frustrated, misunderstood, grief, alone, lonely, overwhelmed, regretful, disgusted, sad, shameful, worried?

Likewise, rather than 'I feel great' or 'I'm fine', get familiar with your positive emotions too. Do you feel happy, energized, excited, joyful, grateful, loved, hopeful, optimistic, proud, or amused to name a few.

WORKSHEET: HOW EMBRACING VULNERABILITY POWERS INNOVATION



Step 1: Take 5 minutes to reflect on how you are feeling right now.

.....

.....

.....

Step 2: Think about a couple of activities or events you currently feel a little uneasy about. How would you describe how you really feel about each of them?

Activity 1 feelings:

.....

.....

.....

Activity 2 feelings:

.....

.....

.....

2. Release Your Emotions

Negative feelings that we keep to ourselves have a way of paralysing us. One of the most powerful ways of releasing yourself from a negative feeling is to share it with someone you trust.

Sharing a negative feeling:

- releases you from the shame it holds over you
- allows you to objectively look at what has happened
- gives you a different and objective perspective and
- frees you up to move forward.

It is the moving forward part that often results in a creative or innovative alternative path.

WORKSHEET: HOW EMBRACING VULNERABILITY POWERS INNOVATION



Step 3: For each of the activities or events in Step 2, create a list of people with whom you have high levels of vulnerability-based trust. These are supporters of yours, people who know your capabilities and abilities and who you know will never use any of your vulnerabilities against you.

Activity 1 Trusted People

.....

.....

.....

Activity 2 Trusted People

.....

.....

.....

If you are finding it hard to put anyone on the list, remember you can always talk in confidence to a coach or therapist.

Find time to talk to these people. Use them as your support network. You might have different groups of people for different aspects of your life. Embrace your vulnerability with these people by sharing how you are feeling and why. Yes, it takes courage, however, notice the change in your feelings as you do so.

Feel the negative emotions diminish and become aware of the opportunities for moving forward that start to present themselves. Sharing vulnerabilities does not always mean being upset and/or emotional (and it is ok if you are!). Many people will talk about their negative feelings in a very pragmatic and factual way.

Step 4: Identify two people from Step 3 who you are going to embrace your vulnerability with. When will you have this conversation?

Activity 1 Conversation

.....

.....

.....

WORKSHEET: HOW EMBRACING VULNERABILITY POWERS INNOVATION



Activity 2 Conversation

.....

.....

.....

3. Get innovative

Once you have found some emotional freedom, use the release it creates to brainstorm alternative ways forward.

Step 5: Brainstorm some different ways of moving forward with each of the activities or events you identified in Step 2. Circle the two that seem most interesting to you and start taking action to achieve them.

Activity 1 Alternative Ways Forward

.....

.....

.....

Activity 2 Alternative Ways Forward

.....

.....

.....

Being vulnerable isn't a skill that can be taught. There are steps you can take to become more aware of your feelings and people you can work with that give you the courage to open up, explore and move on. Ultimately, exposing your inner thoughts and feelings is a risk. However, the benefits of doing it are immense. As Renee Brown says, "*Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change*" and these in turn drives success, fulfilment and mental health.