

The Importance of Vulnerability in Leadership

Leadership is rigorous and requires an incredible amount of courage and humility. The definition of leadership is, “the action of leading a group of people or an organization.” This definition is only a very small part of such an intricate concept. The origin of the word “lead” means to cross a threshold. Leaders must have the ability to stay grounded and be able to center themselves. To be able to do this, a person must cross a threshold of who they were to who they are becoming. Crossing this threshold helps us grow as a person, so we can be stronger for ourselves and others. This is something that both the conscious and the subconscious mind must continuously work on. At my school we have a presentation night twice a year. For one of these events you have to stand in front of a large crowd and share one of your projects you have been working on in school. This is incredibly vulnerable for me, because I am sharing something that really matters to me. Doing this makes my hands sweat and my heart race. For me, the best way to have the courage to do this is to focus on my breath. Whenever you feel vulnerable, use your breath. It is the most powerful tool you can use to calm yourself.

Vulnerability and authenticity in leadership are essential to good leadership. Vulnerability is living with emotional honesty, being authentically yourself. This requires sharing yourself with others. Vulnerability has everything to do with being a strong leader. To be vulnerable is defined as “to be susceptible to physical or emotional attack or harm.” This definition invokes an element of fear. Although vulnerability can be scary and can leave you susceptible to harm, it can also be incredibly beautiful. I have a very difficult time being vulnerable around anyone. At my school, vulnerability is valued and is an everyday occurrence. Every week I meet with my mentor to talk about school and my personal life. We are extremely open with each other, and I am consistently very vulnerable with her. Even though I am accustomed to this, it is still very difficult for me. One way I am practicing being vulnerable is by using my breath. Having the ability to focus on my breath and slow down is incredibly powerful. My breath gives me the chance to accept what I am feeling, ground myself, and then keep going. In addition to my breath, I am also taking more risks. I recently went to the Women’s March on Washington to support equality for everyone. This was one of the most inspiring events I have ever been to. There were so many people there just supporting one another. Everyone was together supporting the same cause and it was beautiful. To prepare for the march, I spent just a few minutes everyday practicing being silent and focusing on my breath.

Brene Brown, writer and researcher, speaks a lot of how important vulnerability is in leadership. She writes, “Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face everyday are not optional. Our only choice is a question of

engagement.” Vulnerability is not inappropriate, and it is not weakness. Each day in school we practice yoga for a physical activity. Doing these postures and being in our bodies can be very vulnerable, especially if we are not used to it. Being vulnerable gives us the opportunity to be authentic, which takes courage. We fear being vulnerable because we are sharing ourselves and being seen by others. It forces us to trust others, which takes bravery and humility, qualities essential to good leadership.

Being able to be a whole person requires a lot of attention, discipline, and compassion. One way to practice this is to imagine your mind is a house, and all of your emotions are different guests in your house. Inviting the guests that are easy to let in won't help you grow as a person. If you have the vulnerability to invite all the emotions into your house, honor all of them, and feel them, you will grow. Having the courage to be able to have this level of emotional honesty is incredibly vulnerable and extremely important. This practice will help you grow as a person and become more whole. Strong and confident leaders have been vulnerable with themselves and with others. They have done this rigorous work, and they have gained the courage to be good leaders. A good leader does not ask others what they have not done for themselves.

Being vulnerable gives us the ability to grow personally and in relationship to others. When a leader allows for vulnerability, there is greater connection with those they work with. They create stronger bonds. They are willing to share themselves, trust others, and welcome the fullness of their emotional life. This takes strength and humility, and is not impossible. Throughout my adolescence I have been able to practice being vulnerable, and practice being a strong and confident leader. I have chosen to say yes to more in my life. I encourage everyone to take risks by taking risks myself. Anyone can be a leader but being a good leader is different. Strong, confident, and compassionate leadership is born from vulnerability.