



# Dare to Lead

## Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts.

Review by Michael Stuart | Book by Brené Brown  
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BOOK REVIEW

Are you smart as a whip and experienced at what you do—but struggling to be effective as a leader? Do you have a clear vision for your company, yet lack the courage to see it through? This book is for anyone who wants to rise above their emotions and master the art of brave leadership.

Brené Brown provides you with a number of thought-provoking ideas on owning your fears, being daring instead of comfortable, and building an organizational culture that's based on bravery and vulnerability. The author effortlessly outlines the skills that underpin courageous leadership and shows how being vulnerable can actually help you on your way to leadership excellence.



Drawing on extensive experience as a researcher, bestselling author Brown dispels many myths about modern business culture and shows that true leadership is about openness and connection, not power and strength.

Readers will learn how to:

- embrace vulnerability, courageously
- align their behavior with their beliefs
- cultivate trust
- foster resilience

## INITIAL INSIGHTS

More than ever, organizations are depending on the quality of their leadership to attain—and sustain—success. But have you ever wondered what it takes to be a great leader? Does it mean being good at your job, winning a popularity contest, or simply being in command of everyone? Most people lack a fundamental understanding of what it takes to lead and inspire. In this book, Brown delves into the key attributes she feels are vital for cultivating trustworthy, courageous leaders. These include vulnerability, bravery, integrity, trust, and resilience.

### Dare to be vulnerable

Being a leader is difficult. Often, there's intense pressure to deliver groundbreaking results that guarantee success. There's usually a great deal of anxiety involved, as well. That discomfort—the feeling of being exposed and susceptible to failure—is something that many leaders try to avoid. But rather than running from it, author Brené Brown thinks leaders should harness this “weakness” to their advantage.

In *Dare to Lead*, Brown is a staunch opponent of what she wittily terms “armored leadership.” To her well-trained eye, this breeds perfectionism and fear of failure by forcing leaders to value being right, above all else. This leaves no scope—or desire—to improve. That's why Brown advocates a more daring form of leadership instead—one that celebrates our vulnerability instead of advocating avoidance. True leadership isn't about winning or losing, she observes. It's about approaching every situation—even the scary ones—as an opportunity to learn. She shrewdly notes that contrary to popular opinion, courage and fear aren't mutually exclusive. It's impossible to be brave without simultaneously being afraid. By owning these emotions, she believes, daring leaders will be well-placed to lead in an environment that's growing increasingly materialistic.

Brown is unequivocal in her belief that the ability to demonstrate courage in business is vital. She boldly offers up her own life as an example. Overwhelmed by tight deadlines, her employees were reaching boiling point. If she hadn't been brave—choosing to actively listen to their problems and being open to criticism—the situation would not have improved. This willingness to lay bare one's weaknesses highlights the author's key message that adaptability to change, difficult conversations, recognition, and resilience all stem from a point of vulnerability.



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## Live your values

It's easy to talk about values—the beliefs, ideals, and principles you live by. But it's also difficult practicing these values on a daily basis. And it's more challenging in the face of the innumerable challenges you're bound to face in business. As an aspiring leader, how do you go about living your values and aligning your behavior with your beliefs?

In response to this question, Brown makes the ingenious observation that organizations don't have values, their employees do. And that starts at the top with you, the leader. The author is vociferous in urging leaders to actively support their company's values and let that connection shine through in their behavior. She notes—perceptively—that if you don't, you'll be quick to lose any faith that others have placed in you. Worse, you might appear hypocritical and employees could lose respect for you and the organization as a whole. Brown drives home the message that when you fail to embody your values, your words seem false or “salesy”—an impression that's easy to create, and difficult to dispel.

What makes *Dare to Lead* hard-hitting is the fact that Brown actually lives her values. And that's what makes her advice so easy to follow. Through a series of anecdotes, the author illustrates that a courageous leader doesn't rely on their title alone. A fearless leader turns values into action. When you do that, people automatically trust in your leadership, and feel confident that you're not leading them astray. With your behavior as a guide, they're more likely to choose what's right over what's convenient. Ultimately, as company values begin to resonate with everyone's personal beliefs, productivity will increase and so will employee engagement. The results will show in your bottom line.

## Build trust

Amongst all the attributes of a transformative leader, Brown highlights one that she views as the glue that holds together the rest together—trust. Without trust, she argues persuasively, any leadership opportunity is doomed. You can have the most compelling vision, rock-star strategy, and innovative team—it counts for naught if people simply don't have faith in your ability to lead. To earn trust, leaders need to create a safe environment for followers. People need to be given an ear and feel respected, if they're going to follow your direction.

Helpfully, Brown shares a short, practical list of seven behaviors to help you establish trust in your leadership. The clever acronym “BRAVING” has



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been created to help in this regard. First, *boundaries*. Respecting each other's limits enhances collaboration and reduces stress. That's because it's easier for people to get along when they don't step on each other's toes. Next, *reliability*. Employees need to know you're true to your word. Another essential leadership behaviour is *accountability*. Mistakes happen, and that means taking responsibility for them. Consider a manager who ignores mechanical problems in a production line and instead consistently finds fault with employees. This is a certain way to lost their trust. The fourth leadership behaviour refers to one's ability to keep people's confidences safe—or locked in a *vault*. Next, *integrity*. Author Brown claims that the greatest leaders live their values because saying one thing and then doing another can damage trust, possibly forever. Being critical can have the same effect. The author therefore advises *non-judgement* as another key leadership quality. When you replace judgement with curiosity, you turn isolation into connection. And finally, *generosity*. Be kind and others will be kind to you. It sounds counterintuitive, but the more you give as a leader, the more you'll get back.

So, the next time you're in a tough spot and need to build trust, count on Brown's top leadership behaviours to steer you through the storm.

### Be resilient

Failure is an inevitable part of life, yet many people are wholly unable to cope with disappointments, or even challenges. For Brown, a daring leader exudes resilience—they have an ability to be flexible in times of difficulty, and possess the fortitude to forge ahead in spite of obstacles. Just as skydivers need to know how to land before hitting the ground, she argues that leaders should always know how handle disaster before it's too late. Otherwise, failures will erode your confidence and reinforce the mistaken belief that you can't progress. In other words, you'll become a broken individual; unable to take future risks and jump into the unknown.

Brown expertly describes the behavior of people who have low levels of resilience—those who are unable to bounce back from failure, no matter what happens. They offload their emotions onto others instead of dealing with their feelings. Doing this, she warns, can lead to unwarranted emotional outbursts—say, an out of proportion reaction to a comment. This behavior, especially if you're in a position of leadership, is unprofessional and only breeds conflict. Blaming others and making phony excuses can become commonplace, too.



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Fortunately for the reader, Brown outlines a simple, straightforward three-stage process (that the author artfully coins “Learning to Rise”) for developing that essential leadership skill—resilience. To begin, there’s the Reckoning. This is when you realize you’re developing an emotional connection to something. For instance, a specific production target wasn’t reached and you begin to get curious about why this happened. Then comes the Rumble. It’s the point when you begin to make noises about what went wrong, for instance—so, attempting to find out why the production target wasn’t met. How you respond in such situations, and understanding your reactions, is key to changing how you react to future failures. And finally, there’s the Revolution. This is where you’ve learned your lesson. You’ve rumbled with your stories and figured out how you could’ve reacted better. It’s the only way to create new, more truthful ways of engaging with failure next time. Once you’ve reached this last stage, you’re ready to embrace setbacks like a pro. Finally, remember that the greatest leaders are shaped by failure, not overwhelmed by it.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Here are some strategies you can apply to become a courageous leader.



### OPEN YOURSELF UP

Check your ego at the door. Forget about being right and focus instead on what's best for everyone. Engage in open and honest discussions with your employees, regardless of how difficult this is or how vulnerable it leaves you. Don't avoid criticism or risk, either. Stick with your problems long enough to find the best solutions.



### VALUE INTEGRITY

It's easy to have lofty principles—but it's difficult living up to them. Don't overcommit and make promises you can't deliver on. Rather, pick three to four values and let these drive your decisions. Make your intentions clear and let your actions speak. Demonstrating that you're true to your word is invaluable.



### EMBRACE FAILURE

In life or in business, you're bound to encounter failures. How you react in the face of these disappointments is key. Don't let your emotions run amok. Avoid anger and stick with the struggle. Persevere, learn from past mistakes, and avoid the same errors in the future. Leverage the obstacles in your path to emerge a better, more courageous leader.



### BE TRUSTWORTHY

Obtaining trust isn't easy. Your first step should be to instill confidence in your leadership. That means being brave enough to follow a set of principles, like owning up to mistakes, keeping your promises, safeguarding private information, setting clear organizational boundaries, suspending judgment of others, and above all, being a generous individual.

## PARTING THOUGHTS

*Dare to Lead* is an insightful and engaging addition to Brown's work on the lost art of courageous leadership. Well-written and meticulously researched, the author redefines what leadership is, in a world that's forgotten what it means to be human. Her practical advice will help you become the type of gutsy and determined leader who's needed in today's business environment, where the quest for increased productivity, profits, and market share holds sway. The scenarios, stories, and examples presented in this book are applicable to almost any work situation, making it an outstanding resource for anyone brave enough to supercharge their leadership potential.



“The courage to be vulnerable is not about winning or losing, it's about the courage to show up when you can't predict or control the outcome.”



## FOR ADDITIONAL READING

- 1 *Leadership: In Turbulent Times* by Doris Kearns Goodwin, Simon & Schuster, © 2018, ISBN 978-1476795928.
- 2 *The Power of Positive Leadership: How and Why Positive Leaders Transform Teams and Organizations and Change the World* by John Gordon, Wiley, © 2017, ISBN 978-1119351979.
- 3 *Small Acts of Leadership: 12 Intentional Behaviors That Lead to Big Impact* by G. Shawn Hunter, Routledge, © 2016, ISBN 978-1629561363.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**BRENÉ BROWN** 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 is the Founder and CEO of the Brené Brown Education and Research Group and The Daring Way. With over two decades experience studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy, Brown is a world-renowned speaker and author of four *New York Times* bestselling books. Her TED talk—The Power of Vulnerability—is one of the top-five most viewed videos in the world, with over 35 million views. She is also the first researcher to have a filmed talk on Netflix.

Brown obtained her Bachelor of Social Work at the University of Austin, followed by a Master's of Social Work and a PhD from the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Houston.



### Also by the Author

- 1 *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*, Random House, © 2017, ISBN 978-0812995848.
- 2 *Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, Random House, © 2017, ISBN 978-0812985801.
- 3 *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, Avery, ©2012, ISBN 978-1592408412.
- 4 *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*, Hazelden Publishing, © 2010, ISBN 978-1592858491.
- 5 *I Thought It Was Just Me (but it isn't): Making the Journey from "What Will People Think?" to "I Am Enough"*, Avery, © 2007, ISBN 978-1592403356.




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