

Daring Greatly

Brene Brown—2012

Introduction

- When it comes to parenting, the practice of framing mothers and fathers as good or bad is both rampant and corrosive—it turns parenting into a shame minefield. The real questions for parents should be: “Are you engaged? Are you paying attention?” If so, plan to make lots of mistakes and bad decisions. Imperfect parenting moments turn into gifts as our children watch us try to figure out what went wrong and how we can do better next time. The mandate is not to be perfect and raise happy children. Perfection doesn’t exist, and I’ve found that what makes children happy doesn’t always prepare them to be courageous, engaged adults. The same is true for schools. I haven’t encountered a single problem that isn’t attributed to some combination of parental, teacher, administrative, and/or student disengagement and the clash of competing stakeholders vying to define one purpose.
- What we know matters, but who we are matters more

Scarcity

- Never _____ enough. It only takes a few seconds before people fill in the blanks with their own tapes:
 - Never
 - Good enough Never perfect enough
 - Never thin enough
 - Never powerful enough
 - Never successful enough
 - Never smart enough
 - Never certain enough
 - Never safe enough
 - Never extraordinary enough
- We get scarcity because we live it. One of my very favorite writers on scarcity is global activist and fund-raiser Lynne Twist. In her book *The Soul of Money*, she refers to scarcity as “the great lie.” She writes:
 - For me, and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is “I didn’t get enough sleep.” The next one is “I don’t have enough time.” Whether true or not, that thought of not enough occurs to us automatically before we even think to question or examine it. We spend most of the hours and the days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don’t have enough of.... Before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor, we’re already inadequate. Already behind, already losing, already lacking something. And by the time we go to bed at night, our minds are racing with a litany of what we didn’t get, or didn’t get done, that day. We go to sleep burdened by those thoughts and wake up to that reverie of lack... This internal condition of scarcity, this mind-set of scarcity, lives at the very heart of our jealousies, our greed, our prejudice, and our arguments with life (43-45).

Debunking the Vulnerability Myths

- From the field of health psychology, studies show that perceived vulnerability, meaning the ability to acknowledge our risks and exposure, greatly increases our chances of adhering to some kind of positive health regimen. In order to get patients to comply with prevention routines, they must work on perceived vulnerability. And what makes this really interesting is that the critical issue is not about our actual level of vulnerability, but the level at which we acknowledge our vulnerabilities around a certain illness or threat.
- With children, actions speak louder than words. When we stop requesting invitations into their lives by asking about their day, asking them to tell us about their favorite songs, wondering how their friends are doing, then children feel pain and fear (and not relief, despite how our teenagers may act). Because they can't articulate how they feel about our disengagement when we stop making an effort with them, they show us acting out, thinking, this will get their attention.
- In a 2011 Harvard Business Review article, Peter Fuda and Richard Badham use a series of metaphors to explore how leaders spark and sustain change. One of the metaphors is the snowball. The snowball starts rolling when a leader is willing to be vulnerable with his or her subordinates. Their research shows that this act of vulnerability is predictably perceived as courageous by team members and inspires others to follow suit.

Understanding and Combating Shame

- I want them to know they're enough. I don't want them to be afraid to talk about the hard shit with us. I want them to be shame resilient."
- We have to be vulnerable if we want more courage
- The secret killer of innovation is shame. You can't measure it, but it is there. Every time someone holds back on a new idea, fails to give their manager much needed feedback. And is afraid to speak up in front of a client you can be sure shame played a part. That deep fear we all have of being wrong, of being belittled and of feeling less than, is what stops us taking the very risks required to move our, companies forward. If you want a culture of creativity and innovation, where sensible risks are embraced on both a market and individual level, start by developing the ability of managers to cultivate an openness to vulnerability in their teams. And this, paradoxically perhaps, requires first that they are vulnerable themselves.
- Researchers found that, as far as the brain is concerned, physical pain and intense experiences of social rejection hurt in the same way.
- If you own this story you get to write the ending. If you own this story you get to write the ending."
- You're only as sick as your secrets." In a pioneering study, psychologist and University of Texas professor James Pennebaker and his colleagues studied what happened when trauma survivors—specifically rape and incest survivors—kept their experiences secret. The research team found that the act of not discussing a traumatic event or confiding it to another person could be more damaging than the actual event. Conversely, when people shared their stories and experiences, their physical health improved, their doctor's visits decreased, and they showed significant decreases in their stress hormones.
- **Since his** early work on the effects of secret keeping, Pennebaker has focused much of his research on the healing| power of expressive writing. In his book, Writing to Heal, Pennebaker

writes, “Since the mid-1980s an increasing number of studies have focused on the value of expressive writing as a way to bring about healing. The evidence is mounting that the act of writing about traumatic experience for as little as fifteen or twenty minutes a day for three or four days can produce measurable changes in physical and mental health. Emotional writing can also affect people’s sleep habits, work efficiency, and how they connect with others.

- When I asked him about his work around addiction and pornography, he gave me an answer that helped me understand that issue in an entirely new light. He said, “For five bucks and five minutes. You think you’re getting what you need, and you don’t have to risk rejection.” The reason that response was so revelatory to me was because it was so utterly different from what women felt. After interviewing women for a decade, it was clear that women see the issue of men and pornography as having to do with their own inadequate appearance and/or their lack of sexual expertise. At the end of my interview with this wonderful and wise man, he said, “I guess the secret is that sex is terrifying for most men. That’s why you see everything from porn to the violent, desperate attempts to exercise power and control. Rejection is deeply painful.”
- When I talk to couples, I can see how shame creates one of the dynamics most lethal to a relationship. Women, who feel shame when they don’t feel heard or validated, often resort to pushing and provoking with criticism (“Why don’t you ever do enough?” or “You never get it right”). Men, in turn, who feel shame when they feel criticized for being inadequate, either shut down (leading women to poke and provoke more) or come back with anger.
- For the first few years of our marriage, Steve and I fell into this pattern. I remember one argument when we were both angry beyond belief. After ten minutes of endless chiding on my part, he turned to me and said, “Leave me alone for twenty minutes. I’m done. I won’t do this anymore.” When he shut and locked the door, I got so mad that I actually banged on the door and said, “Get back out here and fight with me.” In that moment, when I heard myself, I saw what was happening. He was on the verge of shutting down or raging, and I was feeling unheard and misunderstood. The result was mutual desperation.
- The man in shame says, “I’m not supposed to get emotional when I have to lay off these people.” The man practicing shame resilience responds, “I’m not buying into this message. I’ve worked with these guys for five years. I know their families. I’m allowed to care about them.” Shame whispers in the ear of the woman who’s out of town on business, “You’re not a good mother because you’re going to miss your son’s class play.” She replies, “I hear you, but I’m not playing that tape today. My mothering is way bigger than one class performance. You can leave now.”
- I’ll leave you with this passage from the 1922 children’s classic *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams. My friend DeeDee Parker Wright sent it to me last year with a note that said, “This is what being Wholehearted is all about.” I agree. It’s a beautiful reminder of how much easier it is to become real when we know we’re loved:
 - “Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become Real.”
 - “Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.
 - “Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real, you don’t mind being hurt.”
 - “Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

- “It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out, and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real, you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”

The Vulnerability Armory

- This shift from our younger self’s greeting of joy with unalloyed delight happens slowly and outside of our awareness. We don’t seem to even know that it’s happening or why. We just know that we crave more joy in our lives, that we are joy starved. In a culture of deep scarcity—of never feeling safe, certain, and sure enough—joy can feel like a setup. We wake up in the morning and think.
 - Work is going well. Everyone in the family is healthy. No major crises are happening. The house is still standing. Fm working out and feeling good. Oh, shit. This is bad. This is really bad. Disaster must be lurking right around the corner.
- We’re always waiting for the other shoe to drop.
- When we spend our lives (knowingly or ‘unknowingly’) pushing away vulnerability, we can’t hold space open for the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure of joy. For many of us, there’s even a physiological response—a “coming out of our skin” feeling. We’re desperate for more joy, but at the same time we can’t tolerate the vulnerability. And our culture assists in this doom-filled rehearsal: Most of us have a stockpile of terrible images that we can pull from at the instant we’re grappling with vulnerability
- Joy comes to us in moments—ordinary moments. We risk missing out on joy when we get too busy chasing down the extraordinary.
 - Scarcity culture may keep us afraid of living small, ordinary lives, but when you talk to people who have survived great losses, it is clear that joy is not constant
- Be grateful for what you have. When I asked people who had survived tragedy how we can cultivate and show more compassion for people who are suffering, the answer was always the same: Don’t shrink away from the joy of your child because I’ve lost mine. Don’t take what you have for granted—celebrate it. Don’t apologize for what you have. Be grateful for it and share your gratitude with others. Are your parents healthy? Be thrilled. Let them know how much they mean to you. When you honor what you have, you’re honoring what I’ve lost
- How can I improve? Perfectionism is other-focused: What will they think? Perfectionism is a hustle.
- This is about all of us. First, one of the most universal numbing strategies is what I call crazy busy

Mind the Gap

- I think of strategy as “the game plan,” or the detailed answer to the question “What do we want to achieve and how are we going to get there?”
- Culture, on the other hand, is less about what we want to achieve and more about who we are.

- Other folks believe that pitting one against the other creates a false dichotomy and that we need both. Interestingly, I've yet to find a strong argument that strategy is more important than culture. I think everyone agrees in theory that "who we are" is at least as important as what we want to achieve
- "The way we do things around here," or culture, is complex. In my experience, I can tell a lot about the culture and values of a group, family, or organization by asking these ten questions:
 1. What behaviors are rewarded? Punished?
 2. Where and how are people actually spending their resources (time, money, attention)?
 3. What rules and expectations are followed, enforced, and ignored?
 4. Do people feel safe and supported talking about how they feel and asking for what they need?
 5. What are the sacred cows? Who is most likely to tip them? Who stands the cows back up?
 6. What stories are legend and what values do they convey?
 7. What happens when someone fails, disappoints, or makes a mistake?
 8. How is vulnerability (uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure) perceived?
 9. How prevalent are shame and blame and how are they showing up?
 10. What's the collective tolerance for discomfort? Is the discomfort of learning, trying new things, and giving and receiving feedback normalized, or is there a high premium put on comfort (and how does that look)?
- The space between our practiced values (what we're actually doing, thinking, and feeling) and our aspirational values (what we want to do, think, and feel) is the value gap, or what I call "the disengagement divide." It's where we lose our employees, our clients, our students, our teachers, our congregations, and even our own children.
- Practiced value: Fast and easy is more important
 - Dad is always driving home the importance of respect and accountability, but when Bobby intentionally breaks Sammy's new Transformer, Dad is too busy on his BlackBerry to sit down with the brothers and talk about how they should treat each other's toys. Instead of insisting that Bobby needs to apologize and make amends, he shrugs his shoulders, thinking. Boys will be boys, and tells them both to go to their rooms.
- Minding the gap is a daring strategy. We have to pay attention to the space between where we're actually standing and where we want to be. More importantly, we have to practice the values that we're holding out as important in our culture

Disruptive Engagement

- What's the most significant barrier to creativity and innovation? Kevin thought about it for a minute and said, "I don't know if it has a name, but honestly, it's the fear of introducing an idea and being ridiculed, laughed at, and belittled. If you're willing to subject yourself to that experience, and if you survive it, then it becomes the fear of failure and the fear of being wrong. People believe they're only as good as their ideas and that their ideas can't seem too 'out there' and they can't not know' everything. The problem is that innovative ideas often sound crazy and failure and learning are part of revolution. Evolution and incremental change is important and we

need it, but we're desperate for real revolution and that requires a different type of courage and creativity.'

- Most people and most organizations can't stand the uncertainty and the risk of real innovation
- "There are times when you can ask questions or challenge ideas but if you've got a teacher that doesn't like that or the kids in that class make fun of people who do that, it's bad. I think most of us learn that it's best to just keep your head down, your mouth shut, and your grades high."
- Shame can only rise so far in any system before people disengage to protect themselves. When we are disengaged, we don't show up, we don't contribute, and we stop caring
- The simple and honest process of letting people know that discomfort is normal, it's going to happen, why it happens, and why it's important, reduces anxiety, fear, and shame. Periods of discomfort become an expectation and a norm. In fact, most semesters I have students who approach me after class and say, "I haven't been uncomfortable yet. I'm concerned." These exchanges often lead to critically important conversations and feedback about their engagement and my teaching. The big challenge for leaders is getting our heads and hearts around the fact that we need to cultivate the courage to be uncomfortable and to teach the people around us how to accept discomfort as a part of growth.
- **Luckily, this** work has taught me that when I feel self-righteous. It means I'm afraid.
- In my social work training, a lot of attention was paid to how we talk to people, even down to where and how we sit. For example, I would never talk to a client across a desk; I would walk around my desk and sit in a chair across from the client so there was nothing big and bulky between us. I remember the first time I went in to see one of my social work professors about a grade.
- Today, "Sitting on the same side of the table" is my metaphor for feedback. I used it to create my Engaged Feedback Checklist:
 - I know I'm ready to give feedback when:
 - I'm ready to sit next to you rather than across from you
 - I'm willing to put the problem in front of us rather than between us
 - I'm ready to listen, ask questions, and accept that I may not fully understand the issue
 - I want to acknowledge what you do well instead of picking apart your mistakes
 - I recognize your strengths and how you can use them to address challenges
 - I can hold you accountable without shaming or blaming you
 - I'm willing to own my part
 - I can talk about how resolving these challenges will lead to your growth and opportunity
 - I can model the vulnerability and openness that I expect to see from you

Wholehearted Parenting

- Who we are and how we engage with the world are much stronger predictors of how our children will do than what we know about parenting. In terms of teaching our children to dare greatly in the "never enough" culture, the question isn't so much "Are you parenting the right way?" as it is: "Are you the adult that you want your child to grow up to be?"

- **But if doubt** lurks beneath my choices, that self-righteous critic will spring to life in not-so-subtle parenting moments that happen because my underlying fear of not being the perfect parent is driving my need to confirm that, at the very least, I'm better than you.
- For instance, when Ellen got her first tardy at school, she immediately broke down crying. She was so upset about breaking the rules and upsetting her teacher or the principal that she just fell apart. We kept telling her that it wasn't a big deal and that everyone is late sometimes until she felt better. That evening we celebrated surviving our first tardy with little "tardy party" after dinner. She finally agreed that it wasn't a big deal and that other people probably didn't judge her for being human.
- Fast-forward four days to Sunday morning. We're running late for church and I'm in tears. "Why can't we ever get out of here on time!?" We're going to be late!" Ellen looked up at me and earnestly asked, "Dad and Charlie will be here in one minute. Are we missing something important?" Without hesitating, I said, "No! I just hate walking in late and sneaking down the aisle. It's the 9 o'clock service, not the 9:05 service." She looked confused for a second, then grinned as she said, "It's not a big deal. Everyone's late sometimes. Remember? I'll throw a tardy party for you when we get home."
- Sometimes prerequisites and perfectionism are handed down in very subtle ways. One of the very best pieces of parenting advice that I ever received was from the writer Toni Morrison. It was May of 2000 and Ellen was just shy of her first birthday. Ms. Morrison was on Oprah talking about her book *The Bluest Eye*. Oprah said, "Toni says a beautiful thing about the messages that we get about who we are when a child first walks into a room," and she asked Ms. Morrison to talk about it.
- Ms. Morrison explained that it's interesting to watch what happens when a child walks into a room. She asked, "Does your face light up?" She explained, "When my children used to walk in the room when they were little, I looked at them to see if they had buckled their trousers or if their hair was combed or if their socks were up... You think your affection and your deep love is on display because you're caring for them. It's not. When they see you, they see the critical face. What's wrong now? Her advice was simple, but paradigm shifting for me. She said, "Let your face speak what's in your heart. When they walk in the room my face says I'm glad to see them. It's just as small as that, you see?" I literally think about that advice every day—it's become a practice. When Ellen comes bounding down the stairs dressed for school, I don't want my first comment to be "Pull your hair back" or "Those shoes don't match your dress." I want my face to convey how happy I am to see her—to be with her. When Charlie comes in the back door and he's sweaty and dirty from catching lizards, I want to flash a smile before I say, "Don't touch anything until you wash your hands." So often we think that we earn parenting points by being critical, put out, and exasperated. Those first looks can be prerequisites or worthiness-builders. I don't want to criticize when my kids walk in the room, I want to light up!
- This means we need to separate our children from their behaviors. As it turns out, there's a significant difference between you are bad and you did something bad. And, no, it's not just semantics.
- When we shame and label our children, we take away their opportunity to grow and try on new behaviors. If a child tells a lie, she can change that behavior. If she is a liar—where's the potential for change in that?

- Apparently, Ellen got a very serious look on her face and said, “I may be making a mess. But I’m not a mess.” (That’s the day I became “that parent.”)
- In Chapter 3 we learned that the brain processes social rejection or shame the same exact way it processes physical pain
- We can work hard not to use shame as a parenting tool, but our children are still going to encounter shame in the outside world. The good news is that when children understand the distinction between shame and guilt, and when they know that we’re interested and open to talking about these feelings and experiences, they are much more likely to talk to us about the shaming experiences they may encounter with teachers, coaches, clergy, babysitters, grandparents, and other adults who have influence in their lives. This is critically important because it gives us the opportunity to “crop” shame the way we do photographs.
- In addition to helping our children understand shame, and use guilt self-talk rather than shame self-talk, we have to be very careful about shame leakage. Even if we don’t shame our children, shame still shows up in our lives in ways that can have a powerful affect on our family. Basically, we can’t raise children who are more shame resilient than we are. I can encourage Ellen to love her body, but what really matters are the observations she makes about my relationship with my own body. Damn it. I can soothe Charlie’s concerns that he might run the wrong direction around the bases by telling him that he doesn’t have to fully understand the ins and outs of baseball before his first T-ball game, but does he observe me and Steve trying new things, making mistakes, and failing without becoming self-critical? Damn it. Again.
- Lastly, normalizing is one of the most powerful shame resilience tools that we can offer our children. Like I explained in the last chapter, normalizing means helping our children know they’re not alone and that we’ve experienced many of the same struggles. This applies to social situations, changes in their bodies, shaming experiences, feeling left out, and wanting to be brave but feeling afraid. There’s something sacred that happens between a parent and a child when the parent says, “Me too!” or shares a personal story that relates to their child’s struggle.
- To me the question of parenting values is about engagement. Are we paying attention? Thinking through our choices? Open to learning and being wrong? Curious and willing to ask questions?
- Worthiness is about love and belonging, and one of the best ways to show our children that our love for them is unconditional is to make sure they know they belong in our families
- If we want to cultivate worthiness in our children, we need to make sure they know that they belong and that their belonging is unconditional
- What do parents experience as the most vulnerable and bravest thing that they do in their efforts to raise wholehearted children?
 - Letting their children struggle and experience adversity
- I used to struggle with letting go and allowing my children to find their own way, but something that I learned in the research dramatically changed my perspective and I no longer see rescuing and intervening as unhelpful
- Hope is a function of struggle.
- As it turns out, I was wrong about hope and right about scrappy and Plan B. According to Snyder, who dedicated his career to studying this topic, hope isn’t an emotion; it’s a way I of thinking or a cognitive process. Emotions play a supporting role, but hope is really a thought process made up of what Snyder calls a trilogy of goals, pathways, and agency. In very simple terms, hope happens when:

- We have the ability to set realistic goals (I know where I want to go).
- We are able to figure out how to achieve those goals, including the ability to stay flexible and develop alternative routes (I know how to get there, I'm persistent, and I can tolerate disappointment and try again).
- We believe in ourselves (I can do this!).
- Raising children who are hopeful and who have the courage to be vulnerable means stepping back and letting them experience disappointment, deal with conflict, learn how to assert themselves, and have the opportunity to fail. If we're always following our children into the arena, hushing the critics, and assuring their victory, they'll never learn that they have the ability to dare greatly on their own.

FINAL THOUGHTS