

COULD VULNERABILITY BE YOUR NEW SUPERPOWER

By Harper & Gray



If you had asked me the traits of an effective leader ten years ago...I don't think that vulnerability would have made the list.

And yet it is one of the most compelling topics in the leadership development program that we launched at

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When was the last time that you were vulnerable at work?

Take a moment to think.

A lot of leaders are left scratching their heads when asked this question, and it's understandable as to why. The word "vulnerable" can have a lot of emotions attached to it, and we usually associate vulnerability in our personal lives with feeling weak, or out of control.

Vulnerability can feel terrifying to some of us, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it will be once we put it into practice! In fact, it can be the key to unlocking better interpersonal relationships, honing your leadership skills, and building a stronger team.

Forbes produced a compelling piece on this topic, highlighting that “It takes courage to be vulnerable, and for many employees, they have to wonder: is it worth the risk?”

In the same article, Forbes explained that to allow for vulnerability, you have to create an environment that is safe: “Take the fear out of the risk. You need to create an environment that is psychologically safe for employees to share ideas, to take initiative, to try things that they are not yet competent in without fear of blame, ridicule or punishment.

To create an environment that not just supports new ideas but encourages them. One that engenders trust and collaboration among team members versus competition and condemnation. This requires consistent experience over time, where the employee learns to trust they are safe within this team.”
What is, and isn't vulnerability? - let's bust some myths!



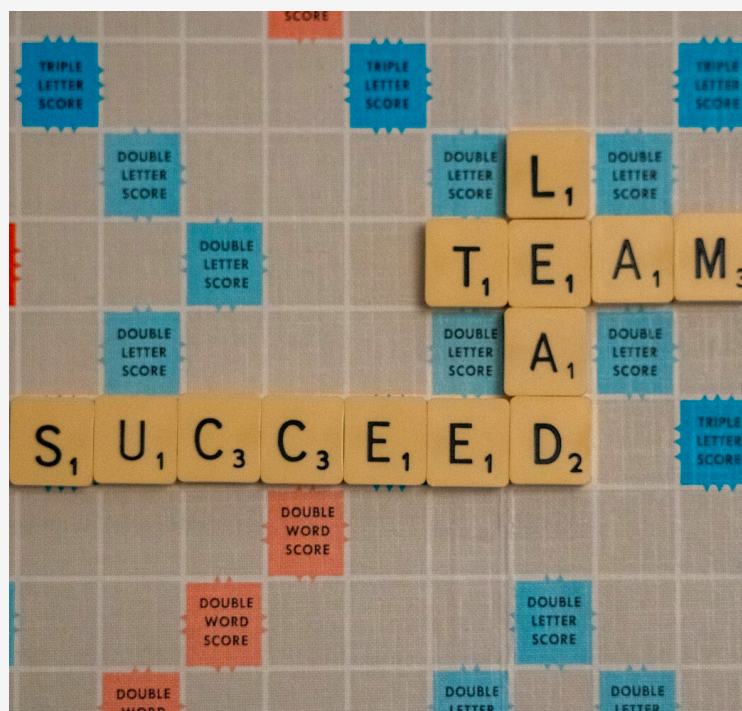
Being vulnerable is about
sharing personal stories



In some instances, it may be effective for you to share a personal story with someone to increase connection, as this demonstrates that you can connect to the emotion that they are feeling, even if it's through a different experience.

Vulnerability should never look like someone (whether they're a leader or not) dumping their emotional baggage or trauma on others. Instead, vulnerability is sharing with positive intent with a specific outcome in mind.

If there are only negative outcomes and conversations based on what you have shared, then you, or others, may be trauma dumping without realizing. This is defined as sharing your trauma's with no prior warning, as well as sharing it when someone hasn't got the capacity to process the information you're giving them.



So, how can I connect effectively without trauma dumping?



Mastering empathy whilst also setting clear boundaries is what you should aim to do, as this is integral to the concept of vulnerability. Ask yourself - why am I sharing this? If it isn't going to impact the individual positively, then you may want to have a rethink.

For example, let's look at a situation where someone may have delivered a presentation internally to senior stakeholders, and they made some mistakes during it. Naturally, this individual will be feeling deflated, their ego will be hurt, and their confidence may be at an all-time low.

If you approached this from an empathetic perspective, you want to link an experience to the emotion they're feeling - let's say that's embarrassment.

If you have a personal story that is similar to what they've just experienced, absolutely share it with them and what you learned from it. Not only does this mean you can connect with them on an emotional level, but you're also offering good advice based on experience - hence impacting them positively.

And finally, if you do want to share a personal story, a great way to open the conversation is simply asking them "can I share an experience with you that may help you through this?"

Not only is this consensual and respectful (particularly if you are dealing with a delicate situation), but your delivery and tone will show that you have their best intentions at heart, instead of potentially dumping information on them that they aren't ready to receive yet.

Being vulnerable focuses on weaknesses instead of strengths



Again, this is all down to how you view vulnerability. Instead, think of it as being open and sharing an insight to benefit the individual you're talking to.

Whenever you're vulnerable with someone as a leader, it should always be to benefit them instead of you. If you can adopt this as a mindset shift, and see it as you are adding value, then you can start to get comfortable being vulnerable more often.



Being vulnerable devalues my position as a leader



Long gone are the days when leaders should feel the need to be put on a pedestal above others in their team. More so now than ever before, the modern-day workforce is desperate for leaders to be open, demonstrate vulnerability, and ultimately allow people to see the person behind the leader.

You can do this with the correct boundaries in place, and the right mindset towards vulnerability, too. If you are still stuck in a dated mindset then you will inevitably struggle to connect with your team if you are unduly concerned about power dynamics.

What Are Some Good Examples of Being Vulnerable?

SAYING "I DONT KNOW"

As a leader, it's important to role model good behaviours to the rest of your team, not only to create a harmonious working environment, but also to create space for your team to grow.

Growth can't happen without learning and pushing ourselves out of our comfort zone, and what better way to honor growth than by admitting that you too, as a leader, don't know everything!

Perfectionism is a shield for leaders and one of the ways that people hold themselves back. Saying "I don't know" or an equivalent builds better trust with your team, and shows them that you too, are dedicated to learning and growing with them, and that you aren't the finished article.

CHECKING IN WITH INTENT

Vulnerability can only be authentic if you're intentional about it. Trying to be vulnerable because it's a trendy thing to do in modern leadership will cause more damage than good.

Check in with your team, and have the right intentions behind it. If someone has been quieter than usual, why not go out for a coffee with them and talk to them one on one? If someone mentioned on Friday that they had a family celebration over the weekend, have you asked them how it went?

Particularly in circumstances when someone is vulnerable with you, let's say they're going through a tough time or there has been a bereavement in their family, your reaction will define whether it was worth them sharing that information with you. We all know what it's like to deal with tough situations and the emotions and states of being that come with them: sadness, anger, grief, jealousy, heartbreak! Validate that and be present with them at that moment.

It's often the smaller, personal touches that enable you to show vulnerability and also that you care.

SAYING "LET'S DO IT TOGETHER"

Some tasks, especially for junior employees, can feel like mountains that they can't climb alone. If you can see someone beating themselves up over a task or a project, can you put a metaphorical arm around them and say "let's tackle this together?" Simple, but effective, it eliminates the hierarchy between leader and team member, and instead creates a flat playing field whereby they can feel supported without judgement, and you can build a trusting relationship with them.

SHOW EMPATHY

Like we mentioned before, showing empathy is more than just talking about personal things to find common ground with someone. Simply holding space for someone in your team to talk to you can be a great example of vulnerability.

Equally, if you can start to look at your team through an empathetic lens and understand why they're acting in a certain way, or performing in a certain way, it will only enhance your leadership and people skills. Not everything is as black and white as we think it is, and empathy allows us to see situations through a wide-lens, and in color! Curiosity is another pillar of great leadership, so lean into that.

COURAGE AND VULNERABILITY ARE INTRINSICALLY LINKED



It takes courage to be vulnerable, and stepping out of our comfort zone can enable us to build valid points of connection with individuals in our teams, as well as our teams.

Vulnerability is a core part of our “inclusive leadership” program. If you're interested in learning more then click [here](#) to inquire, and don't forget to follow us on LinkedIn (@harperandgray) for exclusive insights.



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