

## Preparation for Vulnerability

What does it mean to be vulnerable? In the tech world, risk managers assess a company's vulnerability by evaluating its computer systems' protection against hacking by outsiders. Similarly, we often build walls or erect boundaries to protect ourselves against harm or betrayal by others. This may happen after the fact—when we vow never to be in a similar predicament—or we may learn “proactively” to only reveal the minimum about ourselves, keeping our stories or confidences from others until a particular need arises or trustworthiness has been demonstrated.

Some people maintain their personal lives separately from their work life and relationships. These separations can prove useful—when one area is stressful, being able to maintain a semblance of focus and productivity in another area can help bring clarity and perspective. Yet maintaining these separations or boundaries over time can also exact a price in the value derived from relationships. It's only when we can be authentically ourselves, without worrying what others might think, that we can connect with others on a deep meaningful level.

Dr. Brené Brown, author of *How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, explains her views on vulnerability in a 2010 TED talk:

- Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness.
- What we know is that connection, the ability to feel connected, is—neurobiologically that's how we're wired—it's why we're here.
- The one thing that keeps us out of connection is our fear that we're not worthy of connection.
- This is what I have found: to let ourselves be seen, deeply seen, vulnerably seen; to love with our whole hearts, even though there's no guarantee . . . to practice gratitude and joy in those moments of terror, when we're wondering, “Can I love you this much? Can I believe in this this passionately? Can I be this fierce about this?” just to be able to stop and, instead of catastrophizing what might happen, to say, “I'm just so grateful, because to feel this vulnerable means I'm alive.”  
[www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability)

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out for another is to risk involvement.

To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.

To place your ideas, your dreams, before a crowd is to risk their loss.

To love is to risk not being loved in return.

To live is to risk dying.

To hope is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken.

Because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

If you risk nothing and do nothing, you dull your spirit.

You may avoid suffering and sorrow, but you cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love, and live.

Chained by your attitude, you are a slave.

You have forfeited your freedom.

Only if you risk are you free.

*Leo Buscaglia, Risk*

Trust, but verify. *Based on Russian proverb*

Trees need their protective bark to enable the delicate process of growth and renewal to unfold without threat. Likewise, we need our boundaries and defenses so that the more vulnerable parts of ourselves can safely heal and unfold. But our growth also depends upon our ability to soften, loosen, and shed boundaries and defenses we no longer need. It is often the case in life that structures we put in place to help us grow eventually become constricting. *Madisyn Taylor*

Vulnerable - 1. a woman's definition—excuse for having cheap, “casual” sex. 2. a man's definition—giving a woman anything she wants. “I only did it because I was vulnerable.”

*Bryan Gallagher and Eddie Mars, www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=vulnerable, May 2008*

A ship in harbor is safe—but that is not what ships are for. *John A. Shedd*

No one is born knowing how to trust. Life gives us many teachers, some caring and others cruel. Few people receive a solid base of trust as children. Even fewer are taught how to trust themselves.

*Cynthia L. Wall*

These are feminine or Yin paradoxes: By yielding, I endure. The empty space is filled. When I give of myself, I become more. When I feel most destroyed, I am about to grow. When I desire nothing, a great deal comes to me. . . . This is the wisdom of the feminine: let go in order to achieve. *John Heider*

Friend, there's a window that opens from heart to heart, and there are ways of closing it completely, not a needle's eye of access. Open or shut; both ways are sometimes appropriate. *Mevlana Rumi*

Traveling is one expression of the desire to cross boundaries. *A. B. Yehoshua*

## Questions to Ponder

1. Consider the commitment to “share as deeply as I can” in the covenant for our group meetings. For many people, sharing comes with a sense of vulnerability. What does the commitment to “share as deeply as I can” mean to you? This question will be part of the meeting.
2. Think about a personal boundary (“I won't . . . I don't . . .”) that protects your vulnerability. Consider its possible origin—protective, cultural, familial, your own sense of internal rights.
3. Think of a situation where boundaries were helpful to you and recall how it felt to be protected. What boundaries have you been willing to shed? What results have you perceived from these changes?
4. What do you feel are basic human vulnerabilities? Which vulnerabilities are more specific to you? How can we be more aware of and thoughtful about other people's vulnerabilities?
5. Think of a time when you were betrayed. How did you feel toward the person who hurt you? How did your feelings affect your willingness to be vulnerable in future relationships?
6. How does it feel when others reveal themselves with an open heart? How do you demonstrate trustworthiness? What can you do—who can you be—so that others will feel safe being vulnerable around you?
7. Consider your comfort level about vulnerability in your covenant group experience so far. Are there any actions that could be taken to increase your comfort level within the group?