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Do Employees Want to Work for Authentic and Vulnerable Leaders and What Prevents Leaders from Going There

Annette R. Abel
Bethel University

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Do Employees Want to Work for Authentic and Vulnerable Leaders and What

Prevents Leaders From Going There.

by

Annette R. Abel

A Literature Review and Analysis (LRA)

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Do Employees Want to Work for Authentic and Vulnerable Leaders and What Prevents Leaders From Going There.

Annette R. Abel

June 2016

APPROVED: _____ , Advisor

ACCEPTED:

_____
Department Chairperson

_____
VP and Dean of CAPS & GS

Abstract

Studies have shown that most employees want to work for vulnerable and authentic leaders. Many leaders do not want to show their personal side of their lives and what they face as a leader. Some leaders are fearful they will look weak or too emotional if they show their true thoughts and emotions and are willing for others to see them. Vulnerability is taking emotional risks where people can see you who you really are. Leaders have the power to make a positive impact and sometimes want to make decisions without making connections with their employees. Some leaders do not have the capacity to be vulnerable because of their emotions specifically shame. Shame can prevent leaders from seeing themselves in a positive light and isolates themselves from their employees. Leaders who are influenced by shame also criticize their employees and find ways to focus on the negative. However, leaders can do the work of understanding their weaknesses and become approachable through their own discovery of their strengths and weaknesses.

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There are many people who have impacted and helped me get to this place in my life. I would first like to thank my mom for showing me the gift of learning and to have a positive outlook no matter what comes your way. I would also like to thank Chelsea, Carlie and Chloe for allowing me to be your mom. You inspire me to be authentic and vulnerable and I am so blessed to be a part of your lives. Thank you to my family and friends for believing in me through your conversations, hugs, laughter, tears, and just being there when I needed someone to talk to.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

This literature review is to show if employees want to work for vulnerable leaders and what prevents leaders from being vulnerable with their colleagues. All leaders deal with challenges throughout their lives and face each situation differently. Some leaders handle circumstances inwardly and do not allow anyone to see who they are and come across as authoritative. While other leaders expose themselves and strive towards being vulnerable with their colleagues.

Statement of the Problem:

Leaders choose how much they want to share of themselves with their staff and that is ultimately their right and choice. However, does their choice on how much to share impact whether their employees see them as a leader. And if given the choice would employees choose to work for a vulnerable leader or someone who remains more closed about their own journey and personal life. And furthermore, why have those leaders chosen to not be vulnerable with their employees and what has prevented them from moving in that direction. And finally how does working for a vulnerable leader impact productivity, empathy, and connection to those they come in contact with. Leaders face various situations daily and make decisions on how they will move forward. Ultimately, there is not a right or wrong way but an opportunity to ask questions and begin to understand what vulnerability is about.

Research Questions:

This review is not to decide one way that is better or to minimize those leaders who are

not vulnerable; but to ask whether employees want to work for a vulnerable leader and what

prevents leaders from being vulnerable with their employees.

Significance of the Study:

This review is also about providing examples and tools to help leaders understand and

discover who they are. And allow them to evaluate their own leadership style and consider

asking the questions: *Am I a good leader? How do I come across as a leader? Do my colleagues*

know what I am going through and what I face as a leader? Am I reserved, fearful, and

untrusting as a leader and does that prevent me from being the best leader I can be? And what

am I willing to discover about myself in the process that will ultimately make me a better person

to those I come in contact with. Defining vulnerability in the context of leadership must be

looked at first to understand how it impacts leaders and their employees.

Definition of Terms:

Merriam Webster would define vulnerability as, "When someone is capable of being

physically or emotionally wounded and is open to attack, damage, or criticism." The perception

out there is that vulnerability is a sign of weakness and something to be avoided (Merriam

Webster Dictionary, 1828). However, Brown (2006) would like to change that belief. Brown

would define vulnerability, "Uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" (p.44). Brown (2006)

shared that many times people spend their whole lives pushing away and protecting themselves

from feeling vulnerable and fear they will be told they are too emotional and work to remove

feelings from their lives. Brown (2006) added, "Vulnerability isn't good or bad: it's not what we

call a dark emotion, nor is it always light, positive experience" (p.45). Deciding whether to make a vulnerable choice, as a leader, will depend upon if that leader see's the decision as a positive or negative experience for them.

For example, vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings." Therefore, when we believe that vulnerability is a weakness we also believe that feeling is a weakness (Brown, 2012). Vulnerability is the start of love, belonging, joy, courage and creativity. Vulnerability is a path where people can choose to take and discover a deeper purpose for their lives. Vulnerability can possibly happen in our personal lives (2012). But, is this type of vulnerability possible and can they make an impact specifically in a company where employees are looking for a strong confident leader?

Organization of the Remainder of the Study:

Bennis (1996) would say it is possible and stated, "Leaders are all those persons who, by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behaviors, thoughts and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings." (p. 2). Moreover, Leadership involves making a difference, creating positive change, moving people to get things done with clear visions, and giving employees power to develop better ways and ideas to get things accomplished (Kunich & Lester, 2006). The best leaders are willing to ask the question, "What can and should I do to make a positive difference?" (2006, p.2). Some leaders are looking for a quick fix to make a positive difference with employees (2006). However, it may not come as fast and it takes facing the flaws of the leaders and rectifying things that have not gone well (2006). Fear can arise because leaders believe vulnerability will threaten their success, yet owning those flaws can be

the first step towards the start of true health (Kunich & Lester, 2006). Again, this can leave the leader exposed and scared for what could happen next.

Brown (2012) concluded vulnerability is an incredible risk and leaves us emotionally exposed to others. When vulnerability is thought of as a weakness it can be looked upon as being a failure (2012). But, vulnerability is powerful tool that builds openness, truth telling, innovation, and connection (Moussavi-Bock, 2011). However, leaders need a reason or purpose to change and learn how to engage in vulnerable discussions and how to recognize the emotions that will come along with it (2011). This can be a new type of learning or a relearning depending upon what has happened in life (2011). It is in those moments where leaders can look at themselves and begin the process of understanding how their vulnerability will make an impact just by allowing someone to see who they are. For example, Vail (as cited in Bennis) shared several qualities that a leader would need to make an impact on their employees. He stated that "Discovery, cultivation, and recognition bring about an environment of working, thinking and feeling" (1996, p. 191). Leaders who have the ability to combine all of these abilities are better prepared and able to exist in a healthy environment (1996, p. 4). Again, vulnerability is a huge risk, yet the benefits can be extremely positive. For instance, one particular CEO decided to be vulnerable with his employees and see what would happen if he went outside of the normal routine.

A CEO of a large manufacturing company purposefully approached the large podium and provided an overview of their company and financial trajectories (Bell, 2005). However, the meeting went in a different direction then planned (2005). The CEO made the decision to not read the teleprompter and instead share what was on his heart (2005). He shared his love for the

company's vision and how he valued each of his employees (2005). He immediately began to cry and took several pauses to regain his composure (2005). Eventually the CEO completed his speech and the employees stared at the CEO with a long pause (2005). The audience seemed overwhelmed, yet they immediately sprang to their feet and gave their CEO an awkwardly long standing ovation (2005). It wasn't just some of the employees standing, but all of them were applauding with excitement (2005).

    The CEO's employees were moved by what they experienced or saw. Chip Bell (2005) states, "To be unabashedly authentic is to be publically real. Whether the emotion displayed is anger, compassion, pain or joy, the authenticity of a leader changes the nature of the connection and invites a valued link with others" (p.19). Philosopher Rollo May (as cited in Bell, 2005) would add, "There is an energy field between all humans that can change a relationship forever" (p.19). This CEO was open to share his emotions, yet how many leaders truly know their emotions and what it means to be vulnerable (2005). Furthermore, what can be done to help leaders be vulnerable especially when they are reluctant and have an underdeveloped understanding of what it means to be vulnerable with each other.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Most executives have an underdeveloped capacity for understanding and dealing with their emotions (Levinson, 1995). In fact, many are reluctant to look at why they act the way they do. Some leaders have perfected how to look at numbers and figures, but treat people as anonymous entities (1995). Leaders become emotionless structures who have removed creativity, play and humor from the work done each day (1995). Vulnerable leaders create a real, genuine, open and authentic relationship around them and want a place of trust where there can be a context of creativity and inventiveness (Bell, 2005). Moreover, vulnerability will facilitate the healing and revitalization process where leaders have the ability to assess and accept their emotional and personal responses (2005). Leaders' exposing themselves is a step towards eliminating expectations on how they "should" act and behave (2005).

For instance, leaders need to be told to "Be yourself more" and allow their individual self to come forward (Nelson Rolihlahla , 2013). Nelson Mandela was a "Be yourself more" type of leader (2013). Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was known as a leader who was himself through his struggle with apartheid and racism (2013). He was esteemed all over the world and was an icon and hero of the African liberation (2013). Mandela dedicated himself to remaining humble, vulnerable, and authentic allowing people to see his hopes, but also his struggles. Mandela shared, in his court trial, "I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all person's live in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die." (2013, retrieved from http://mandela.gov.za/index.html).

Mandela dedicated himself to the people by providing a vision and hope that goes beyond the now. He did not paint an unrealistic picture, but instead fought for what would allow people to move beyond their current the people, but knew it was needed to bring about change (Nelson Rolihlahla, 2013). Kunich, Charles, and Lester (2006) believed circumstances and see a vision (2013). Mandela was not required to share what he was dealing with since, "Leadership involves nothing more than making a difference, creating positive change, moving people to get things done, and having a clear and powerful vision" (p. 2). Scott (as cited in Moussavi-Bock, 2011) would add, vulnerability is not something you have, but something you choose. Again, Mandela shared his struggles, fears, and yet his ultimate hope was to see people truly live without fear (Nelson Rolihlahla, 2013). Mandela retired from public work, but he did not retreat from doing empowering things for the world (2013). He formed a group of prominent global elders who addressed human suffering and moreover, shared what humanity needs. (2013). Mandela had fierce conversations where he had real discussions and could not come across as fake (2013). A fierce vulnerable conversation does not mean a leader will have all the answers, but committed to remaining human throughout the journey (Moussavi-Bock, 2011). Mandela made choices that impacted lives, but he remained true to his vulnerable self.

Furthermore, all of these qualities are important; however, vulnerability does not require them to sacrifice their career or livelihood and will not require or ask leaders to expose the imperfect parts of themselves (Moussavi-Bock, 2011). In fact, the best leaders do not ask the question "What's best for me?" Instead they ask, "What can and should I do to make a positive difference?" (Kunich, Charles, Lester, 2006). Yet, does a leader making a positive difference mean allowing their employees to see them for who they are? Some believe leaders can never

fake who they are and need to depend upon their own humility and ability to understand what

their employees need (Kunich, Charles, Lester, 2006). Some scholars believe that leaders are

born leaders, but what about a vulnerable leader? And what are the various scopes of authentic

and vulnerable leadership.

Authentic leadership is a "Multidimensional piece which entails four dimensions:

internalized moral perspective, self-awareness, relational transparency, and balanced

processing's" (Hannah, Bruce, Walumbwa, 2011 p. 562). When a leader has an internalized

moral perspective they are guided by their moral standards instead of pressures that are put on

them by their peers or higher level leaders (2011). They strive to think more open and deeply

about ethical issues (2011). Self-awareness shows the authentic leader has a self-knowledge

which helps them to be aware of how their decisions will impact other people. Self-awareness

also allows leaders to use their knowledge about themselves and how it can enhance their

capacity to lead and develop those that follow them (2011). Relational transparency is shown

through openness, accountability, and honesty exchanged between other leaders and those that

are being managed by them. Relational transparent leaders show their true thoughts and feelings

and will lay out what they are expecting from the relationship (2011). Finally, balanced

processing brings about an openness and accountability with colleagues where relevant

information is shared before coming to a conclusion or decision (2011). This self-awareness is

contagious and employees are drawn towards their transparent leader.

For example, vulnerable leaders are often attractive role models when other team

members want to be engaged and involved with what they are doing (Hannah, Bruce,

Walumbwa, 2011). Vulnerable leaders serve a key role in how others are motivated and desire to

be led. Vulnerable leaders focus on the strengths and weaknesses of their teams and how to move

forward (Strategic Finance, 2012). Vulnerable leaders look inward with hopes of gaining a

greater self-awareness and self-identity that will articulate their goals and visions. Furthermore,

they strive to be loyal to the values they hold and understand how they will share those beliefs

with those they manage (Sosik & Weichun, 2011). Next, vulnerable leaders are willing to accept

their strengths and weaknesses and positive and negative qualities and use that information as

feedback to help grow and discover continually (2011). In the end, employees will want to

follow their vulnerable leader but inside the leader may still have questions whether vulnerability

is the right choice.

For instance, unlocking vulnerability and authenticity as a leader can be scary; however

the benefits, in the end, can make leaders more approachable, trusted and influential with their

employees (Warrell, 2013). Warrell (2013) believed, "Sharing ourselves often goes against our

instincts for self-preservation…often our automatic response is to protect, pull out, by canceling

a meeting, breaking off a relationship, or retreating from center stage" (p. 2). Vulnerability is a

behavior that is chosen depending upon the moment. Leaders are not perfect and leadership is

about behavior and not just talking about it. Vulnerable leaders need to remind themselves to be

accountable about the fears, strengths, and weaknesses happening and not pretend they know the

situation. There needs to be an inner confidence to admitting the leader does not have all the

answers to everything (Moussavi-Bock, 2011). Yet, this can only come through practicing and

unlocking true vulnerable leadership.

Warrell (2013) stated, "Leadership is far less about what you are doing, than about who

you are being" (p. 29). Some leader's place a value on superficial things and most employees

get frustrated (Warrell, 2013). Eventually people begin to crave and yearn for vulnerability and

seek out leaders who will be strong, confident, but also human (2013). For example, authenticity

and engagement are key elements for internal and external success in vulnerability (Donnelly,

2013). Warrell (2013) has found that when leaders can connect with their employees they

become more approachable, trusted, and influential and will begin to unlock the power of

vulnerability. And stronger feelings of trust will grow knowing vulnerability will not be used

against them in any way (Rosen, 2007). Leaders want to share who they are, yet the underlying

fear that their vulnerability will expose them negatively often stops them from moving ahead.

     Vulnerably sharing ourselves will often go against a natural instinct (Warrell, 2013).

Some particular leaders are looking at self-preservation; however it is time to stop playing it safe

and have the leader take a risk (2013). Taking a risk is where the leader does not need to prove

their superiority, success, or significance (2013). The leader is no longer the person who has the

power, but someone they can relate and trust (2013). Building trust comes through honoring their

word, following through on their commitments, being consistent with approach, and ultimately

remaining authentic and vulnerable the entire time (Rosen, 2007).

     One particular person who was an example of trust and relating to people in a vulnerable

way was Margaret Thatcher. Margaret Thatcher stated, "You cannot lead someone from the

crowd" (Warrell, 2013 p.29). Margaret Thatcher owned her leadership style and focused on what

made her unique (2013). She realized that vulnerable leaders cannot deprive themselves by

conforming to others, but instead look at the unique contributions that are brought and offered

(2013). Thatcher believed this way of leading would build a strong reputation that attracts high-

performing people who help encourage success and growth. Furthermore, leaders who do not

lose themselves, in the process, and remain engaged will ultimately succeed (Elrod, 2012).

Owning your unique and vulnerable leadership style is crucial, yet it will not matter if a leader

forgets to listen to their employees.

Listening authentically is one of the most powerful pieces that a leader can offer and

share (Warrell, 2013). Unfortunately, it is the least practiced skill in leadership (2013). For

example, listening authentically involves seeing the world through another person's eyes and

begins a process of breaking down walls where employees have been fearful to trust (2013). And

to be fully present instead of thinking about what agenda needs to get done that day (2013).

Again, leaders' listening to their employees is needed, yet what is the vulnerable leader focusing

on when listening? Are they acknowledging and appreciating their employee's strengths (2013)?

Criticizing people can come more naturally than appreciating someone (Warrell, 2013).

And acknowledging people authentically can unlock a true appreciation for others (2013). The

Gallup organization found that two-thirds of all employees worldwide believe their work isn't

fully recognized. And to fully recognize employees Gallup would suggest helping their

employees know their strengths (2013). This can be done through taking an assessment and

focusing on their ability to collaborate, be creative, and tenacity to move ahead and help others

(2013). Sharing the great work their employees have accomplished is another step towards

leaders being vulnerable. Leaders often assume employees do not need to hear what a great job

they have done, however gratitude can create a foundation of vulnerability, trust and the

importance of looking at others (2013).

Another important piece towards vulnerability is serving. How often does a leader focus

on their ability to serve employees? There are situations where leaders focus on what they have

accomplished and gotten done. Yet, how many employees know their leader genuinely cares about them (Warrell, 2013)? Warrell (2013) stated, "Leadership isn't about the leader – it's about those being led" (p. 29). Moreover, when leaders remain committed to vulnerable and meaningful relationships they create a foundation that will build connections with their employees and those they serve (Donnelly, 2013). Ultimately, vulnerability can only happen if it starts at the top of the organization (Donnelly, 2013). Leaders of companies serving their employees with vulnerability takes dedication and perseverance, however the rewards are transforming.

For example, a Mutual Insurance agency has an incredible reputation among other agencies. They are known for their ability to understand their employees and what it means to provide value added service (Bell, 2005). Value added service is when employees are looking for ways to provide super, open and honest interactions with their customers (2005). The employees would not strive toward these goals if they did not have this modeled by those in power. They would not know what honesty entails if they did not have someone who cared about being vulnerable. Mutual Insurance believes that all agents are valued partners that are built upon mutual respect and truthful dealings (2005).

The founder focused on how to meet with each new employee for at least an hour and a half to listen to what excites them and what new ideas they have. In turn the founder and four other executives share their own excitement about the company and work towards a "whole truth philosophy" (Bell, 2005). Great authentic leadership comes from creating a remarkable experience (2005). The work is done face to face and ear to ear instead of having an employee take a survey (2005). This company is an example of when a leader and their employees can

work together through authenticity and vulnerability. However, there are some leaders who still cannot commit to being a vulnerable and authentic leader.

Predominantly, leaders do not come to their full potential of becoming a vulnerable leader because they have undiscovered and/or unhealthy practices that have overtaken the more positive aspects of themselves (Kunich & Lester, 2006). Therefore the leader will need to find and mend the hidden flaws that are preventing them from moving ahead as a leader (2006). Kunich & Lester (2006) stated, " Unless we face our flaws, we gamble that one day they will face us-at a moment when a single, unaddressed issue jeopardizes everything we have achieved, and one big "Oh, no" upends a career overflowing with "Attaboys" (p.86). Looking in the mirror at ourselves is never easy and can bring up horrible memories and challenges that we do not want to face (2006). And it is often easier to critique leaders and wonder why they made the decision they did since it is so easy to see blind spots (2006). In the end, the authentic and vulnerable leader needs to place their character under a microscope and realize the depth it will take to move forward (2006).

Goffeeon (as cited in Kunich & Lester) believed there are four behaviors that are linked to personal vulnerability (2006). The first behavior is when leaders show selective weakness and display humanity and approachability. Second, they use intuition to understand the "soft data" and decide when and how they use that information (2006). Third, they care deeply about the type of work their employees are taking on (2006). And finally the fourth behavior is when they understand what makes them different to others and how they build upon their own unique qualities (2006). Ultimately, vulnerable leaders are great story tellers who value everyone's stories and how those stories can impact those around them (2006). These types of leaders will

emerge in all types of places and those stories can mold events into a vision where people want to work and be involved in their lives (Kunich & Lester, 2006).

Vulnerable leadership is about putting away the self-centered, narcissistic, thoughts and leaving the strong egos at the door (Kunich & Lester, 2006). And focus on servant leadership where privileges are put aside and a focus on what is best for the greater good to be done (2006). The leader will continue to put forward their best efforts and others will follow because of the humility and vulnerability they see in their work (2006). Organizations cannot grow unless people are growing and that includes the leader 2006). Storytelling is one way the leader can grow through listening to the employees.

Everyone has a story and wants to be known and those stories empower leaders to be vulnerable in leadership (Bunker, 1997). Initially, sitting together telling stories at the table was a pastime that was celebrated and relished (1997). It was a time when older adults could pass down their wisdom to children and understanding that a good story takes time to really share and connect with people (1997). The art of storytelling has been lost. We have stopped telling stories when we started to lose pausing time, reflecting time, wondering time (1997). Life keeps pushing us at a pace that people don't stop and sit at the kitchen table to listen to the human stories. Those stories awaken people and they begin to be weaved together by a common story (1997). Yet, some executives have lost those stories.

For example, several leaders have been beaten by the constant changes and tumultuous transitions and have forgotten to listen to the employees (Bunker, 2007). Unfortunately these changes have caused damage to the heart of the leader and some feel ill equipped and unavailable to step up to the challenge of being a vulnerable leader. These constant changes and

tumultuous transitions also come at a cost and some leaders have experienced trauma and want

to eventually give up.

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) took on the project of helping leaders who had

experienced trauma and or downsizing in their jobs (Kunich & Lester, 1996). They wanted to

look for ways they could empower leaders to not give up especially when things were difficult.

Many talented leaders would spend their time creating masks that would hide their personal pain

and vulnerability with their employees (1996). Some leaders have told themselves to not show

emotions or be vulnerable (1996). This will build credibility with your employees and it will help

you to guide your ship through the unknown waters of change (1996). Sadly, this is the furthest

thing from the truth.

CCL began to meet with leaders and discussed how to confront those hidden concerns

(Kunich & Lester, 1996). Leaders needed to give themselves permission to lower the protective

walls around them and know they were in a safe place where vulnerability was welcomed

(1996). This technique has consistently brought out more authentic, genuine, and compassionate

leaders who were hiding inside that were fearful and alone (1996). They encouraged leaders who

give themselves the freedom to explore the hopeful and hopeless feelings that often arise when

being vulnerable (1996). Moreover, this understanding validated their feelings of being stuck and

depressed (1996). Leaders are still human beings who may find it difficult to understand and

show their humanness for fear they will be fired or removed (1996). But, leaders can use one's

own vulnerability as a tool to facilitate healing and move towards a place of acceptance and

showing their employees who they are (1996). For example, one leader wrote, "I do not have

friendships with colleagues in an emotional sense, but in an intellectual one. Not too close, please, you may get to know me, I may have to relate to you" (Kunich & Lester, 2006 p.124).

The leader is fearful to look at all sides and accept responsibility for what changes could come about (Bunker, 2007). The CEO found a way to exist, yet his employees do not feel a connection with him (2007). His fear has actually created a roadblock and he cannot move in a direction that is healthy for the organization or for him. (2007). CEOs are actually better at hiding their feelings, but it does not mean they do not experience them (2007). Often CEO's share they are caught in roles with what is expected and what they are feeling inside (2007). Many choose to wear a mask each day at their jobs and almost seem superhuman with their employees (2007). These behaviors may come across as passive aggressive where on the outside they act like everything is happy and perfect and on the inside they frustrated, angry, and sad. Sadly, this often bleeds into their personal relationships and burn out is inevitable.

Regrettably, most organizations are not ready for vulnerability and will not listen to things with an open mind (Kunich & Lester, 2006). Some organizations want their staff to push their employees too quickly and do not take the time to truly listen to their employee's fears, anger, and frustration (2006). They are told to "get on with life" and end of up sitting in silence for fear they will not be heard if they decided to be vulnerable (2006).

There are some leaders who want an opportunity to share their stories to show how to be vulnerable and be an example to their staff (Kunich & Lester, 2006). Yet, many supervisors don't know how to recognize or respond effectively to the emotional needs of their employees (2006). Miserably, leaders will not get to a place of vulnerability unless they learn how to help

themselves and be empathetic towards others. But what is the remedy for leader's to get the help

they need to be vulnerable (Kunich & Lester, 2006).

Openness and readiness are the keys to help with being vulnerable (Kunich & Lester,

2006). People are only willing to make changes when they want and see a need for that change

(2006). And begin with addressing the human side of their work and home life (2006). There

may be some grieving that needs to take place and those feelings will need to be validated by

someone who can be supportive no matter where they are in the process (2006). They will also

need to experience empathy from their leaders who can come in and energize and revitalize their

environment (2006). There is not a magic bullet or special tool that can remedy vulnerability.

Instead vulnerability will happen throughout several stages and an understanding of what good

things can become of it (2006).

For example, Bunker (2007) stated, "No one is comfortable at a funeral especially if the

rules say you are not supposed to cry" (p.129). There are so many unspoken rules in life and they

are especially strong in the work force (2007). And add the constant changes that happen at our

places of employment and all the multiple feelings of distrust and fear that has happened over

time. Additionally, few want to open the door of vulnerability for fear the flood gates will bring

even more things to process and handle (Bunker, 2007).

Employees are not told to be vulnerable instead they are told, "Continue to work hard and

be loyal; do more with less; be grateful that you were lucky enough to keep your job; do not

whine about the losses and changes; accept the new mission statement and get on with it – but

take charge of your own life and career; don't expect to be here for life; and remember there are

no guarantees" (Bunker, 2007 p. 130). Organizations must contribute to their employees by

creating ways where they can contribute. Yet, companies cannot pretend and put on a perfect front that everything is working well.

Meaning, employees can sense when someone is not being vulnerable and it will not matter how believable the story is (Moussavi-Bock, 2011). Leaders may lean towards trying to be perfect so they can cover their tracks and avoid any finger-pointing that could happen (2011). But perfectionism and fear is only a short term fix. And in the end perfectionism will only create employees who are scared, resentful, and will only comply out of fear of losing their jobs (2011). Furthermore, employees will begin to speak from what their roles and titles are instead of where their hearts are at. Speaking from the heart does not come easily and leaders will need to practice (2011). Yet, for some leaders, fear continues to be the driving force.

For example, how often has a leader stopped their decision to be vulnerable for fear they would look weak, scared, angry, and sad to their employees? How many male leaders have not cried in front of their employees because they have been told a man is weak when they cry? Furthermore, how many female CEOs believe they are too emotional and stop themselves from ever showing emotions for fear they will be ridiculed? And believe the sociocultural expectations of what women are supposed to be based on their identity (e.g. gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, religious identity) and/or role (e.g. mother employee, partner, group member) (Brown, 2006). These expectations are even enforced more by the media culture that includes television, advertising, marketing, film, music, and printed word (2006). Most executives are faced with the chance to be vulnerable and authentic with their employees, yet many stop themselves because of fear (Sterns & Parrott, 2012). Emotions are not private feelings, but are pieces of communication that are interpersonal (2012). Emotions let other people know how

someone understands and perceives a situation (2012). And people will often monitor and view emotions and perceive what they are going to do next (2012). Moreover, many will wonder how those emotions will affect judgments of a person's character and how will they react (Sterns & Parrott, 2012).

Emotions serve as a social signal and employees will understand and be aware of how their leader is reacting. Emotions are also genuine and relatively uncontrollable and some employees may see this as a way to look into their boss's psyche that reveals their motivations and reactions towards situations (Sterns & Parrott, 2012). These emotions have the potential to convey what someone is feeling or experiencing whether it is "right or wrong" (2012). Emotions are also a process by which people begin to assign meaning to what they believe (Feiring, 2005). Many would recognize that emotions are crucially important and a powerful force (Scheff, 2003). Moreover, our shared understanding about certain emotions allows us to communicate with each other and look at what the differences and similarities are (2003). One particular emotion that can influence authenticity and vulnerability is when shame is present specifically in an unhealthy way.

Shame is the master emotion of everyday life; however it is typically invisible in modern societies (Sheff, 2003). American society is a shame based culture that is often not spoken about (2003). Sheff (2003) believed the image of seeing oneself negatively in the eyes of others is the origin of shame and embarrassment. Shame involves a focus on the entire self especially when someone is evaluating their failures and how that looks (Feiring, 2005). Brown (2006) would define shame as, "An intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging" (p. 44). And once people experience shame

they come across as feeling trapped, powerless, and isolated (2006). Shame is often largely

misunderstood and discounted by social scientists (Brown, 2006). Some have categorized shame

to the class of self-conscious emotion along with guilt, embarrassment, and pride (Feiring, 2005).

Researchers are working towards examining shame and what its role is with self-esteem,

depression, addiction, bullying, suicide and family violence (Brown, 2006).

Shame begins to interweave throughout conversations and thoughts and can become

difficult to overcome (Brown, 2006). Lewis stated that shame is inherently a social emotion.

Shame has an instinct that signals danger to life and can be a potential threat to survival.

Especially when we no longer feel a connection with another human being and are feeling

completely isolated. For example, leaders who have chosen to be authentic and vulnerable are at

risk of their employees shaming them (2006). Shame also signals trouble in a relationship and a

fear that someone has not lived up to someone's expectations and causes a threat to the

relationship (2006). Shame and guilt are "self-conscious" emotions that involve evaluative

judgments by themselves and others. And create action tendencies where people can experience

wrong-doing, self-worth, and social disapproval (Sterns & Parrott, 2012). For example, some

who are experiencing shame may shrink their body and look away when someone is trying to

look at them in the eye (Feiring, 2005). Unfortunately, leaders who deal with shame can come

across as unlovable and believe they are a disappointment to their employees (2005).

Furthermore, having an unreasonable number of unrealistic expectations placed on

someone is how a leader could experience being trapped in a shameful place (Brown, 2006). One

leader shared how he uses shame as a management tool (Brown, 2010). For example, when

frustrated, the leader will single one particular team member out and criticize them in front of

their colleagues (Brown, 2010). The leader has told his employees to take care of a task his way. However, the employees do not listen and they do things their own way (2010). The leader is angry and believes taking them down will make them respect him (2010). Sadly, this way of managing employees leaves them feeling trapped and begins a complex web that can cause men and women to feel exposed and ignored (Brown, 2006). Unfortunately, few are able to identify shame because of the silencing and secret nature that shame and isolation often brings (2006). Ultimately, seeing one's self negatively in the eyes of others is the origin of shame (Scheff, 2003). Adult leaders who have experienced shame are often battling unresolved issues from their childhood.

Shame often starts with their parents; however communication of disdain and disapproval from teachers, extended family, clergy, friends, and professionals can all be a source of shame (Feiring, 2005). For instance, an infant is completely dependent on the caregivers bond and when shame is present it can be as intense as fear (Scheff, 2003). Erskine and Philipson (as cited in Moussavi-Bock, 2011) shared that when a child is reprimanded they will often identify with the criticism and believe the negative messages of "bad" boy and girl and that they are "greedy" and "rude". Being shamed by peers and parents is how boys are taught to conform to male gender roles and norms (Shepard & Rabinowitz, 2012). Hartley (as cited in Shepard & Rabinowitz, 2012) reported, "Boys learn to conform to the rules of what it means to be a man through repeated humiliations and reprimands." (p. 93). Over time, especially men, will develop a hypervigilance to being shamed and find ways to avoid it at all costs (Shepard & Rabinowitz, 2012). Regrettably, for some, those early experiences formed a unique, fingerprint-like susceptibility to shame (Moussavi-Bock, 2011). Once the shame is felt many want to hide the

damaged self from others and look for ways to not share their thoughts and feelings any longer

(Feiring, 2005). Shame can be damaging for the vulnerable leader and can create toxic situations

especially if they do not feel they are approved by others.

Some leaders might believe they are a disappointment and unlovable because they have

failed to live up to others expectations. Sadly, an intense anger and a desire to retaliate with

aggression can grow and employees are hurt (Feiring, 2005). Unfortunately, those unique

individual shame templates might remain and color the interactions that are had with others

(2011). For example, a woman worked up the courage to share that she was a recovering

alcoholic of twenty years with a colleague (Brown, 2010). The colleague decided the woman

was not fit to be around her children because of this knowledge (2010). Yet, the woman

reminded her colleague that she attended functions with her children over the past two years and

there was never a problem (2010). Sadly, shame dictated the situation and didn't allow the

person to be vulnerable. The alcoholic woman was incredibly brave and was a leader to her

colleague and others (2010). She allowed herself to be seen in a vulnerable way, yet many are

self-conscious (2010).

Many individuals are already self-conscious and preoccupied with being acceptable and

are unwilling to risk anything that would make them look bad (Hannah, Bruce, & Walbumbwa,

2011). And if a leader is looked upon as unknowing they can feel shame as they experience

uncertainty and face multiple possibilities (2011). The interactions between the leader and others

can look like warfare with energy focused on digging in and very few decisions are made (2011).

These interactions sacrifice the ability to be creative and productive (2011). Shame is extremely

powerful and complex and difficult to overcome, but what can be done for a leader to move

forward in a healthy way (Brown, 2006)?

Realizing that shame creates a feeling of powerlessness is one way a leader can make an

impact on their life and others (Brown, 2006). A leader has the power to act and/or produce an

effect, yet is extremely difficult when shame is present (2006). Shame causes leaders to hide due

to an unconscious awareness of themselves and ultimately a fear of being judged by others.

Making the effort to point out the feeling of powerlessness and shame is an important first step

for leaders, yet is difficult when there is no trust in their employees.

Some believe shame can be used to create social unity and be a positive way to express

their feelings specifically if they are apologizing about their behavior and how they have treated

someone (Sterns & Parrott, 2012). This can only happen if someone truly knows how damaging

the actions are (2012). For example, "If a person has moral feelings, she is carrying the

motivation to do good around with her all the time. She will do good and avoid wrong when no

one is looking, when there is no reward or punishment to be had" (Sterns & Parrott p.26, 2012).

This could be a healthy sense of guilt; however shame does not have the same effect especially

in the context of leadership.

Many leaders are told to not allow themselves to be open or vulnerable especially by

poking fun of themselves or sharing successes and failures (Rosen, 2007). Some would say the

leader needs to remain quiet and keep a separation between the boss and the employees (2007).

Yet, Rosen (2007) stated, "Knowing you as a leader, is one of your greatest gifts and attributes:

your ability to develop strong relationships, trust and loyalty amongst your team" (p.20). Elrod

(2012) added that vulnerable leaders focus on their strengths and work on their weaknesses

which will create trust within their team. There can be missed opportunities when a leader wants

to figure everything out perfectly and not allow team members to see their thought process

(Moussavi-Bock, 2011). A boss telling their employees how to act and make decisions is not

creating trust (Rosen, 2007). Understanding the importance of being a vulnerable leader and

what can get in the way is important. Having this background information is helpful, yet how this

is applied to the lives of the leader is the next important step towards success for the vulnerable

leader.

Chapter 3: Applications and Recommendations

Application

One way for leaders to apply vulnerability is through creating trust. True vulnerable trust entails, "People to more comfortably and confidently share their true mistakes, failures, challenges, feelings and concerns that are often bottled up inside in fear of expressing them and being misinterpreted as a sign of weakness" (Rosen, 2007 p. 20). Once a manager has laid a foundation of vulnerable trust the employees will not be fearful of a hidden agenda. The vulnerable leader who has gained trust and expresses themselves does not look weak and becomes an invincible leader. Ultimately, authenticity is not something a person has, but a way of life (Moussavi-Bock, 2011).

Another way leaders can apply vulnerability in their work is through empathy. For example, empathy is the ability to see the world as others see it, be non-judgmental, understand another person's feelings, and later communicate those feelings to others ("Training Journal", 2006). Empathy is truly the opposite of feeling shamed by another person (Brown, 2006). Showing empathy removes isolation and shame and allows leaders to see themselves and their employees in a new light (2006). Leaders are looking for a connection with their employees (2006). They desire mutual support, shared experiences and a freedom that would allow them to explore and create new ideas (2006).

Beginning to ask how experiences will create loneliness and even isolation is something leaders will want to identify when understanding empathy ("Training Journal", 2006). And, take time to ask what vulnerability is and how would someone protect themselves when feeling

threatened or shut down (2006)? And, what do we do when we feel emotionally exposed? Are

you, as a leader, willing to take emotional risks? For example, some leaders shared how they

have used perfectionism and pleasing when they felt uncertain and are yearning for control

(2006).

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses and when a leader is upfront about them

improvement can happen within the team (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012). Asking questions and

opening up about shame in a journal or with a trusted friend and /or colleague develop strategies

that will increase shame resilience and a deeper place of understanding (Brown, 2006). Yes,

there will be situations where a leader feels the need to look brave on the outside; however inside

they are feeling extremely fearful (2006).

Brown (2006) shared that vulnerability is not about winning or losing, but about courage.

Vulnerability is about integrity where telling the whole truth can bring about interactions of

people trusting you (Bauman, 2013). Former CEO of Medtronic Bill George shared the

importance of integrity and vulnerability and why it is so important to provide the whole truth

(2013). He shared about a young fraternity president discovering they were short $6,000 dollars

on his first day as president (2013). Their fraternity secretary suggested that they borrow $6,000

from the orphanage donations they received earlier and pay the money back later (2013).

Everyone on the leadership team agreed with the secretary to pay the money back later (2013).

Yet the young president was faced with a moral dilemma and was struggling (2013). The

president decided to take the leadership team to the bank and ask for three $1,500.00 dollar loans

to cover the operating expenses (2013). This story shows integrity in action (2013). Yes, there is

a greater risk of being hurt, but again the rewards are far greater knowing the leader has allowed

themselves to be seen by others. Furthermore, this young president was an authentic vulnerable leader who told the truth and kept his commitment (Bauman, 2013). In the end, vulnerability may well be an ethical issue.

The idea of vulnerability does not necessarily have ethical inferences (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012). Yes, the idea of vulnerability is asking people to live a more focused life that will bring about a unified whole where values and beliefs are deeper (2012). Yet, there are not guarantees the leader will strive to be a more principled person (2012). Moreover, the idea of a principled person can look very different to each person (2012). The hope is a vulnerable life will push someone into a more transformed life where a deeper level of human understanding and trust can take place (2012). The idea of loving a vulnerable life will incorporate beliefs, values, and concerns that are working together (2012). However, someone understanding a vulnerable life may not go along with something that is necessarily ethical or moral by another person's standards (2012). The hope is to create deeper relationships and still empower others (2012). Again, vulnerability provides empathy for others which can enhance the person and those living in the world (2012). But, how will employees truly know their leader is vulnerable and if they want to work with them.

Algera & Lips-Wiersma (2012) stated, "The authentic leader will know what is good, important, beautiful, and will exhibit a higher moral capacity to judge dilemmas from different angles" (p. 125). However, being vulnerable cannot be assessed by anyone other than the person because it comes from an individual perspective (2012). Therefore, a leader will need to be aware of what they are sharing and how it will impact their employees (2012). There will be challenges and pressures, however there are opportunities for growth and depth that can take

place if they are willing to be seen (2012). Unfortunately, too many leaders are focused on their work and are not fully available to staff (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012). There is a tension that happens in the work place with authentic and vulnerable living. And there is a tension to keep things organized and moving in a direction that does not prevent the organizational demands from happening (2012). Completing tasks while still being present to employees will remain a struggle for leaders.

For instance, time and space for leaders to reflect on vulnerability in the workplace is necessary (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012). But, time is often restricted and challenged by the daily requests and decisions that need to be made quickly and efficiently (2012). And employees also need to have time and space to consider what the vulnerable leader is sharing with them (2012). Ultimately, the organization will need to be flexible and adaptable with their time and allow processing to happen and still be able to meet the looming deadlines that need to take place (2012). Vulnerable leaders are looking for places they can find "real" conversations in the mailroom and break rooms, and look for employees who will not tell them what they want to hear (Bell, 2005).

Vulnerable leaders talk with their employees and know when one of their employees is having a baby or ask them to share their story (Bell, 2005). Authentic leader's biggest goal is to look for ways they can keep things lively and strive towards being genuine and vibrant. They even look for employees who can bring in soul and be silly with other people at the table. Brown (2010) would add, "In order for connection to happen, we have to allow ourselves to be seen, really seen….deeply seen" (p.62). Ultimately, there are benefits to being a vulnerable leader.

One great payoff for being a vulnerable leader is unbridled passion. Bell (2005) stated, "Passion is not something that leaders give, it is something they release. As leaders publically connect with their true selves, they issue an implied invitation for followers to do likewise. Heads do not talk to hearts; only hearts talk to hearts" (p.24). Employees are willing to give their all when they feel internally responsible and not just externally responsible (2005). Furthermore, leaders do not become great by working towards a list of character traits, but effective leaders are authentic where they empower others ("Training Journal", 2006). Relationships that will need to be nurtured and developed can only happen when they are vulnerable with one another (2006).

Practicing vulnerability has several requirements and one of them is to put away all the masks and begin to wear and name the truth with good intentions (Moussavi-Bock, 2011). The most powerful way to create a place of vulnerability is when a leader models being vulnerable with their employees (Brown, 2011). Meaning, leaders can begin to look for ways that invite others to put their thoughts and beliefs out on the table and create a deep dialogue that will deepen the relationships with one another (Brown, 2011). And when speaking remember to remove the leader's title and speak from the heart rather than a place of cold and meaningless (2011). Brown stated (2011), "Give me a generation that has these qualities – high self-worth, vulnerability, and connection, and we'll solve today's problems" (p. 62). The world can be changed, but it will take someone who is willing ask themselves what can I do to make an impact (2011).

Leaders can easily speak about vulnerability, but to actually model it is completely different (Moussavi-Bock, 2011). Leaders who are willing to put their vulnerability on the table will actually strengthen relationships with others (2011). This will feel foreign and artificial at

first, but the positive outcomes will outweigh the negative. One positive outcome will be a deeper appreciation of what an authentic commitment really feels like. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to have a deeper relationship with your employees that will bring growth and success in your organization. It's easy to go along with what everyone wants you to say, yet disagreeing with someone can actually pave the way for meaningful and healthy relationships and building a foundation that will create trust and vulnerability.

The true effective leaders engage their whole being and allow their employees to see their humanity and approachability. A leader will work to master the art of consistently being them self and realize they may need to change their behavior to respond to the changing dynamics happening (Bennis, 1996). Vulnerable leaders do not talk about being vulnerable, but instead live it out by using real life examples that will touch their employees (1996). For example, Martin Luther King Jr. was able to share stories of his father's sermons that helped him be recognized as an international leader (1996). Martin Luther King Jr. knew the stories of his father and yet he wanted them to not be forgotten and help the next generation realize there is a hope for them (1996). This is an example of how vulnerable leadership happened in the past, but what is needed for vulnerable leadership to grow in the future?

Opportunities for Future Research:

Corporations have added a theme of authentic and vulnerable leadership development programs for their executive and front line manager programs (Blausten, 2013). These decisions have brought about positive changes for the teams (2013). Leaders have discovered themselves and their underlying motivations and how that fits within their companies' structure and beliefs (2013). Leaders influence their employees and the stakes are much higher when stressful

situations arise (2013). However, things run more smoothly when closer connections are made

within their teams (2013). Furthermore, a leader can create an open and transparent and safe

culture when companies reward their leaders and employees for their vulnerability and

authenticity (Hannah, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2011).

Conclusion:

Employees want to work for a vulnerable leader and employees will remain and work

alongside of their leaders longer. Many leaders have shame they need to overcome from past

experiences, yet the leader can experience trust and respect if they are willing to do the hard

work of acknowledging their past and the confidence to move forward. Gardner (as cited in

Kunich & Lester, 2006) stated "We need to believe in ourselves and our future but not to believe

that life is easy. Life is painful and rain fall on the just. Leaders must help us see failure and

frustration not as a reason to doubt ourselves but a reason to strengthen resolve (p. 88).

Leadership is not easy especially dealing with the everyday challenges and big decisions that are

being made (2006). And it is even more difficult when you add vulnerability to leadership.

Many organizations ask leaders to push their employees into fast forward and ignore their

employees' thoughts when things are not going smoothly (Bunker, 1997). CEO's push

employees to ignore their anger and sense of loss and are told to "get on with it". However,

those moments are where vulnerability can touch employees and allow them to grow and bring

about healthy relationships and change (1997). Once vulnerability happens there is a realization

that everyone is learning together (1997). Furthermore, employees who listen to their vulnerable

leaders will see a humanness and connection which allows their workplace to be a healthier and

more productive place (1997).

Organizations with vulnerable leaders have experienced employees who are engaged and provide cutting edge breakthroughs (Bell, 2005). Turnover is lower because people no longer feel they are in a passive aggressive environment where cynicism and suspicion are at the root of all issues (2005). And most of all employees are loyal longer because they can trust what is being said and experienced (2005).

I believe Margery Williams, author of the "*Velveteen Rabbit*", understood what it meant to be a vulnerable leader, especially in the dialogue between the wise skin horse naïve rabbit. She wrote, "Real isn't how you are made. It's a thing that happens to you. It doesn't happen all at once, you become. It takes a long time" Becoming vulnerable or "real" as Williams shared is about a process where leaders allow themselves to be seen by their employees. Real leaders are inviting passion by keeping things genuine (Bell, 2005). In the end, as leaders open up employees begin to realize and understand that heads do not talk with hearts, but hearts talk with hearts and connections can be made (2005). Finally, all of these tools will provide leaders a foundation where employees trust their leaders and want to work with their leaders knowing they are making an impact together through vulnerability.

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