



Vulnerability as Strength

by *Esther Muller and Michael Williams, Ph.D.*



Vulnerability enables intimacy. Intimacy promotes reflection and growth. Vulnerability as a weakness defines its strength. Vulnerability requires strength of character, openness to difference, and the courage to occupy an internal space that is terrifying for some and liberating for others. Many professionals view vulnerability as weakness; a weakness of character, intent or commitment. Vulnerability can weaken us. It is energy intensive, potentially draining our energy stores leaving us exhausted. However, vulnerability and its fueling can be concurrently energizing. The experience of vulnerability offers opportunities for change and potentials for transformation. Dr. Reuben Castagno, a licensed mental health counselor and Associate Professor of Psychology at Touro College in New York City shares, "Vulnerability presents us with states of intimacy encouraging contexts for introspection and insight. Vulnerability can promote awareness of our needs, desires, and dreams. This awareness can enable our developing coping skills, future plans, and strategies for realizing the future today."

How can vulnerability enable high performance?

Consider the following characteristics relative to vulnerability enabling your performance.

Courage

Courage comes from the Latin cor-Heart. Experiencing vulnerability requires courage; the courage to suspend existing habits of thought and behavior and embrace new ideas or unfamiliar actions in order to better understand ourselves and potential. Courage is enhanced by vulnerability. We may be open to learning how social media can identify prospects for a product, work with a coach to improve communication skills, or choose a new career. Vulnerability and courage may appear an odd pair; however they have influenced and enabled our personal and professional lives. As the British statesman and author Sir Winston Churchill wrote, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." Being courageous is enabled through our success and failure in life and work. Courage is attained through trial, effort, and discovery. Vulnerability fuels our journeys toward courage.

Purpose

Vulnerability can inspire purpose. Purpose fuels desire and inhabits goals. President John F. Kennedy stated, "Effort and courage are not enough without purpose and direction." Purpose directs our thinking and behavior relative to achieving what we want. Vulnerability may be a transitional cognitive and emotional experience necessary in tempering our resolve to adopt purpose and growth. It is in through crafting, revitalizing, and adapting the

purposes of our lives we can harness the power and potential resident in vulnerability to achieve goals. As the poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, "The purpose of life is to be defeated by greater and greater things." Purpose invites challenge and defeat while vulnerability offering insight and discovery.


Connectedness

Nature informs us of our connectedness to the external world. Connectedness and its resulting causality create the networks and patterns of our lives. Awareness of our connectedness enables us to plan and implement focused and purposeful action toward achieving our goals. Vulnerability enables connectedness. It promotes receptivity to new ideas, lessens rigidity to habitual behaviors, and promotes willingness to explore undiscovered dimension of ourselves and others. Connectedness is the fabric of business. Our transactions and exchanges are its infrastructure; they connect us. Leveraging connectedness forges expanding and enhanced relationships. Relationships are at the heart of business. Vulnerability enables us to think and feel authentically, in turn promoting honest and meaningful connectedness.

Vulnerability

American author Madeline L'Engle wrote, "When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability. To be alive is to be vulnerable." Vulnerability can be a powerful force for change and transformation. We tend to avoid vulnerability as we may render ourselves accessible, malleable, and impressionable. At times, we surrender or submit to influences from others or our environments. Often, surrender and submission are viewed as states of weakness or a condition resulting from the lack of self control. However, in practice the opposite may be true. Surrender evidences courage and submission enables purpose. Applying the power and potential inherent in vulnerability in our workplaces may be challenging. However, once applied, it can fuel connectedness in our lives.

Coaches can help you develop courage, purpose, and connectedness. Be vulnerable; know strength.

Get coached; get results. 

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