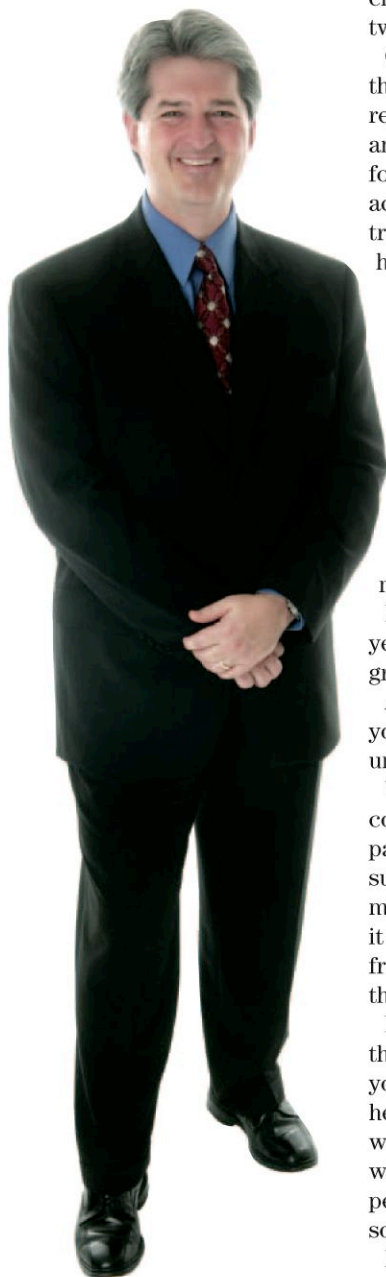


Strength in vulnerability

Create a connection
that builds trust
and respect.



I stood before the people of my company in what I knew would be a defining moment.

After a decade of phenomenal success, the market had turned, sharply and unexpectedly. The financial impact was devastating. Difficult decisions that included layoffs, expense reductions and the plotting of a new strategy had to be made. It would be painful, and a fearful uncertainty overshadowed my team.

As I walked to the podium, their faces showed the same concerns that I felt churning inside me. In that moment, I had two choices of what I would say.

One was to be vulnerable, to let them see that I felt the same emotions and the same regret they did over the issues we faced and to then use that connection to take us forward together. The other choice was to act as though I had everything under control, displaying confidence that, in my heart, I did not feel.

Unfortunately, I chose the latter.

The message I gave could best be characterized as a pep rally speech, with lots of bravado that I now know seemed as false to them as it did to me. I concluded by stepping off the stage and shouting, "Let's make it happen!"

After a brief moment of forced applause, they quietly left the room, having gained no hope or courage from my attempt at a rallying message.

Even today, I cringe at this memory. And yet, this experience taught me one of the greatest lessons in the business of life.

Are you facing a challenge today that has you feeling overwhelmed or frightened, unsure what to do?

Whether you are a leader in business, the coordinator of a community project or a parent, you will inevitably face a moment such as this. And when it happens, you may be tempted to act as though you have it all under control and need little help from anyone else. Take it from me, this is the wrong approach.

It's easy to believe you should have all the answers for every situation. And when you believe that, you hesitate to ask for help, even when you know you need it. You work to seem confident and assured, when what you should be doing is asking the people around you to join you in finding a solution.

Imagine if I had begun my meeting by

acknowledging that I had been affected by the changes, just as they had, and then asked for ideas on how we could get through the crisis together. Would they have thought less of me as a leader, or more?

I think you know the answer. And the same is true in your situation.

When you are willing to let others see that you have the same doubts and fears as they do, it does not make you weak. It makes you human. Courage is not the absence of fear, it is action taken in spite of it.

Your willingness to be vulnerable creates a connection that not only enables others to help you, it makes them want to. The result is unity, in your family or on your team, which strengthens everyone and displays the truest form of courage.

Vulnerability also makes you stronger when you've made the wrong decision or said something that you regret. Instead of defending your actions, acknowledge your mistake and what you learned from it.

The people around you always see the truth eventually. They can respect you, in spite of your mistake, if you are simply willing to admit it.

I once worked for a leader who, although respected for his passion, thoroughness and hard work, was widely known for never making two important statements: "I was wrong," and, "I'm sorry."

Like everyone, he was sometimes wrong, but staunchly refused to admit it. Because of this, the people on his team became unable to trust him, and eventually, he was removed from his position.

Your vulnerability is what enables you to connect with the people in your life. The more you connect, the more engagement, respect and trust you will experience, and the more of a leader you will become.

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