



VULNERABLE AND COURAGEOUS

"Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness."

—Brené Brown

OVERVIEW

Staff members watch a video clip about courage and vulnerability, reflect on situations at work that make them feel vulnerable, and consider how to courageously embrace their own vulnerabilities.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- During staff meetings to promote courage and vulnerability
- To promote a positive workplace climate and a sense of purpose among staff
- To encourage openness and trust among colleagues at a staff retreat or professional development workshop

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Adult

MATERIALS

- PC or electronic device and connected screen for watching the video

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

School staff will:

- Acknowledge the relationship between courage and vulnerability
- Expand their self-awareness by reflecting on situations that make them feel vulnerable

- Identify obstacles to embracing vulnerability and consider ways to overcome them

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Humility
- Courage
- Purpose
- Compassion

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Self-management

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused attention
- Open awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- In a quiet place, watch this 3-minute [video](#) on vulnerability and courage.
- Now, take a few moments to think of a situation in the past that involved courage and vulnerability, whether it was something you experienced yourself, or a situation you encountered with a colleague or someone else.
- As you consider the courage required to be vulnerable in this situation, reflect on the three components of courage.
 - 1) What was the **intention** underlying the courageous act?
 - 2) What was the **risk** that that was involved
 - 3) Was there a **“noble goal” or value** driving the action or decision?
- Next, think of a *current* situation that requires you to act courageously by embracing a vulnerability.
 - Why be courageous now?
 - What is the underlying *intention*, *risk(s)*, and *goal(s) or value(s)* that drive you forward.
 - Are there any obstacles that might prevent you from being vulnerable in this situation? If so, what can you do to overcome these obstacles?
- Write down your thoughts about how you might approach these obstacles.
- How do you think this form of reflection might be relevant or helpful to your team or staff?

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

- In the beginning of your staff meeting, invite everyone to take a few long, deep breaths together to calm and ground themselves.
- Then, begin by sharing a quote by Brené Brown, who has been doing inspirational work on vulnerability: *"Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness."* (Invite one or two responses to this quote as time permits.)
- Next introduce courage the three components of courage: *Researchers propose that courage [involves three things](#): an intention, a risk, and a goal. For example, admitting a mistake made at work could involve:*
 - **An Intention**
 - *Deciding to apologize to a colleague*
 - **A Risk**
 - *The fear of losing one's status*
 - *Being dismissed, disrespected, or considered faulty*
 - *Being considered unprofessional*
 - *Losing power or influence*
 - *Feeling worse about oneself after confessing*
 - **A Goal** (Noble goal or value)
 - *Honesty*
 - *Integrity*
 - *Personal responsibility*
 - *Reconciliation*
- After sharing the example above, you can also note that [researcher](#) Brené Brown claims that vulnerability includes uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.
- Next, ask the group:
 - *How is vulnerability a courageous act? Why?*
- Invite them to watch this 3-minute [video](#) on vulnerability and courage.
- After watching the video, mention that Brené Brown said that vulnerability is *"the first thing I look for in you, but it is the last thing I want to show you in me,"* then ask them to discuss in pairs:
 - *What are the benefits and risks of sharing fears, vulnerabilities, and failures?*
- Then, invite staff members to think of a situation that required courage and vulnerability, whether it was something they experienced themselves, or a situation they encountered with a colleague or someone else.
- Ask them the following to write down responses to the following:
 - 1) *What was the **intention** underlying your courageous act?*
 - 2) *What was the **risk** that that was involved?*
 - 3) *Was there a "**noble goal**" or **value** behind your decision?*
- Invite two or three staff members to share their stories of courage and the related intention, risk, and goal involved.

Optional Extension:

- Now, invite staff members to think of a *current* situation that requires them to act courageously embracing a vulnerability (e.g., a fear, an insecurity, a worry).
 - *Why be courageous now? What is your underlying intention, risk/s, and goal or value that drives you forward.*
 - *Are there any obstacles that might prevent you from being vulnerable in this situation? If so, what can you do to overcome these obstacles?*
- Ask them to write down their thoughts about how to approach these obstacles.
- If staff members feel comfortable, invite one or two participants to share their situations and their intended actions.

CLOSURE

- To close, ask staff to either 1) share one word describing how they feel after this activity, or 2) draw a symbol to represent their current feeling or state of mind.
- Invite everyone to hold up one written word or one symbol—or ask for a few volunteers to share their word or symbol.
- Thank everyone for their participation and contribution.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What worked well when sharing this practice?
- Were the participants engaged? Which parts of the practice would you keep?
- What did not work well? Were participants uncomfortable with any segments of this practice? What would you change the next time?
- Did you notice any change among staff at school after the practice? If so, what changes did you notice?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Courage stories](#) can have a positive effect on a community, creating “positive spirals” within organizations, so regularly sharing them can be of value at the workplace. Promoting courage can also help in navigating social and emotional challenges. In fact, greater courage has been linked to using more [effective, self-directed coping strategies](#). Thus, practicing courage can help us deal with the daily challenges we encounter at work with more resilience.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

[Researchers and philosophers](#) regard courage as an essential virtue or character strength guiding us to act upon other virtues or values: it can help us be the people we want to be. Moreover, greater courage is related to an enhanced [sense of purpose](#), and a willingness to [speak up](#) at work. Speaking up and sharing our experience can catalyze us to lead more purposeful lives and careers with, while standing up for our beliefs.

Courage can also help us embrace our authentic selves, while creating trust among staff. [Researchers](#) highlight three characteristics that can lead to trust-building between leaders and employees: authenticity, humility, as well as courage. When we actively model and practice courage in school contexts, we can foster a more positive school climate driven by authenticity and purpose—while promoting [positive, trusting relationships](#) among staff members.

SOURCE

Practice inspired by scholarship in organizational leadership that emphasizes the positive impact of sharing courage stories in the workplace:

Worline, M. C., & Quinn, R. (2003). Courageous principled action. In K. Cameron, J. Dutton, & R. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.