BLOG

Vulnerability In The Workplace

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Vulnerability is such an uncomfortable word; who wants to make themselves vulnerable, especially in the work place?

I've recently been listening to a book by Dr. Brene Brown, who rose to fame after her TED talk 'the Power of Vulnerability' went viral. Prior to this, Brown was a pretty niche academic researching topics such as vulnerability and shame, not the most comfortable themes and definitely not areas that had FTSE 100 companies beating down her door.

This all changed after the 2010 TED talk and, by her own admission, she found herself in an unusual situation with large firms from across the globe asking her to come and talk, but not wanting her to discuss her research focus… they wanted Brown to contribute to far more mainstream discussions such as positivity, inspiration and wellness.

This doesn't come as a surprise; whilst corporates and private businesses across the world are integrating meditation, mindfulness and even the benefits of office dogs into their core, these are all comfortable topics. Meditation might be a bit hippy dippy, but there's neuroscience to back up the benefits, mindfulness might still raise some eyebrows, but there's an ability to white wash the concept and remove all spiritual elements, sanitized for even the most corporate environments. Vulnerability though, that's a far more difficult topic.

So why on earth should we want to be vulnerable in the workplace? Without some level of vulnerability, of putting ourselves out there, we can't be authentic and more and more this is becoming an essential requirement in the work place. Whereas NLP techniques and sales orientated 'closing' was a feature of most business relationships, now complete separation of work and personal personas isn't acceptable, being too salesy has become a common critique.

In an era where deals are not carried out over a pint in the pub, we can't fall back on caricatures of ourselves to build relationships and expect other people to engage. This is a trend which is only going to grow with 'clean living' Generation Z coming to the workplace. Social media attitudes are telling; whilst older Millennials look to project a positive persona on social platforms, Generation Z want to be immediate, authentic and creative, heralded by the rise of platforms such as Snapchat.

In addition to the cultural changes, it also very difficult to implement any other element of 'wellness' without an element of authenticity – how do you live in the moment (and therefore be mindful), if you have a work persona that's pretty divorced from the person you really are? It's almost impossible to be authentic without putting yourself out there and, therefore, to be authentic in the workplace you need to make yourself vulnerable.

Rather than adding to our lives, avoidance of vulnerability leads us on a path to complexes we know aren't healthy, such as perfectionism, lack of confidence and paralyzing action through caring too much about other's opinions and thoughts. These complexes are rife within the workplace and I'm sure that you've either felt them yourself or witnessed them in others – they drain energy that could be put to better use, furthering both personal and

business goals.

So how can we be more vulnerable within the workplace? It's a balancing act; authenticity is positive, massive oversharing with no filter in the work place is not. In essence, most people avoid being vulnerable because they don't want to be judged, but whatever you do, however good, bad, open or closed you are, you will be judged. It's a fact of life and a horrifying but freeing thought.

Imagine a world when you spent more time being true to yourself than to thinking about how other people might or do view you – the possibilities for growth are endless. So, the question is, how can you be more vulnerable in the workplace today? I recommend **Brene Brown's talk** as a starting point and to go from there.

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