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VULNERABILITY & LEADERSHIP

Ask Roxi NOVEMBER Question

Vulnerability: Brené Brown TEDx Talk

Winter is definitely upon us - a time when we celebrate all kinds of holidays, family, parties... and for those of us in the colder parts of the world...we may be feeling a bit more vulnerable: to snow, ice, and weather related mishaps, colds

I just accepted a new job and inherited an intact team. How I fit in to this group will send a big message to my boss and I want it to be a good one. Any advice to get us off to a good start?.

and flu, and just being cold. We have to figure out ways to deal with all this successfully and, even joyfully.

The **TEDx** talk I've included this month by 'researcher and story teller', Brené Brown, seemed just right and I hope you will find it as thought provoking as I did.

Let me model the "vulnerability thing" with you, my loyal readers! The last month has been a nightmare for my just born and launched... AskRoxi.com web site! Oh, yes, indeed. For three weeks now, we've gone from trying to speed it up, to getting blown up by a crazy programmer, to disappearing altogether, to returning without any course videos! I have the greatest empathy for people who feel vulnerable and out of control of their lives or their work.

The reality is what it is, so the only question now is, "what am I going to do about it?" Well, I have to LEAD myself and my business to a better place and I have to believe I can. I've reached out for help from smart people I trust and I'm telling the truth to my clients. I've had to remember AND accept that anyone launching any business anywhere, including on-line, is going to experience bumps and bruises along the way. Yes, we are all vulnerable to lots of things - so what? Good work and good people are worth our efforts!

Are you still wondering what VULNERABILITY has to do with LEADERSHIP? You know when you take on a new project, new staff, or try to do something you have never done before, you may feel a little, or maybe, a lot, vulnerable. Will it work? Will you look good to your peers and boss? And...on the other side of the coin, you need to be vulnerable with your staff if you want them to trust and feel safe with you. They need to believe you are human and that you can have EMPATHY for them.

Let's look at another example. This is about the leader who has joined a team with older and more experienced staff members reporting to them. Both parties in this relationship are likely to have "will I belong" questions niggling at them.

Look around. The chances of leading people senior in age and experience to you are quite high given the delayed retirements and demographics we see today. This is not a bad thing; in fact, if you are good leader, you will welcome the diversity in perspective, experience, and wisdom you can utilize from within your team. In my career I have rarely held a leadership role without managing people older than me, until I became the older one!

Remember, your more senior employees may also be feeling anxious and vulnerable with a change in leadership. The staff - of any seniority - have had either positive or negative experiences with the previous leader and will bring those experiences to the table. They may have felt safe and connected to the previous leader, or unsafe and vulnerable. They may wonder if a younger leader will assume they are out of touch, behind the times, and unwilling to change? Are their careers at risk? Will they belong? Will the younger leader

Answer:

You are smart to ask. A lot of leaders just jump right in, focus on their own vision and plow ahead ignoring the past and the present of the teams they've just joined. Slowing down early on to integrate into and then build your team as the new leader will have big payoffs in a number of ways. Here are some things to consider...

First - Diagnosis

It's important to get to know each person, what motivates them and what you can do to help them be productive and successful - one on one. Find out what's working and/or not working for them on the team. Find out whether they have spent time in the past building the team and what results came from that.

Second - Design

Get help if you need it, even an outside (from your team) facilitator, to create the activities that will build upon the results from your diagnosis.

Third - Do

Don't wait too long - get something going to start building a highly effective team.

Fourth - Debrief

Make sure to debrief the experiences and really listen to and respect what your people say. Get them involved in planning team meetings, creating or adjusting foundational ground rules, and creating future team experiences.

Spending the time here will give you and your team a strong foundation on which to build - everything else.

value their input, experience, and knowledge?

Everything we do happens through our relationships, and we choose to connect with others. How we behave impacts each of those relationships. When you create a trusting, respectful relationship with your staff, regardless of their age or experience, you will reap the rewards over and over again.

The early signals you send will calm or stir the waters. You already have the "authority" when you're the boss. If you have to pull the "I'm the boss" card out more than 10% of the time, you are probably blowing it. Even when you do have to remind people you're the boss (gracefully, of course!) only do it when there is no other way to get something truly essential to happen.

Just like anyone else, you have to earn respect and trust...it doesn't come with your title. If you are feeling vulnerable, insecure, uncertain, and less than adequate as you carry out your role, that's ok - it's normal. Take action and do whatever you need to do to learn enough to feel more confident. Take classes, read...and oh, by the way, your greatest teachers might just right under your nose. Welcome their wisdom and make sure they know how much you appreciate it and them.

CONNECTING WITH YOUR STAFF

Here are 4 things you can do that will signal you are listening and respecting your people. These apply to ALL staff:

1. **ASK** far more than you tell. You have two ears and one mouth for a reason. **LISTEN** to your people, ask them what they know, want, feel, and need.
2. Remove the word "but" from most of your conversations - say "and" instead. When people hear "but" they discount everything you say before it.
3. Say "We" 10 times more often than "I", including in your emails. If it's all about you, it isn't about anyone else, so pay attention to that little "I" word.
4. Do not say "No" first. At least listen and say what you need more of or that you'll think about it.

The fundamentals of building a highly effective team all come into play here, no matter the demographics or personalities. If you know how to create safety, trust, and group synergy, you will engage everyone on your team and get the most of their talent.

So ask yourself - do you know where you want to take your team? Do you know what they think? Have you made time to get to know each of your people, what motivates them, what they love or don't love about their jobs? Have you asked for their wisdom, sharing that you know only by tapping the wisdom from each member of the team will you all succeed? Have you honored their contributions?

Trust me on this...Building your team IS a Pay Now or Pay Later proposition. The TASK of building and maintaining a healthy team is REAL and hard work. It requires as much or more effort and attention as getting a project or task done.

And the bonus is - you'll get those tasks done...faster, better, and cheaper if you invest in your team first.

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The NUMBER ONE way to demonstrate your authenticity and vulnerability with your staff is to speak from your heart more than your head. Tell them what you FEEL at least as much as what you THINK. Pay attention to the balance of these perspectives when you talk with and lead your staff to new and better places.

Bottom line - everyone IS vulnerable, and people are motivated by and need different things, but ALL of us need to feel like we BELONG. When you build a trusting relationship and establish you truly care about that person, their wisdom, and their contributions, you will get a boatload of help, respect, and you may just learn a thing or two along the way!

QUOTES

LEADER COMMENTS and QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

Dear Roxi,
I thought you might like to see how your *ripples* are having an effect over here in Wisconsin...

We're shifting the conversation to the holistic value that we provide - hard skills from our heads, soft skills from our hearts. We've created a peer-learning community with certification - "Smart Certified Consultants". 20 skills in 6 competency areas (Communication, Leadership, Interpersonal, Emotional, Personal Effectiveness, and Technical). A consultant chooses a skill that appeals to them, they study an authoritative source, and they facilitate a learning activity for other consultants. So far the feedback from our consultants and customers has been overwhelmingly positive. This exercise teaches the subject-matter and builds community among our consultants where they can practice in a safe environment.

Eric Lovgren
Smart Solutions, Inc. Madison WI

**"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."
Eleanor Roosevelt**

I encourage you to share this newsletter with anyone you feel would enjoy it. Remember, past newsletters on a wide variety of leadership topics are located in my archive in the link above. Just click and read.

See you in December!

Vulnerably yours!

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