



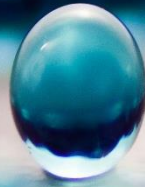
**500 WORDS ON  
LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT**

# **Pain is Taboo**

“Vulnerability is the absolute heartbeat of innovation and creativity.  
There can be zero innovation without vulnerability.”

*Brené Brown*

These 500 words on Leadership Development is for all leaders and managers who are interested in supporting their people through challenging times



Back pain is so debilitating. I'm currently suffering from a severe case of back pain and I can't even bend down to put my socks on. Luckily I'm not suffering alone as my family is rallying around, being empathetic and offering comfort. Things have got so bad; my nine year old offered to help me get dressed this morning and happily popped my socks on for me.

As she was bustling around, taking charge and making my life easier, I got to thinking about pain and how showing vulnerability connects people. By sharing my pain with them they have offered unequivocal sympathy, help and support. I would, of course, do the same for them; I guess that's what makes us a family.

But is this the same in business?

We constantly talk about connection, collaboration, communication and cooperation. But do we talk about PAIN? And here, I am not talking about back pain! Are we as open to sharing the bad stuff?

In the business world talking about physical, emotional or psychological pain has seemed more of an obstacle. But why should we share the good stuff if we are not able to share the bad? Hypocrisy is counter-productive! We cannot feasibly expect our teams to be motivated, fun, collaborative and cohesive if we refuse to share the darker side of life too: vulnerability, pain, grief, heartache or despair.

But is showing vulnerability in a work environment weak? By exposing ourselves and our teams are we opening ourselves up to fail? Or can vulnerability be seen as a strength? Something to be applauded rather than stigmatised?

“When we witness what happens to others, we activate our own actions as if we'd be acting in similar ways. We activate our own emotions and sensations as if we felt the same.”

Christian Keyzers of the Netherlands  
Institute for Neuroscience

Brené Brown seems to think so:

“Vulnerability is the absolute heartbeat of innovation and creativity. There can be zero innovation without vulnerability.”

In fact, the very best leaders are usually the ones who make themselves vulnerable. They understand that to be vulnerable is a sign of courage and strength. The very essence of their vulnerability becomes their power.

More often than not, innovators in business have felt most vulnerable when they were being their most courageous; when they were starting a new business venture; when they took their company public; or when they owned up to something negative at work.

None of these scenarios come from a place of weakness. Instead, whilst they are at a time of vulnerability, they are coming from a place of change or power.

“I feel your pain”

If you see someone in distress, your most common reaction is one of empathy. Over the last 20 years neuroscientists have developed this concept and have pinpointed some of the specific regions in the brain responsible for this sense of interconnectedness.

As Christian Keyesers of the Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience in Amsterdam explains:

“When we witness what happens to others, we activate our own actions as if we’d be acting in similar ways. We activate our own emotions and sensations as if we felt the same.”

The same can happen in business. By opening ourselves up in a work environment and expressing doubts, fears or emotions we become more connected as a team and more cohesive.

So, allow me to end this 500 words with some bold claims:

PAIN is good.

PAIN is real.

PAIN is not in the past and not in the future; it is very much in the present.

PAIN can bring positive change.

Without PAIN no learning.

And without showing PAIN there is no authenticity and no real leadership.

Yours,

**Dr Marcus Gottschalk**

CEO at CLP

