BRAVING THE WILDERNESS AT WORK CONVERSATION STARTERS AND QUESTIONS

Brené Brown, Ph.D., MSW

CHAPTER ONE: EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE

"I search for inspiration from the brave innovators and disrupters whose courage feels contagious… I summon up men and women who have shaped the world with their courage and creativity. And who have, at least on occasion, pissed people off. They are a varied bunch."

Whether you know them or not, who are the creative and courageous people who inspire you? What about their approaches and ideas resonates with you?

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Think of a time when you felt brave at work. What did you do? How did others respond? What did you learn from the experience?

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In terms of how you show up at work, what permission slip(s) do you want to give yourself that will help you set your desired intention and follow through? Are there permission slips that you and your colleagues can write to encourage and support each other to show up in new ways?

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"The special courage it takes to experience true belonging is not just about braving the wilderness... We're going to need to intentionally be with people who are different from us... We're going to have to learn how to listen, have hard conversations, look for joy, share pain, and be more curious than defensive, all while seeking moments of togetherness."

What opportunities do you have at work to be with and listen to people whose experiences and opinions are very different than yours?

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What does your team do, what do you do, to make it safe for people to share their opinions and/or disagree? What other steps would you like to take to make it safer?

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"True belonging is not passive. It's not the belonging that comes with just joining a group. It's not fitting in or selling out because it's safer. It's a practice that requires us to be vulnerable, get uncomfortable, and learn how to be present with people without sacrificing who we are. We want true belonging, but it takes tremendous courage to knowingly walk into hard moments."

Does your company or team reward authenticity or reward "fitting in"? If it feels more like a "fitting in" culture, is there something you want to do to help create a culture of true belonging?

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Do you see people in your company modeling belonging to and believing in themselves? What does it look like when people have the courage to speak up and take unpopular stands?

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BRAVING (the seven elements of trust) is a powerful wilderness checklist because it allows us to talk about trust in a specific, behavioral way, and it reminds us that trusting ourselves and other people is a vulnerable and courageous process.

Do you use BRAVING or some other shared language at work to talk about trust?

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How does self-trust show up for you as a prerequisite for courageous behavior at work?

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CHAPTER THREE: HIGH LONESOME: A SPIRITUAL CRISIS

"Right now, we are neither recognizing nor celebrating our inextricable connection. We are divided from others in almost every area of our lives. We're not showing up with one another in a way that acknowledges our connection."

Does your company or team celebrate connection with each other? Is everyone included and welcomed?

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"The sorting we do to ourselves and to one another is, at best, unintentional and reflexive. At worst, it is stereotyping that dehumanizes."

In your company, is sorting and closed-mindedness the norm? Or, is the culture built on being curious and open to the opinions of others?

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"In the case of the United States, our three greatest fault lines – cracks that have grown and deepened due to willful neglect and a collective lack of courage – are race, gender, and class."

Does your workplace take conscious actions to be inclusive of everyone?

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What would it look like to have respectful, safe conversations at work about race, gender, and class?

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CHAPTER FOUR: PEOPLE ARE HARD TO HATE CLOSE UP. MOVE IN.

"...we are all vulnerable to the slow and insidious practice of dehumanizing, therefore we are all responsible for recognizing it and stopping it."

In your company, what is taught and modeled about the importance of boundaries when it comes to how people talk about each other? Do people "walk the talk" consistently?

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Dr. Michelle Buck uses the term "conflict transformation," saying that it is about "creating deeper understanding" that requires "perspective-taking."

How could your team use "conflict transformation?" What could emerge if you did?

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In Brené's interview with Viola Davis, she describes her true belonging practice – a few simple rules she lives by. These rules include practices like allowing herself to be seen, not being afraid, and "putting it all out there."

What practices guide and support you in belonging to yourself? How do you apply them in your life and your work?

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CHAPTER FIVE: SPEAK TRUTH TO BULLSHIT. BE CIVIL.

"If leaders really want people to show up, speak out, take chances, and innovate, we have to create cultures where people feel safe – where their belonging is not threatened by speaking out and they are supported when they make the decision to brave the wilderness, stand alone, and speak truth to bullshit."

Do people where you work take the risk to speak out when they disagree? What supports people in finding the courage to do it? What gets in the way?

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Christine Porath's research and other studies "…show how implementing civility standards and enforcing them leads to higher-performing and better-functioning teams." She writes, "Incivility can fracture a team, destroying collaboration, splintering members' sense of psychological safety, and hampering team effectiveness."

When have you seen incivility disrupt team cohesion? When have you seen civility help a team be more effective?

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"Speaking truth to bullshit and practicing civility start with knowing ourselves and knowing the behaviors and issues that both push into our own BS or get in the way of being civil."

Brené uses BRAVING and the trust checklist to help us think about how to be civil in tough situations. What idea(s) do you want to incorporate into how you show up at work?

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CHAPTER SIX: HOLD HANDS. WITH STRANGERS.

"...the key to building a true belonging practice is maintaining our belief in inextricable human connection. That connection – the spirit that flows between us and every other human in the world – is not something that can be broken; however, our belief in the connection is constantly tested and repeatedly severed."

In what ways does your company or team share experiences of collective joy and pain? When you're together, how do you talk about why the experiences are important and what they mean?

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Some of the ways that "common enemy intimacy" shows up at work are gossiping, talking behind someone's back instead of going direct to her/him, and finger-pointing or blaming another person or another team.

Is "common enemy intimacy" accepted behavior where you work? Do you find yourself slipping into it?

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"Social media are great for developing community, but for true belonging, real connection and real empathy require meeting real people in a real space in a real time."

As the work world changes and more people work remotely, what practices help us stay connected in meaningful ways?

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CHAPTER SEVEN: STRONG BACK. SOFT FRONT. WILD HEART.

A strong back is courage and a soft front is vulnerability.

How does your workplace value those experiences and emotions? How are you normalizing discomfort as a part of being brave?

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Pete Carroll says, "…there's a special kind of resilience that comes from the level of scrutiny that happens in the wilderness. I know those experiences left me with a truer belief in myself and a much stronger sense of when I'm not being true to what I think is right."

When have you been tested? When have you had to stand alone in the wilderness? What helped you stay true to what you thought was right?

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"Perfecting, pleasing, proving, and pretending get in the way of the strong back." Brené encourages us to strengthen our courage muscles with BRAVING.

What practices from the BRAVING list in Chapter Seven do you see being used in your workplace? Which ones are you already using yourself? Which do you want to begin to use?

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"STOP WALKING THROUGH THE WORLD LOOKING FOR CONFIRMATION THAT YOU DON'T BELONG. YOU WILL ALWAYS FIND IT BECAUSE YOU'VE MADE THAT YOUR MISSION. STOP SCOURING PEOPLE'S FACES FOR EVIDENCE THAT YOU'RE NOT ENOUGH. YOU WILL ALWAYS FIND IT BECAUSE YOU'VE MADE THAT YOUR GOAL. TRUE BELONGING AND SELF-WORTH ARE NOT GOODS; WE DON'T NEGOTIATE THEIR VALUE WITH THE WORLD. THE TRUTH ABOUT WHO WE ARE LIVES IN OUR HEARTS. OUR CALL TO COURAGE IS TO PROTECT OUR WILD HEART AGAINST CONSTANT EVALUATION, ESPECIALLY OUR OWN. NO ONE BELONGS HERE MORE THAN YOU."

What does this quote mean to you? What do you want to take from it and incorporate into your thoughts, feeling, and actions?

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