



A *dare to lead*™ BOOK

Brené Brown

STRONG GROUND

**THE LESSONS OF DARING LEADERSHIP,
THE TENACITY OF PARADOX, AND THE
WISDOM OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT**

Copyright © 2025 by Brené Brown

ARMORED LEADERSHIP

Leading from Self-Protection

Vs.

DARING LEADERSHIP

Leading with Grounded Confidence

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1 | Being a knower and being right | Being a learner and getting it right |
| 2 | Tapping out of hard conversations | Leaning into vulnerability and skilling up for hard conversations |
| 3 | Using shame and blame to manage ourselves and others | Leading ourselves and others from a place of empathy, accountability, and learning |
| 4 | Fostering a scarcity-driven culture (“There is never enough ____”) | Committing to and modeling “We are enough, and we have enough.” |
| 5 | Professing values | Practicing values |
| 6 | Driving a “fitting in” culture | Cultivating a belonging culture |
| 7 | Leading for compliance and control | Leading for commitment and shared purpose |
| 8 | Leading reactively | Leading proactively and strategically |
| 9 | Resisting change | Accepting and embracing change, including productive urgency, strategic risk-taking, and agility |
| 10 | Getting stuck in and owned by failures, setbacks, and disappointments | Owning our failures, setbacks, and disappointments through open discussion, learning from them, and embedding the learning in our work and our teams |
| 11 | Perceiving leadership as being served by others | Understanding leadership as serving others |

Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

© 2025 Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved

RUMBLE STARTERS

- 1 The story I make up . . .
- 2 I'm curious about . . .
- 3 Tell me more.
- 4 That's not my experience (instead of "You're wrong about her, him, them, it, this . . .").
- 5 I'm wondering . . .
- 6 Help me understand . . .
- 7 Walk me through . . .
- 8 We're both dug in. Tell me about your passion around this.
- 9 Tell me why this doesn't fit/work for you.
- 10 I'm working from these assumptions—what about you?
- 11 What problem are we trying to solve?

Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

© 2025 Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved

RUMBLE TOOLS

- 1 What's my part?
- 2 What does support look like?
- 3 What key learnings can we take from this?
- 4 Are there stealth intentions that we need to surface and name?
- 5 Are there stealth expectations driving us?
- 6 Is horizon conflict at play here?
- 7 Do we need to check our gritty facts and gritty faith?
- 8 Time-out

Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

© 2025 Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved

BRAVING TRUST

The acronym BRAVING breaks down trust into seven elements:

**BOUNDARIES, RELIABILITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, VAULT,
INTEGRITY, NONJUDGMENT, AND GENEROSITY.**

BOUNDARIES

Setting boundaries is making clear what's okay and what's not okay, and why.

RELIABILITY

You do what you say you'll do. At work, this means staying aware of your competencies and limitations so you don't overpromise and are able to deliver on commitments and balance competing priorities.

ACCOUNTABILITY

You own your mistakes, apologize, and make amends.

VAULT

You don't share information or experiences that are not yours to share. I need to know that my confidences are kept, and that you're not sharing with me any information about other people that should be confidential.

INTEGRITY

Choosing courage over comfort; choosing what's right over what's fun, fast, or easy; and practicing your values, not just professing them.

NONJUDGMENT

I can ask for what I need, and you can ask for what you need. We can talk about how we feel without judgment.

GENEROSITY

Extending the most generous interpretation to the intentions, words, and actions of others.

The BRAVING Inventory can be used as a rumble tool—a conversation guide to use with colleagues that walks us through the conversation from a place of curiosity, learning, and ultimately trust-building.

Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

© 2025 Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved

ENGAGED FEEDBACK CHECKLIST

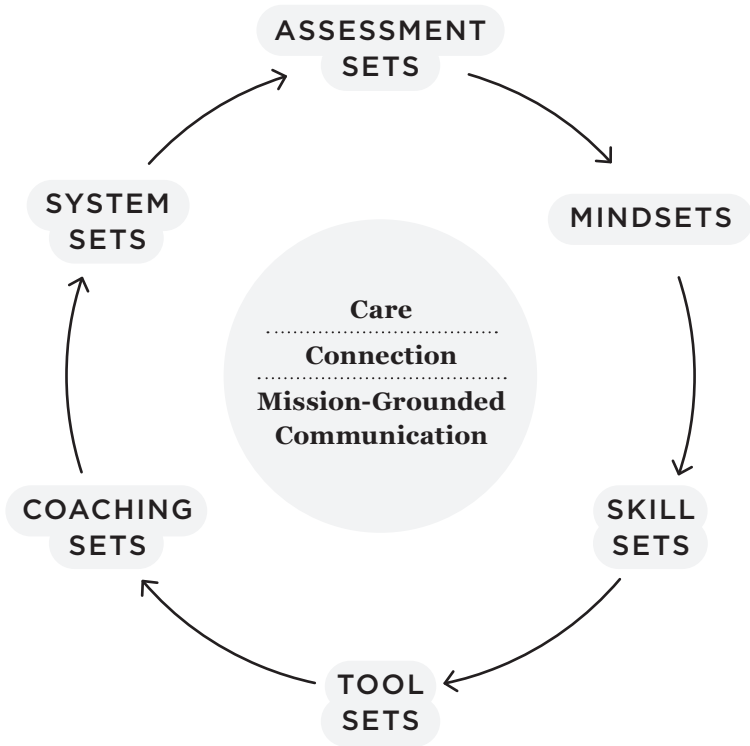
I KNOW THAT I'M READY TO GIVE FEEDBACK WHEN:

- 1 I'm ready to sit next to you rather than across from you.
- 2 I'm willing to put the problem in front of us rather than between us (or sliding it toward you).
- 3 I'm ready to listen, ask questions, and accept that I may not fully understand the issue.
- 4 I'm ready to acknowledge what you do well instead of just picking apart your mistakes.
- 5 I recognize your strengths and how you can use them to address your challenges.
- 6 I can hold you accountable without shaming or blaming.
- 7 I'm open to owning my part.
- 8 I can genuinely thank someone for their efforts rather than just criticizing them for their failings.
- 9 I can talk about how resolving these challenges will lead to growth and opportunity.
- 10 I can model the vulnerability and openness that I expect to see from you.
- 11 I am aware of power dynamics, implicit bias, and stereotypes, and I engage with others from a place of this awareness.

Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

© 2025 Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved

ANATOMY OF TRANSFORMATION

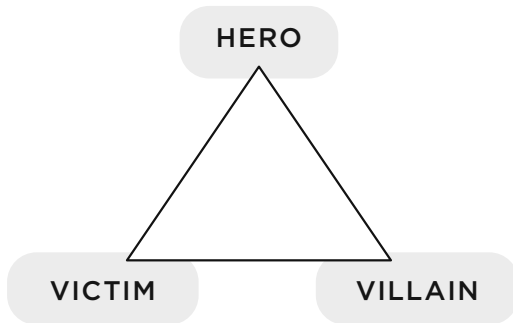
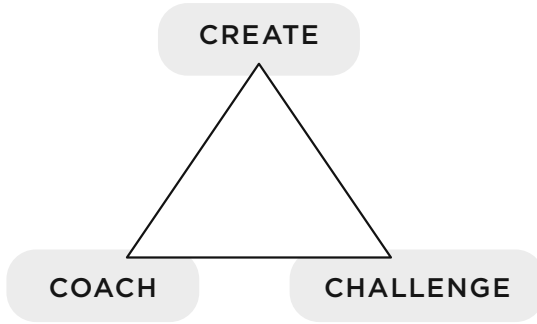


Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

© 2025 Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved

ABOVE / BELOW THE LINE

PRACTICE



ATtribution: It appears that the concept of “above the line/below the line” originated with Robert Kiyosaki, the author of *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*. In Carolyn Taylor’s book *Walking the Talk*, Taylor acknowledges Kiyosaki as the source of her introduction to the idea. She goes on to explore the “above the line/below the line” concept in depth, applying it to leadership and organizational culture. The Conscious Leadership Group (Jim Dethmer, Diana Chapman, and Kaley Warner Klemp) popularized the framework among coaches and leadership consultants in their book, *The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership*. They also advanced the concept by adding Stephen Karpman’s Drama Triangle and David Emerald’s Empowerment Dynamic.

Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

© 2025 Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved

Grounded Confidence

OUR CORE:

Self-Awareness • Metacognition • Emotional Awareness + Regulation •
Mindfulness • Systems Thinking

OUR STRENGTH:

Vulnerability • Courage • Trust • Compassion + Empathy • Connection •
Humility • Deep Curiosity • Mastery • Discipline • Power • Accountability
• Adaptability • Lock-In and Lock-Through Power

OUR AWARENESS:

Situational Awareness • Temporal Awareness • Visualization + Mental
Rehearsal • Multicultural Awareness

OUR THINKING:

Anticipatory Thinking • Strategic Thinking • Critical Thinking •
Paradoxical Thinking • Intuitive Thinking + Pattern Recognition
• Creative and Design Thinking • Symphonic Thinking

OUR COMMUNICATION:

LEGO+DUPLO • Emotionally Resonant Language • Chekhov's Gun •
Aesthetic Force • Communicate All of the Changes • Invisible Armies and
Bullshit Disclaimers • Metaphors, Analogies, and Stories

Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

© 2025 Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved

DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL LITERACY

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

PLACES WE GO...

WHEN THINGS ARE UNCERTAIN OR TOO MUCH

- Stress
- Overwhelm
- Anxiety
- Worry
- Avoidance
- Excitement
- Dread
- Fear
- Vulnerability

WHEN THINGS AREN'T WHAT THEY SEEM

- Amusement
- Bittersweetness
- Nostalgia
- Cognitive dissonance
- Paradox
- Irony
- Sarcasm

WHEN WE SEARCH FOR CONNECTION

- Belonging
- Fitting in
- Connection
- Disconnection
- Insecurity
- Invisibility
- Loneliness

TO SELF-ASSESS

- Pride
- Hubris
- Humility

WHEN WE COMPARE

- Comparison
- Admiration
- Reverence
- Envy
- Jealousy
- Resentment
- Schadenfreude
- Freudenfreude

WHEN WE'RE HURTING

- Anguish
- Hopelessness
- Despair
- Sadness
- Grief

WHEN THE HEART IS OPEN

- Love
- Lovelessness
- Heartbreak
- Trust
- Self-trust
- Betrayal
- Defensiveness
- Flooding
- Hurt

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO AS PLANNED

- Boredom
- Disappointment
- Expectations
- Regret
- Discouragement
- Resignation
- Frustration

WITH OTHERS

- Compassion
- Pity
- Empathy
- Sympathy
- Boundaries
- Comparative suffering

WHEN LIFE IS GOOD

- Joy
- Happiness
- Calm
- Contentment
- Gratitude
- Foreboding joy
- Relief
- Tranquility

WHEN IT'S BEYOND US

- Awe
- Wonder
- Confusion
- Curiosity
- Interest
- Surprise

WHEN WE FALL SHORT

- Shame
- Self-compassion
- Perfectionism
- Guilt
- Humiliation
- Embarrassment

WHEN WE FEEL WRONGED

- Anger
- Contempt
- Disgust
- Dehumanization
- Hate
- Self-righteousness

Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart* (2021)

Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

© 2025 Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved

EMPATHY MISSES

1 *I feel sorry for you.*

SYMPATHY VERSUS EMPATHY

The person who responds with sympathy (“I feel so sorry for you”) rather than empathy (“I get it, I feel with you, and I’ve been there”). The subtext of this response is distance: These things don’t happen to me or people like me. If you want to see a shame cyclone turn deadly, throw one of these at it: “Oh, you poor thing” or “Bless your heart.”

2 *You “should” feel shame!*

JUDGMENT

The person who hears the story and actually feels shame for you. The friend gasps and confirms how horrified you should be. Then there is an awkward silence. Then you have to make this person feel better by convincing them that you’re not a terrible person.

3 *You’ve let me down.*

DISAPPOINTMENT

The person who needs you to be the pillar of worthiness and authenticity. This person can’t help you because they are too disappointed in your imperfections. You’ve let this person down.

4 *This feels terrible. Who can we blame? You?*

DISCHARGING DISCOMFORT WITH BLAME

Because shame is visceral and contagious, we can feel it for other people. This person immediately needs to discharge the discomfort and vulnerability of the situation by blaming and scolding. They may blame/scold you: “What were you thinking?” Or they may look for someone else to take the fall: “Who is that person? We’ll kick their butt.” Caution: Parents can fall easily into this when a child shares a shaming story with them. “How did you let this happen?”

5 *Let’s make this go away.*

MINIMIZE/AVOID

We minimize and avoid when we want hard feelings to go away. Out of their own discomfort, this person refuses to acknowledge that you’re in pain and/or that you’re hurting: “You’re exaggerating. It wasn’t that bad. You rock. You’re perfect. Everyone loves you.”

6

If you think that's bad!

COMPARING/COMPETING

This person confuses connecting with you over shared experiences with the opportunity to one-up you. “That’s nothing. Listen to what happened to me one time!”

7

Don't upset people or make them uncomfortable.

COMPLIANCE VERSUS HARD CONVERSATIONS

This person thinks you should stay quiet and small rather than holding people accountable for language, comments, or behavior that marginalizes or dehumanizes others—especially if it creates discomfort or conflict: “I can’t believe you said that to your boss!” or “I can’t believe you went there!” or “You can’t talk about that stuff with people” versus an empathic response of “That must have been hard—you were really brave” or “It’s hard to stand up for what you believe in—thank you.”

8

I can fix this, and I can fix you.

ADVICE GIVING/PROBLEM SOLVING

Sometimes when we see pain our first instinct is to fix it. This is especially true for those of us whom people seek out to help with problem-solving. In these instances, rather than listen and be with people in their emotion, we start fixing.

We have all experienced these empathic misses, AND we’re all capable of being “these friends”—especially if someone tells us a story that gets right up in our own shame grille. We’re human, imperfect, and vulnerable. It’s hard to practice empathy when we’re struggling with our authenticity or when our own worthiness is out of balance. That’s why we have to commit to practicing empathy, screwing it up, and circling back.

Brené Brown, *Strong Ground* (2025)

© 2025 Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved