



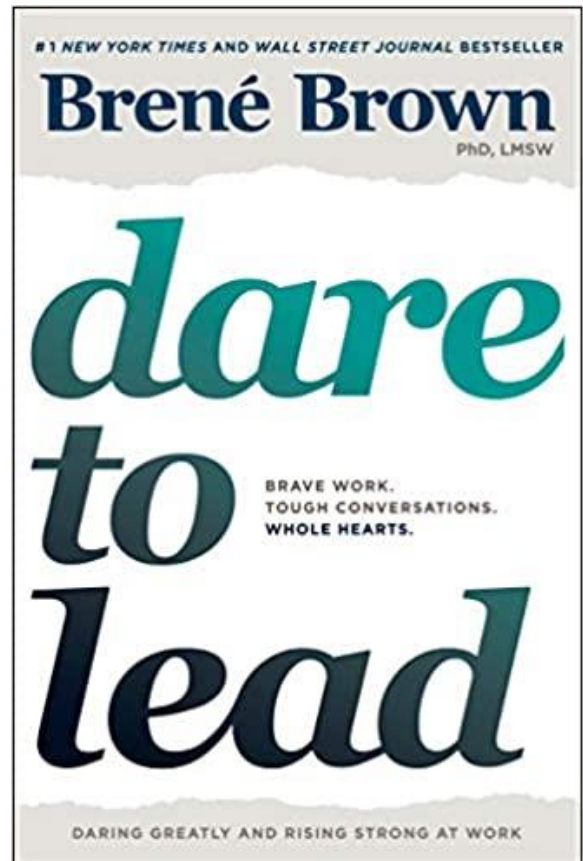
**Brown, B. B. (2018). *Dare to lead: Brave work. Tough conversations. Whole hearts.* Random House.**

**Pp. 298**

**ISBN: 9780399592522**

**Reviewed by Shannon Hamm  
Lewis University  
United States**

Whether this is your first year as a school administrator or whether you've been an administrator for several years, at some point during your career you may have researched critical pedagogy around leadership. As an avid reader on all education topics, I am constantly on the lookout for new and innovative ideas that will help me grow as a school principal. Right now, I have six books on my nightstand still waiting to be read; but alas, the time demands of my job have made this difficult. This year, I felt like I won the "extra time" lottery, because *Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown was not only on my nightstand, it was chosen as the book study for our administrative team. Brown, also recognizing leaders are always strapped for time, "wanted to write a book that would change how the reader thinks about leading, would result in at least one meaningful behavior change, and could be read cover to cover in one flight" (p. 4). This book is for classroom teachers, school administrators, superintendents, small business owners, and corporate leaders to enable them to lead bravely from the heart and embed the value of courageous leadership within the climate and culture of their workplace.



Dr. Brené Brown, is a research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work where she holds the Huffington Foundation – Brené Brown Endowed Chair at The Graduate College of Social Work. You may have seen her on a Netflix special, a TedTalk, or on a television interview. She has spent more than two decades researching courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. Brown has studied the works of Paulo Freire and bell hooks, and their influence on her research and the way she shares information about power and speaking with and among others, comes through in *Dare to Lead*. Throughout the book, she describes herself as a researcher storyteller. She shares her autoethnographic stories which reflect her awakening and becoming as a woman, mother, wife, and researcher as she worked through her own discomfort with vulnerability. According to her website *brenebrown.com*, Brown lives by the motto, “courage over comfort.” *Dare to Lead*, which was designed to be a “practical playbook” for leaders, is the culmination of a seven-year study on courage and leadership which came about selfishly as her popularity grew and she found herself leading several businesses. Experiencing the challenges of leadership herself, the author quickly discovered studying leadership was much easier than actually leading. Through her own struggles, interviews with leaders, and analyzing more than 400,000 pieces of data, her research led her to defining a leader as “anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes, and who has the courage to develop that potential” (p. 4). In order to be this type of transformational leader, Brown believes leaders have to get to the “heart of daring leadership,” which includes rumbling with vulnerability, living into our values, braving trust, and learning to rise. These four daring leadership qualities are the four primary sections of *Dare to Lead*, with rumbling with vulnerability taking the bulk of the text.

Brown defines vulnerability as “the emotion that we experience during times of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure” (p. 19). Without vulnerability and uncertainty, leaders close themselves off from their staff and no longer lead from the heart, rather they lead from a place of control and power. The author enables any reader to understand the myths of vulnerability. Brown identifies six myths of vulnerability: 1. Vulnerability is a weakness, 2. I don’t do vulnerability, 3. I can go it alone, 4. You can engineer the uncertainty and discomfort out of vulnerability, 5. Trust comes before vulnerability, and 6. Vulnerability is disclosure. Rather than asking leaders to open up and tell their employees everything about themselves, she is encouraging them to lead from the heart by having honest and tough conversations, modeling critical thinking, seeking feedback, and showing emotions. In order to grow, teachers need leaders who acknowledge the challenges they are facing and feel like they are supported through the process.

Part of rumbling with vulnerability, according to Brown, is the ability to give yourself permission to say you do not have all the answers. Too often, everyone expects leaders to have the answers. Also too often, leaders feel that if they do not have the answers, they will be seen as a fraud and feel a deep sense of shame. In *Dare to Lead*, Brown encourages leaders to own up to mistakes, admit what they do not know, and reach out to their team in open and honest dialogue. One of the most important lessons she feels she can teach a leader is, “Leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings, or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behavior” (p. 67). In other words, if leaders are seeing the same problems over and over, then it is time to show courage and dig deeper into the emotions behind the actions of their employees. This is the time to ask questions, stop talking, and just deeply listen to the

person giving him or her time to think and speak. By doing so, leaders are modeling daring leadership practices.

In *Dare to Lead*, Brown uses 16 examples to clarify the difference between armored leadership and daring leadership. A few notable differences between armored and daring leadership revolve around leading with an open and honest heart, decision making made as a team, modeling a willingness to learn from others, and always being a curious leader. Brown explains that daring leaders believe in and practice “strong back, soft front, and wild hearts,” (p. 90) meaning they are grounded in confidence but are vulnerable, curious, and kind.

If a leader is still practicing from an armored perspective, he or she most likely operates from a “victim or viking” perspective (p. 89) in which someone always has to be a winner. Another distinction the author makes between daring and armored leadership deals with the idea of power and control. Daring leaders use “power with, power to, and power within” (p. 96). Armored leaders often use “power over” to create change. Brown clarifies that power itself is not dangerous. “What makes power dangerous is how it’s used” (p. 96). Although Brown doesn't explicitly write about transformative leadership in this section, her ideas on daring leaders who cultivate a shared purpose are in alignment with a transformative leadership model. Brown explains that armored leaders focus on compliance from their staff. Leaders who operate from compliance and control are seen as micromanagers and inevitably lose the trust of their employees.

Brown then dives into values for leaders. “Living into our values means that we do more than profess our values, we practice them” (p. 186). This takes time, vulnerability, and an abundance of work. One reason this is so difficult for many leaders, according to the author, is because many leaders haven't taken

the time to name the values that are most important to them. Leaders need to know that they should not have different values for work and for their personal lives. Brown believes, “We only have one set of values” (p. 187). Brown encourages leaders to examine their values and then show up in the “arena” with them. The arena as the place where everyone is on stage and in the difficult work together. “When we think about the arena, we have to think about factors like race, age, gender, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, and cognitive ability” (p. 194). We have to check our privilege and know that everyone who is listening to us comes with their own story, and that our perspective isn't the only important one. If we share a value of our organization, and then don't speak up when we see a value being offended, we are not truly living up to the values we supposedly hold dear to our school culture. This takes bravery. Leaders will know they are living into their values, when they are uncomfortable. For Brown living into your values involves being able to receive feedback and learn from others just as much as you are able to give honest feedback to those you observe. She provides practical tips for learning how to receive feedback openly and reflectively.

Brown explains that in order to be successful, leaders need to brave trust. The author provides readers a BRAVING inventory that can be used between leaders and their employees as a conversation guide and as a way to build honest and open trusting conversations or “rumbles.” Areas within this inventory include boundaries, reliability, accountability, vault, integrity, nonjudgement, and generosity. Brown provides several scenarios and examples that help leaders understand how to hold these types of open and often uncomfortable conversation with their staff. In addition to providing ways to do this with those whom you lead, Brown also provides tools for self-reflection of a leader's own life.

Brown acknowledges that courageous leadership often begins when problems happen and repairs need to be made, but she argues that although this work can help in these situations, leaders who are proactive in daring leadership will most likely have better results. If leaders aren't taught how to fail and then learn from those mistakes to make improvements, they may never attempt something that is risky. Brown says, "If we don't have the skills to get back up, we may not risk falling. And, if we are brave enough often enough, we are definitely going to fall" (p. 244). In "Learning to Rise", the last part of *Dare to Lead*, Brown provides tools, language, and skills so leaders can immediately start putting her suggestions into practice. Leaders can begin this practice by realizing when they are in the reckoning phase, or "knowing that we're emotionally hooked and then getting curious about it" (p. 250). This is the phase where we walk into a tough story. According to the author, once we have gone through the reckoning phase, we move into the rumble phase. "The rumble is where we go to that mat with it and own it" (p. 258). During this phase we often tell ourselves stories that are not true, instead of assuming positive intent from others. During this phase we need to be asking more questions about the situation instead of making up stories that may or may not be true. Finally, leaders go through the revolution phase. According to Brown, although the word is dramatic, "choosing authenticity and worthiness is an absolute act of resistance" (p. 271). It is up to daring leaders to model, lead vulnerability, and live courageously by their values. By doing so, we may just be starting a revolution of change.

*Dare to Lead* is accessible, and leaders everywhere will undoubtedly be writing in the margins of the text. Yet one might question how systems can change if district leadership does not believe in this type of leadership. Although school leaders have the ability to create systems of change, they can be quickly halted if the culture of the district does not

align with what they are trying to accomplish. School leaders often walk into situations in which they have to be guarded because of highly toxic cultures. In climates such as these, it can be very difficult for a school administrator to be vulnerable because their honesty can be seen as a weakness by already critical employees. One can hope that Brown's *Dare to Lead* will guide leaders to act courageously and provide them with a voice to speak up. I have found a lack of this type of leadership training at the graduate level, and in mentorships and internships. Because of this, I believe *Dare to Lead* would be an excellent addition to a course on transformational leadership. In order for true change to occur, people in power need to be "on board" and willing to have tough conversations, be vulnerable, and show empathy by letting go of their armor and leading differently.

The pedagogy on leadership that Dr. Brown provides in *Dare to Lead* is consistent and practical. Her ethnographic storytelling and suggestions help leaders to see it is never too late to improve the culture and climate of their workplace. Leaders can use her pedagogy on a small scale or on a much larger scale. Her work encourages leaders to reflect on their own actions and the messages they are giving their staff, as well as to reflect on their own feelings about vulnerability, shame, and being true to themselves; and it provides resources to model this with their staff. As a school leader, I found *Dare to Lead* to be an insightful text with scenarios that helped me to understand how I can lead from the heart in a vulnerable way. In my administrative team, *Dare to Lead* has opened up group conversations about our own vulnerability and need for self-care, and how we can have open and honest communications with one another. We have found the free companion resources and videos on her website [brenebrown.com](http://brenebrown.com) to be helpful in our work with her book. Leaders hoping to work with their staff to create a culture of vulnerability can easily access these materials and use them as a read-along guide

for a book study. I feel grateful to be working with a district that is exploring alternative options of leadership that involve collective decision making and leading with courage. Brown's pedagogy on daring leadership

motivates both leaders and teachers to stop shaming themselves and work collaboratively through vulnerability and the courage to improve student learning and increase motivation in the workplace.

---

## About the Reviewer


**Shannon Hamm** (CAS in Administration and MEd in Educational Leadership) is a current EdD student in the Educational Leadership for Teaching and Learning program at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois. She has been in education for 20 years as a classroom teacher, instructional coach, and assistant principal. She is currently a principal in Yorkville, Illinois. Her research interests include transformational leadership, governmentality of schools, teacher burnout and attrition, and the socialization and “becoming” of women teachers.



**Education Review**

**Reseñas Educativas**

**Resenhas Educativas**

 *Education Review/Reseñas Educativas/Resenhas Educativas* is supported by the Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and ***Education Review***, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or ***Education Review***. ***Education Review*** is published by the Scholarly Communications Group of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

**Disclaimer:** The views or opinions presented in book reviews are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of *Education Review*.

Connect with *Education Review* on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Review/178358222192644>) and on Twitter @EducReview