

Module 5-Letting the Light In – Lead with Vulnerability

Section 1: Guided Reflection – TED Talk

Watch: Brené Brown – The Power of Vulnerability

Use the space below to capture your thoughts and reactions:

What stood out most to you in Brené’s talk?

How did the talk make you feel? Did anything surprise or challenge you?

How do you define vulnerability in your life or leadership?

What new perspective are you taking away about connection or courage?

Section 2: Busting the Myths

Instructions: Read the common myths below and reflect on your own beliefs.

Myths:

- Vulnerability is weakness
- Vulnerability means oversharing
- Vulnerability erodes authority

Reflection Prompts:

Which of these myths have you believed or witnessed?

How has that belief shaped your leadership or behaviour?

What new belief are you willing to explore instead?

Section 3: Case Studies in Vulnerability

Review the following three leadership stories. Read the background, reflect on the leader's vulnerability, and capture what stands out to you.

Use this to draw parallels to your own leadership journey.

Case Study 1: Howard Schultz – Transparency in Crisis

Background:

Howard Schultz grew up in a working-class family in Brooklyn, New York. He deeply valued dignity and opportunity for working people, which influenced his leadership philosophy at Starbucks. In 2008, Schultz returned as CEO during the global financial crisis. Starbucks was struggling store performance was down, morale was slipping, and the company faced major cost-cutting decisions.

What made his leadership vulnerable:

Rather than making decisions behind closed doors or projecting unwavering certainty, Schultz chose to be *honest and human*. He wrote open letters to employees, shared the depth of the financial challenges, and admitted the company might need to close stores or make painful changes. He also launched leadership meetings focused not just on performance but on *shared values and connection*. This move was risky it could have been seen as weak or unsettling but it had the opposite effect.

Why it mattered:

Schultz's transparency cultivated trust and a sense of shared purpose. Employees felt included and respected, not controlled. His openness created psychological safety during a time of uncertainty, reinforcing that people not just profits mattered.

Reflection Questions:

How did Schultz's honesty affect employee morale?

What might have happened if he chose to stay silent or lead from control?

How could you show similar courage in your current leadership context?

Case Study 2: Satya Nadella – Growth Mindset and Empathy

Background:

When Satya Nadella became CEO of Microsoft in 2014, the company was seen as competitive but stagnant. Internally, teams operated in silos, competing with one another instead of collaborating. Nadella, who grew up in India and credits much of his emotional intelligence to raising a son with disabilities, brought a dramatically different leadership tone to Microsoft.

What made his leadership vulnerable:

In his very first public interviews and internal memos, Nadella stated that he *didn't have all the answers*. He invited people to be curious, take risks, and learn from failure behaviours not typically encouraged in a high-performance tech culture. He openly shared his journey as a father and as a learner, modelling a culture of *humility, empathy, and inclusion*.

Why it mattered:

This vulnerability changed Microsoft's trajectory. Employees were empowered to be creative, collaborate across departments, and build trust. Innovation increased. Nadella's leadership showed that strength doesn't come from dominance it comes from humility, listening, and continual learning.

Reflection Questions:

How did Nadella's transparency create trust and innovation?

What do you appreciate about his use of humility as a strength?

Where could you lead more boldly by embracing 'not knowing'?

Case Study 3: Michelle Obama – Owning the Personal in Public

Background:

As the First Lady of the United States from 2009 to 2017, Michelle Obama was under immense public scrutiny. But instead of retreating behind a polished public persona, she chose to share her humanity. In her bestselling memoir *Becoming*, she opens up about imposter syndrome, her struggles with fertility, the balancing act of motherhood and career, and the emotional toll of being in the public eye.

What made her leadership vulnerable:

Michelle Obama didn't just advocate for causes she lived them. She shared her own doubts and mistakes, allowing others to see themselves in her story. She spoke about showing up as her full self in rooms where she often felt like an outsider. Rather than hide those feelings, she led with them.

Why it mattered:

Her vulnerability fostered deep emotional resonance. She became one of the most admired women in the world not *despite* her openness, but *because* of it. Her story made advocacy more relatable, and her leadership more magnetic. People listened not just because she had a platform but because they felt seen.

Reflection Questions:

How did her openness foster deeper public trust?

What lessons can leaders draw about authenticity and influence?

How might your personal story create impact or connection?

 **Summary Prompt:**

What did you learn across all three stories about the power and risk of vulnerability in leadership?

Where do these stories challenge your current leadership beliefs or behaviours?

What personal shift might you be willing to make?

Section 4: Vulnerability Self-Assessment

Instructions:

Rate how true each statement feels for you in your leadership context using the scale below:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

Self-Assessment Statements

1. I can admit when I don't have all the answers in front of others.
2. I share relevant personal experiences to build connection with my team.
3. I feel comfortable showing emotion (e.g. disappointment, pride) in professional settings.
4. I regularly invite honest feedback about my leadership style.
5. I acknowledge when I've made a mistake, even if it feels uncomfortable.
6. I speak up about challenges I'm facing, rather than pretending everything is fine.
7. I allow myself to be seen as human, not just capable.
8. I give space for others to express their vulnerability without judgement.
9. I feel safe asking for help when I'm overwhelmed or stuck.
10. I share my decision-making rationale, including doubts or values behind the choice.
11. I check in with my emotional state before reacting under pressure.
12. I can hold space for difficult conversations without needing to control the outcome.
13. I recognise that vulnerability is a strength, not a liability.
14. I share my values openly and use them to guide my leadership decisions.
15. I stay present and calm when others show emotion at work.
16. I acknowledge when I'm wrong even in front of more senior colleagues.
17. I intentionally practise openness to model psychological safety.
18. I am willing to show my learning process, even when it feels messy.
19. I reflect on my personal stories and how they shape the way I lead.
20. I take regular time to journal, talk, or think about how I show up as a leader.

 **Total Score:** _____

Scoring Interpretation:

20–40: Early stage – You may be new to practising vulnerability. There is opportunity to explore where openness could build trust and connection.

41–70: Growing awareness – You're building comfort with vulnerability but may still hold back in key areas. Keep noticing your edges and experimenting.

71–100: Courageous leadership – You're actively integrating vulnerability into your leadership. Keep going, deepening your presence and authenticity.

Post-Assessment Reflection:

What are your 2 strongest indicators?

Where do you resist vulnerability?

What practical change are you committed to this week?

Who can support or witness your growth?

Section 5: Turning Insight into Action

Instructions: Translate reflection into commitment. Complete each question below.

One behaviour I want to shift is:

One conversation I'll approach with more vulnerability is:

What I want others to feel as a result:

My next small step will be:

When will I take this action:

Who will I share my intention with:

Section 6: Final Reflection

Take a moment to pause and integrate your learning from this module. Use the prompts below to guide your reflection and capture these insights into your journal. There are no right or wrong answers just an opportunity to notice, acknowledge, and make meaning of your experience.

Personal Insights

- What surprised you during this module?
- How has your view of vulnerability shifted?
- What are you proud of in your exploration so far?
- How has your definition of strong leadership evolved?

Reflections from the TED Talk

- What's one moment from Brené Brown's talk that challenged your thinking?
- What emotion did you feel while watching, and what does that tell you?

Unpacking the Myths

- If you could replace one myth you've believed about vulnerability with a more empowering belief, what would it be?
- How might this new belief shape your behaviour going forward?

Case Study Insights

- Which leader (Schultz, Nadella, or Obama) did you most relate to, and why?
- Across all three stories, what did you learn about balancing strength with openness?
- In your own context, what is one courageous behaviour you'd like to practise more?

From Awareness to Action

- What's one small, low-risk action you could take this week to practise vulnerability?
- If you're working with a buddy, how will you support one another in following through?
- What pattern did you notice in your self-assessment? Where do you feel called to grow?