

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 100: Brené Brown

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Tim Ferriss: Hello, my friends. You muscular, little Oompah Loompahs. Welcome to another episode of The Tim Ferriss Show. My name is Tim Ferris. My job is to deconstruct world-class performers, people who are the best at what they do and to tease out the habits, routines, findings that you can apply to your own life, whether they are people like Arnold Schwarzenegger, chess prodigies like Josh Waitzkin, directors like Jon Favreau or Robert Rodriguez, and hedge fund managers, military strategies, and everyone in between. Today we have a researcher, Dr. Brené Brown. And you can say hi to her on Twitter @brenebrown.

She's a research professor at the University of Houston, Graduate School of Social Work. Her 2010 TEDx talk – the Power of Vulnerability – has more than 20 million views. It is one of the top five most-viewed TED talks in the world, which is very hard to pull off. She has other talks with millions and millions of views. So once you're lucky; twice you're good. She is very good.

She has spent the past 13 years studying vulnerability, courage, worthiness, and shame – all of my favorites. Brené is the author of two No. 1 New York Times Bestsellers, “Daring Greatly” and “The Gifts of Imperfection.” Her brand new book is titled, “Rising Strong.” In it, she writes, “If we are brave enough often enough, we will fall.” This is a book about what it takes to get back up. And she interviews some very interesting folks: top performers in the corporate world, start-up world, military world, and she gathers data to support the recommendations and conclusions in these books.

I have a copy of Rising Strong and encourage you to check it out. She is also the founder and CEO for The Daring Way, which is an organization that brings her work to organizations, schools, communities, and families. And without further ado, I want to let you enjoy this wide-ranging conversation that touches on some sensitive topics, you might say, with Dr. Brené Brown.

Tim Ferriss: Brené, welcome to the show.

Brené Brown: Thank you. I'm excited to talk to you.

Tim Ferriss: And my fans are excited to hear all of your wisdom and dig into your research. I suppose we could start with some context for those people who are not familiar with your work. When you are asked the question, what do you do? How do you answer that?

Brené Brown: I actually have two answers. One if I want to keep talk and one if I don't. So if I don't want to keep talking, I usually will just say, "I'm a shame researcher," and that scares people. And then they usually go on. Then they usually say, "So, what do you think about the Texans this season?" or something. And then if I'm in a normal conversation, I'll say that I study vulnerability and courage, shame and worthiness. That's kind of terrible, isn't it? That I do that?

Tim Ferriss: I don't think it's terrible. I think that you can do kind of a reverse George Costanza when you don't want to talk to someone if you're trapped on a plane or something.

So instead of picking the most interesting thing to get them to admire you and say you're an architect, you can be like, "Oh, yes, no. I'm a ..." you can bring out something extremely awkward, right? Like, "I research off-color sex trafficking" or something. And then depending on who you're sitting next to, I suppose it could be a good character check, right?

Brené Brown: It's a total character check. Because if they launch in after they heard I study shame, then that kind of bites me on the ass a little bit, but it works pretty well.

Tim Ferriss: You're like, you're not following the script, pal. You're off script.

Brené Brown: Yeah, right?

Tim Ferriss: So speaking of script, I am not the only one who's been impressed with your presenting ability. But it seems like one of the ways that you really hit the mainstream map was through TED. And specifically, I guess it would've been The Power of Vulnerability, although that has more than 21 million views now and some of your other presentations have more than 5 million views.

So certainly, once you're lucky; twice you're good. You are good at this. Could you give people an overview of the components that make a hit speech or TED talk? Because you're clearly good at it. It's not a one-hit wonder. How did The Power of Vulnerability come to be? How did you decide on that, on the content, and

rehearse it and so on? The genesis story I think would be very interesting.

Brené Brown: Yeah, I'd love to share it because it's been a huge learning for me. So the TEDx talk was kind of a combination of an accident and an experiment. The curators of TEDx Houston asked me to open their first event. They called and they were really excited. I said, "Sure, I'd love to." I was really excited. Javier Fadul is the curator and I said, "What do you want me to talk about?"

When you study things like shame and vulnerability, people can get very prescriptive about what they want you to say and what they don't want you to say. It really has no bearing, actually, on what I do say. But they like to think in the beginning that they're going to control some of that. So I said, "Do you have any thoughts?" His answer was, "Be awesome. Have fun." And the day before – you would think it's liberating, but it's also kind of terrifying.

Tim Ferriss: Right. The blessing the curse of no constraints.

Brené Brown: Exactly. And so I was on a flight home the night before, a long flight with my husband and kids. I looked at Steve and I was like, "I think I'm going to experiment tomorrow." And my husband looked at me and he said, "That sounds like a terrible idea." And I said, "No, I think I'm going to actually be really vulnerable while I'm talking about vulnerability."

And he said, again, "Not sure that's a great idea." So I went to the TED event and I experimented. I really kind of put myself out there. I talked about my own breakdown, spiritual awakening. I talked about having to go to therapy and how much I really hated that and I kind of thought it was bullshit but I [inaudible] had to do it. I really put myself out there. And I remember driving home and thinking, "I will never do that again." I mean, I literally had what I thought was one of the worst vulnerability hangovers of my career.

I was so grateful – I have to tell you, Tim – I was so grateful that there were only 500 people there and that it was recorded at University of Houston where I've taught for 20 years, so most people kind of were like, oh, yeah, that's Brené. I don't have any memory of that being recorded. I'm pretty sure – maybe the universe just aligned and thought, you know, let's not let her know that this is being recorded.

So when it came out on the TEDx site, I was pretty mortified. Steve's like, "No one's going to watch it; don't worry." And then several months later, Chris Anderson called and said, "Hey, we don't usually put the TEDx talks up, but we love your talk and we want to put it up." I think the conversation went like this, which was an interesting form of leadership. I think I said, "No, I'm flattered, but no thank you." And he said, "I think December 23rd will be great." And then that was that. So it went up on December 23rd and again, Steve was like, "Don't worry, Brené. People are not going to see it."

And it went like 1, 2, 1 million, 1 million 1, 3 million. And I was like, "Oh." And so if I look back, my learning, my take away from that experience was this: if I'm not a little bit nauseous when I'm done, I probably did not show up like I should have shown up.

Tim Ferriss: That's great. That echoes advice from – I believe it's Neil Gaiman – in the commencement speech, "Make Good Art," where he talked about when you feel like you're talking down the street naked and extremely uncomfortable, maybe you're starting to get it right.

Brené Brown: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: I'm paraphrasing, of course, but that's a really good point. And how did you – your delivery was so spot on, how did you rehearse? Or did you? I mean, maybe you're just, maybe that is a language that you're naturally fluent in – presentation, that is. But how did you prep for it?

Brené Brown: I don't rehearse at all. In fact, rehearsing is really – so when I rehearse in the traditional way we think about rehearsing, it's about what I'm going to say and when I'm going to say it and how I'm going to say it.

And so if I do that, what ends up happening – and I've tried it a couple times – I get so prefrontal cortex, I get so wrapped up in oh, wasn't I supposed to pause here? And wasn't I supposed to do this there? That I am not connecting. And so for me, it is use images as the arc, understand what every image means to me and what I want to wrap around that image, and then require that the house lights are on so I can see people's faces.

Tim Ferriss: That's a good rule. That's a really good rule.

Brené Brown: Yeah, so that thing where they're – and I rarely allow any of my presentations to be videotaped. Very, very rarely. Because one, if they're taping you, you have to be super hot under the lights and the audience has to be dark. And then it's performance, not connection for me.

Secondly, I don't feel like it's anyone business what happens between me and an audience at any given moment. I mean, I just really feel like that's a moment.

Tim Ferriss: And I think that comes – I mean, I'm speculating here – but from a lot of experience teaching, right?

Brené Brown: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Being in front of students as opposed to viewing yourself as being in front of an audience, which I think enables a very different relationship with the people you're trying to communicate with. To provide perhaps a little bit of connective tissue for people who are curious about your research, you mentioned vulnerability, you mentioned shame. How should we define these terms? Just for the purposes of this conversation. So people can understand – and how did you research them?

Brené Brown: I think the best place to start when we're talking about kind of what words mean, at least the way I use them in my work, is to really start with vulnerability. Because I think if you can get your head and heart wrapped around vulnerability, the others make a lot more sense. So, to me, I don't know how you were raised and how the listeners were raised, but I was raised to believe that vulnerability is weakness. That you wake up in the morning, you armor up, you go into the day, you kick some ass, you don't let people see your emotions, you mitigate uncertainty and risk as much as you can, and that's the way you live.

And so from the very earliest stages of my research 13 years ago, that is not how vulnerability emerged in the data. Vulnerability emerged as not weakness, but probably our best measure of courage. So when we ask people, "What is vulnerability?"

They would say things like, "It's the first date after my divorce." "It's trying to get pregnant after my second miscarriage." "It's sitting with my wife who has Stage 4 breast cancer and making plans for our three-year-old and five-year-old." "It's starting my own business." "It's taking my business public." "It's getting fired." "It's firing someone." "It's getting promoted." "It's missing

the promotion.” And so it became very clear to me early on that the simplest definition for vulnerability is really uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure.

Vulnerability is about the willingness to show up and be seen when you have zero control over the outcome. And I think if you ask people to close their eyes and think about the last time they saw someone doing something truly brave, it is very easy to see how vulnerability underpins all acts of courage.

Tim Ferriss: Sure.

Brené Brown: Yeah. I mean, I just think it’s about really putting yourself out there, which is increasingly difficult to do in this very hyper-critical, unforgiving media culture. So vulnerability is showing up and being seen. Courage, to me – I love the word “courage,” be the root of the word is “cour,” and the Latin for “cour” is heart. And when courage first came into the English language, the original definition was to tell the story of who you are with your whole heart. That was an act of courage. So to me, courage is really about choosing what’s right over what’s easy, practicing your values, not just professing them, and choosing to be brave over being comfortable.

Tim Ferriss: I love this type of contextual prelude. It’s not a prelude, but it’s defining. Because I think it’s so important for any important conversation, and certainly I think for most conversations, to make sure that the people in the conversation are talking about the same thing, right?

Brené Brown: It’s the key to everything, right?

Tim Ferriss: And that starts with defining. I’ve noticed, for instance, even in my own relationships, something as seemingly clear as honesty – I want you to be honest. Say in intimate relationships. Actually can have, no allusion intended, by 50 shades of gray, right?

Brené Brown: Right, totally.

Tim Ferriss: It can mean something very different. Is omission a lie? Or are we talking about a misrepresentation of truth, right? It’s really critical and I like your description.
Because courage, I remember thinking when you were walking us through this – Kustomato, who is Mike Tyson’s primary trainer, who brought him to the pinnacle of his success, would tell Mike who was terrified before going into the ring, in the dressing room

and so on, that, “The hero and the coward feel the same thing. It’s how the hero responds that makes him different.” You can’t be courageous unless you are exposing yourself to a perceived risk, which, by definition, makes you vulnerable, even if you’re thinking about it in a very literal, kind of physical sense.

So I’d love to segue to shame because I was reading one of your alumni publications. You can correct this, certainly, if it’s not accurate. But a quote of yours came up that I thought was insightful and worth exploring a bit.

And it said, “Shame hates to have words wrapped around it. If we talk about it, it loses its grip on us.” And I was hoping maybe you could elaborate on that and help us to better understand shame.

Brené Brown:

Yeah. I think that quote is so powerful because it’s so true. When I talk about shame, I often like to personify it and say, “Shame is a very formidable foe.: Shame is this intensely painful belief or experience that something is wrong with us; that we are flawed and that we are unworthy of love and belonging.” And we all know it. Everyone knows that warm wash that comes over you that makes you feel like you’re not enough.

We have 50 years of data that really show us, in my mind, unquestionably that the only people who don’t experience shame are people who don’t have a capacity for connection, people who don’t have a capacity for empathy. So if we are capable of having connection, we know shame because shame is the fear that we’re not worthy of connection. And so the thing about shame that makes it so difficult is it needs three things to thrive in our lives. If you take a Petri dish and you put shame in a Petri dish and you douse it with secrecy, silence and judgment, it grows exponentially.

It will grow into every corner and crevice of our lives. If you have the same amount of shame in a Petri dish and you douse it with empathy, shame can’t survive empathy. Empathy is a very hostile environment for shame. And so to understand shame, I think what resonates mostly with people are the two kind of tapes that shame drives.

The first is you’re not enough and you can fill in the blank. You’re not thin enough, pretty enough, strong enough, powerful enough, rich enough, [inaudible] enough, loved enough, awesome enough – you’re not enough. And then if we can somehow get a handle on that say okay, I have this big presentation and you’ve got this shame gremlin in your ear saying, “You’re not enough, you’re not smart enough, there are going to be like 100 MBAs in that room,

what do you know about business? You're not enough." If you can wrestle that thing down, the other tape that shame drives is who do you think you are?

So it creates this amazing vise that our self-worth gets caught in and just squeezes us from both sides. Shame is really visceral. If you just say the word to people, people can feel it.

Tim Ferriss: No, definitely. You mentioned fear of disconnection. I wrote down, when I was doing some research before this call, "Being shunned?" And I'd love to ask you, because a question that came from some of my listeners was, "What is the evolutionary need of shame?" or "Why did that develop in human beings?" And it seems to me like shame can serve a useful purpose, right? If you are ashamed of the fact that you think about molesting a child, that serves a societal function, right?

Brené Brown: I would argue no.

Tim Ferriss: You would argue no?

Brené Brown: I would argue no, absolutely.

Tim Ferriss: Okay, all right. Well, I'd love for you to expand on that because that's an interesting viewpoint. So could you expand on that?

Brené Brown: I think if you look at shame from an evolutionary, biological perspective, I think it did absolutely serve a function. So Tim, you lead the dinosaur back to the cave, it eats my entire family and my whole clan. This is the second time you've done that, so we are literally going to shun you from our collective, which means you'll be alone, which means death, right?

Tim Ferriss: Mm-hmm.

Brené Brown: Because you're dangerous. Not unlike if we see even in the animal world today, some pack animals that there's a sick animal among them, will literally approach it as a group and back it off a cliff for the sake of the pack, right?

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Brené Brown: So that makes sense. As we've evolved neuro-biologically, as we've evolved, shame becomes a profoundly dangerous tool for people who have the emotional understanding that we have.

So now what we see is you can change a behavior sometimes, especially with children, on a dime, with shame. But it's like hitting a thumbtack with a 500-pound anvil. You are going to crush that thumbtack in the process of doing that. So what we see now is we see shame highly correlated with addiction, depression, aggression, violence, suicide, eating disorders – very highly correlated. What we see as the inverse is we see guilt. And shame and guilt are very different. Shame is “I am a bad person.” Guilt is “I did something bad.” So you go out on Thursday night, you get wasted, you're so hung over on Friday you sleep through your alarm clock, you miss a really important meeting.

You get to work late on Friday and your self-talk is, “Jesus, I'm a loser. I'm an idiot. I'm such a loser.” That's shame. If you get to work on Friday – same scenario – and your self-talk is, “Dude, I cannot believe I did that. That was such a lame thing to do. That was such a stupid thing to do.” The difference is shame is a focus on self; guilt is a focus on behavior. People who are very guilt-prone who say, “You know what? I got a bad grade. I'm not a loser, but that was a loser idea to not study and go out and last night.” Their relationship with addiction, depression, violence, suicide, bullying is inverse; meaning the higher the level of guilt, the less likely it is to experience these outcomes.

So the most dangerous – if you look at shame and guilt in a criminal population, the most dangerous people have the highest levels of shame proneness and the lowest levels of guilt proneness.

Tim Ferriss: That makes sense.

Brené Brown: Because guilt is holding up –

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, that makes perfect sense.

Brené Brown: Does that make sense?

Tim Ferriss: It makes perfect sense.

Brené Brown: So guilt is holding up something we've done against who we want to be. Or something we've done, thought about doing or failed to do up against our values, who we want to be, what we think is right. And guilt is the psychological discomfort created by the cognitive dissonance between our behavior and who we want to be and it's healthy and adaptive.

Tim Ferriss: No, it makes perfect sense. I was having a conversation with Josh Waitzkin, who's been on this podcast as well. He was the basis for "Searching for Bobby Fischer." So he was known as a chess prodigy as a child.

Brené Brown: Oh, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: He is a tremendous dad; a really amazing parent; has a young boy.

And he has a very particular parenting style. He always focuses on rewarding effort and not labeling his son "smart." So, for instance, he'll say, "That was a really good job. You worked really hard. You did A, B and C that resulted in D." As opposed to, "Wow, you got a great grade. You're so smart." Because then when the kid gets a bad grade, it's viewed as this unsolvable, unfixable personal failing and it seems to correlate to the difference between shame, i.e., I am flawed, I am a broken toy that cannot be fixed versus guilt, like, wow, I really fucked that up; bad on me, but next time I'll do something different.

Brené Brown: It's hugely different. The thing is, if you think about this, I have a 16-year-old and a 10-year-old. They get caught being dishonest with me and I say, "You know what? You're a liar and you're grounded."

When you tell somebody they're a liar, that's a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you're a liar – if I, Brené Brown, am a liar, what option is there for growth or change? That's who I am.

Tim Ferriss: Not only that, but what incentive is there not to lie if you're branded as such?

Brené Brown: Right. So when you talk about the person who is thinking about committing violence or assault on a child, do I want that person to be more ashamed? No. Because I have a feeling – in your example, I guess, there's pedophilia, which can be an organic issue, but the majority of what we see are people who are so deeply shame based, committing horrific crimes. So if I thought shaming people, no matter how – I hate to say this, but I'll just be honest. If I thought shaming people, no matter how hurtful and painful it is, if I thought that kept people safer, I'd be all for it. It just doesn't.

Tim Ferriss: Right, right. Well, it's interesting because I've been training a rescue pup for the last few weeks, a brand new rescue pup. She was at a kill shelter in South Carolina and had suffered a lot of abuse. But I really got into looking at mammalian training and

looking at everything from dolphin training to polar bear training and dog training. The fact of the matter is, negative reinforcement or punishment-based training doesn't work that well. At the very best, it's very slow compared to a lot of the positive reinforcement-based training. Whether it's using clickers for conditioning and so on, because you can only reinforce a behavior that has occurred, right? I think that the shame just seems to tie to me in an interesting way to not understanding what is malleable and what is not.

Brené Brown: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: I'd love to come back to the "I am enough." Because in your book, "The Gift of Imperfection" – one of the best book titles of all time, by the time, so well done on that.

Brené Brown: Thank you.

Tim Ferriss: It has been described as "the lifelong journey from what will people think to I am enough." Now what I'm so curious to hear about, and I'll leap forward to Daring Greatly. And I'll just read this quote, from which I believe the title was adapted. So this is Theodore Roosevelt. "It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points at how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deed could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly. Who at the best knows in the end of the triumph of high achievement and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."

Now, what I have had as an internal conflict for a very long time, and this was brought to the surface the most noticeably the last year and a half through meditation. So I practice transcendental meditation in the mornings and have friends who practice Vipassana transcendental – different types of mediation. And these are Type-A, driven, competitive people. And I've had the conversation repeatedly – the same conversation with different people – about whether that removes a competitive edge.

And the reason being, that you decide "I am enough," you are content; therefore you do not have discontent driving you to achieve big things that are, for most of us, pretty high on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, right? It's like we have shelter, we have food. So in reality, in almost every capacity, we have enough, we are enough.

So how do you balance the wellbeing of having a mindset of “I am enough,” versus the – at least with a lot of my peers and friends in Silicon Valley – the discontent that seems to drive so many of those people to accomplish great things?

Brené Brown:

So I would go back to your really important insight from the beginning of our conversation about defining terms and I’d also go back to kind of the insights that you’re learning from doing your training with your rescue pup, which does to me “I am enough” – I mean, I’m a competitive, Type-A person too. I don’t know [inaudible] which probably doesn’t come as a surprise. The oldest of four, you know, very ambitious and I’m that person too in many ways.

I think the soul or the center of my ability to keep putting myself out there and trying new things, even with I fail – and I have had some big failures – I think the soul of my healthy competitiveness and my ambition is the belief that I am enough. Because I’m starting – and I think when I don’t believe I’m enough, I engage in behaviors not to push myself, not to grow and stretch and learn, not to strive for excellence, but to prove to other people what I can do. But when I start from a place that, you know what? I’m enough. I’m imperfect. I’m afraid. I’m super vulnerable, but that does not change the fact that I’m also brave and worthy of love and belonging.

And when I start from that place, I am completely unleashed. So I think one of the things that’s really important to help define here – because I’m not on the couch binge watching TV five days a week, writing nasty ass comments on other people’s accomplishments on Twitter and Facebook and saying, look, fuck you, I’m enough. That’s not what I’m talking about. I’m talking about a belief of self-worth. That I am enough not based on what I do, what I accomplish, what do I prove or produce. I am just enough. And if you start from that, that’s the healthy center, I think, of most of the most awesome achievements we’ve seen. I’ve spent a lot of time in Silicon Valley, too.

And what I can tell you – I wish we could have a bet right now – I would bet you a lot of money that if we listed the names of ten people, which we’re not going to do, you could tell me which of those folks are operating – and ten competitive, ambitious, just like crazy fighters out there in the arena – and we listed ten names, you could tell me the five who are motivated from a place of being enough but wanting to strive for excellence and learning, and the

five who are trying to fill a hole in their self-worth and who are dangerous.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, no, for sure. I think in my mind, when I think – I’m just imagining this list of ten people in my head. When I imagine the people who fall into the less self-destructive category, who are operating from a place of I am enough, I guess I would, in their cases, say that – of I could hear their sort of subconscious internal mantra, in my mind it would seem to be – and maybe this is the same thing.

But closer to I am good or I’m really good, but I can be better. Not I am flawed; I need to impress everyone around me to make them validate me. But I guess I’m just struggling with the word “enough.” But I understand the point of it. I think this is something that I struggle with. I’m extremely – personally, I’m very hard on myself. I have always sort of been of the mindset that second place is first loser and am extremely competitive. That has not always been the healthiest thing for me in all sorts of different capacities.

Let’s sort of tackle this from a slightly different angle. The Daring Greatly. The question that I think is raised in that book, among others, is have you dared greatly today? Please feel free to take this in any direction, because you obviously know more about your work than I do. But what is a good way to evaluate that? Do you ask yourself this type of question on a daily basis? I’ll leave it at that. I could make this a 12-part question. But how does someone determine if they’ve dared greatly? And how often would you suggest someone check in and ask themselves that?

Brené Brown: So I think, for me, daring greatly – and that quote from Theodore Roosevelt – I even got teary-eyed while you were reading it. It was a life changer for me.

It was right after the TEDx Houston talk had gone viral. I was kind of everywhere on the internet at that time. Everyone from ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, Huffington Post, were all writing about this. Who is this person at the University of Houston with this TED talk going viral? And as you can imagine, all these online stories had online comments that were [inaudible].

Tim Ferriss: Of course.

Brené Brown: So my husband and my therapist were like, “Don’t read the comments.” And so I read all the comments on day – yeah, really. I sat down and just read them for like an hour. I think if you’re a

listener right now, if you close your eyes and think about how we all have the shame triggers. We all have two or three things – most of us have more – that you could overhear someone saying about you that would be so painful and so hurtful that you don't know if you could survive it.

Most of us have those things. So for me, up until that point, those things really dictated my life. I was like, look, I'm going to engineer this career to be small and safe. I'm going to play right under the radar because I am not willing to put myself out there and get criticized like I know is happening. So the problem with staying small is it's always served up with resentment and pissed-offedness, because we're not using our gifts, we're not in our power, and there's always a price for that. So to me, when I read that quote, when I looked at the comments there were things like, "Of course she embraces imperfection. What choice would you have if you look like her?" "I feel sorry for her husband and kids." "More Botox, less research." "You need to shake loose ten pounds before you talk about being worthy." Just like really shitty, hurtful stuff.

The next 30 minutes after reading all that, I came upon that quote from Theodore Roosevelt. In that moment, what I realized is, you know what? I do want to live a brave life. I do want to live in the arena. And if you're going to live in the arena, the only guarantee is you will get your ass kicked. The second thing is that daring greatly is being vulnerable. So when you ask yourself, did I dare greatly today? The big question I ask is, when I had the opportunity, did I choose courage over comfort?

When things went sideways between Steve and I this morning over who was going to pack a lunch for my son, did I just go into the old pattern of rolling my eyes and walking out of the kitchen or did I choose courage and say, "I'm sorry, I'm feeling really overwhelmed with the book launch tomorrow and I'm sorry. I apologize. That was hurtful."

Did I choose courage or did I choose comfort? And so for me, that's the question we ask about daring greatly. I think one of the things that you said, Tim, when you're talking about your friends and this idea of being enough, one of the things that really turned my life upside down – there were four or five things in the research that have taken me a long time to get over and get through. One of them was the difference between healthy striving or striving for excellence and perfectionism. I've always been perfectionistic

about my staff. What I learned in the research was that perfectionism is very outwardly defined.

It's dictated by what will people think? And healthy striving is dictated or striving for excellence is internally motivated. So perfectionism is really – I can't the 20-ton shield. I think a lot of, when we're talking about those people, five of whom work for this place of wholeness and the other – I think what a lot of times what we're talking about is the difference between perfectionism and striving for excellence.

I think perfectionism is this 20-ton shield that we carry around. It's a defense mechanism, classically, that just says if I live perfect, love perfect, work perfect and accomplish perfectly, I can reduce or minimize shame, blame, criticism and judgment. And so we carry this thing around, thinking it's protecting us, but what it's really doing is keeping us from being seen. And so I think when I ask myself personally, have I dared greatly today, sometimes for me it is the question of was I enough? Or am I trying to get everything perfect so that I can somehow think I'm mitigating criticism and judgment?

Tim Ferriss:

Right. Well, I also find – and I haven't really thought about it in these terms before – but if you look at – I think it's Barry Schwartz, the paradox of choice, where he talks about maximizers and, I think it's satisficers. But if I try to correlate that to my own experience being, I think, very much a perfectionist, and that of my friends, the people who are perfectionists very often are so future-focused that the perfection once achieved is viewed as the trigger that will sort of solve their guilt, shame discontent, etc. Whereas the people who are striving for excellence are better at celebrating the little wins, accepting the small defeats, and sometimes the large defeats, and tend to be a bit more present-state focused.

You mentioned vulnerability and the sort of components, right? So facing, whether it's an uncertainty, risk and so on. I've seen it described elsewhere as stopping, controlling and predicting. It seems very much akin to certain tenets in say, stoic philosophy, of which I read a lot. Whether it's Marcus Aurelius or Seneca, etc. And there are a lot of common threads in Buddhism, of course, that would talk about how fruitless it is and futile it is to try to eliminate suffering completely, because we are almost by definition experiencers of suffering and coming to terms with that.

Which thinkers, philosophers or schools of thinking or philosophy most resonate with the insights you've found in the data and your research?

Brené Brown: Oh, my God. E, all of the above. It took me from Marcus Aurelius to liberation theology.

Tim Ferriss: What is liberation theology?

Brené Brown: It's kind of a Catholic theology of social justice that had its stronghold beginning in Central America. One of the things about being a grounded-theory researcher that I love and hate is we don't start with an existing theory and then try to prove or disprove it. We build a theory from people's lived experiences and then we do the literature review and see where it fits and where it doesn't fit because the idea behind grounded theory is if you start with an existing theory, you're just kind of paying homage to – they would say – the theoretical capitalist that came before you, and that it's people's lived experiences that really matter.

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People often comment in my books – they're like, "How is it that you're quoting ...?" I do quote Marcus Aurelius in one of my books. "How are you quoting him?" and then "How are you quoting Pema Chödrön, who is an American Buddhist nun?" And then "You're quoting Disney, a Pixar movie from Toy Story?" And to me, I have no division and very little tolerance for the high-brow versus low-brow inspiration. I think if you're paying attention, you can find truth and inspiration anywhere and everywhere. So to me, I'm all over the place in the literature.

I think the people who really depend on polarity will hate this, but really some very strong common themes across Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Joseph Campbell; I think I end up finding myself in some just profound truths from a lot of ...

I was reading something yesterday in the data and I made me pull out my book by Gibran. I think it's Rumi, Mary Oliver, Neil Peart, the drummer for Rush. Something came up and I was like, I didn't know if you knew, so I had to put it in there, but I was like, this is when choose not to decide, you still have made a choice. I think I don't know that anyone says it more eloquently than Rush, you know? I don't know what to say.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, Neil – just as a side note, if people want to see a beast of a drummer, then you can search on YouTube for some videos of this guy. Oh my goodness, what a just monster on the kit.

Brené Brown: And a poet. So I find my inspiration kind of everywhere.

Tim Ferriss: And let's talk about misinterpretations of vulnerability for a second. I think I'm probably projecting my own prejudices here, but is it vulnerability – I think there are some people who misinterpret being vulnerable and the benefits derived from being vulnerable with incessant oversharing of emotions or inner dialogue or doubt. What would you say to those people? Maybe my diagnosis is off base, but there are a lot of people who just kind of pour out every concern, worry, fault, mistake and okay it with the label of vulnerability. I'd just love to hear your thoughts on that word salad that I just dropped on you.

Brené Brown: I love it. I'm tracking 100 percent because yeah, there's a very simple formula in my head. Vulnerability minus boundaries is not vulnerability. It can be desperation; it can be over-sharing; it can be manipulation. It can be a lot of different things, but it's not vulnerability. We always have to hold awareness of boundaries and roles in our minds around vulnerability. We share with people who've earned the right to hear our story and we stay mindful all the time of the role we're in.

So one of the great examples I can give you is I'm with 50 CEOs from Silicon Valley and we've spent a long weekend together. Toward the end of maybe the first day, one of them says, "I came here thinking that I would never believe in vulnerability or accept it, but I am 100 percent on board."

"So I want to make sure I understand that I should stand up in front of my investors, my VCs and say look, I am in over my head. We are bleeding money and I do not know what to do next." And I said, "Only if you don't want another round of funding should you do that." I mean, no, that's not appropriate. But let me ask you this. If you had \$50,000.00 invested with this leader, wouldn't you be praying to God that he's sitting across from someone saying that?

Tim Ferriss: Sure, definitely, 100 percent.

Brené Brown: Right. I don't care whether it's his therapist, a mentor, an advisor. Because what the alternative is, if he's really drowning, in over his head and bleeding money and doesn't know what he's doing, is just keep to grinding harder and harder on the same things he's doing and not ask for help.

Tim Ferriss: Right, totally agreed.

Brené Brown: Yeah. And so when people say, live tweeting your bikini wax? That is not vulnerability.

Tim Ferriss: I'm sorry about that; it was only once.

Brené Brown: I mean, so if you could hold back a little bit, Tim, we'd really all appreciate it. No – or sharing intimate details of your children's reaction to your impending divorce on Facebook. That is not vulnerability. Vulnerability is the birthplace of intimacy, trust, connection, creativity, innovation. For leaders, it's the birthplace of trusted influence. But it's not permission to over-share.

Tim Ferriss: Right. I thought the investor example was great. Because if a CEO or founder gets up and provides the confession that you gave as an example, in front of a room that will almost inevitably respond by yanking funding, it's not a constructive use of that confession, if that makes sense.

I live in San Francisco most of this time. This sort of misinterpretation of vulnerability as over-sharing is very common among the kind of Burning Man, spiritual, atheist sect. I think it's massively problematic. It appears to create many more problems than it solves. Let me use that as a segue. So the opposite. I was interviewing a well-known strength coach named Pavel Tsatsouline. He's originally from – I think the Ukraine. In any case, former Soviet Union.

One of the questions I asked him on the podcast was, "What do you write in your personal journal that you don't often talk about with other people?" His answer was, "Well, Tim, that is a very personal question." And he proceeded to tell me that over-sharing is a big problem in the United States. I was like, "Well, I feel like that's a fair response." So I wanted to ask you a question that's based on input from a number of listeners to this podcast. Here's the lead. And I'd be very curious to hear your thoughts. So there's lots of chatter about over-feminization of boys. How do you have vulnerability coexist with strong, masculine virtues/traits?

I'm paraphrasing here. I'll just another sort of contextual example that may or may not be interesting to comment on. So there's an expression in some military training that is "suffer in silence." And the idea is if you're going through hell week for the Navy Seals or something like that and you're carrying logs around and laying down in the freezing cold water, crawling under barbed wire, doing all these just nausea and fear-inducing things – if you complain

“my foot hurts,” this, that and the other thing, it will trigger more suffering in the people around you. Which I happen to agree with in that context.

So that’s a lot at once. But what is your thinking on the so-called “over-feminization of boys” and masculine virtues/traits versus vulnerability? How do they coexist? Maybe that’s not even the right question.

Brené Brown: It’s a really good question. I work a lot with Special Forces with the military and with vets.

Tim Ferriss: May I add one more thing?

Brené Brown: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Just so that I’m not – people don’t think I’m only representing the male side of this. A lot of my female friends complain to me that in a lot of urban centers in the US, San Francisco, etc., they can only find guys to date and they’re looking for men to date. So it’s not just – this is a concern, not just from the male side. It seems to be coming from both sides. Sorry to interrupt, but I just wanted to throw that in there.

Brené Brown: No, I think it’s really important. I have so much to say on it that I’m overwhelmed. I don’t even know where to start. I am. I’m just like busting a gut over here.

Okay, so these binaries of tough and tender, masculine/feminine ... I think we have to be really careful about this because when we start about vulnerability – let’s talk about it in the context of my work. You’ve got me really [inaudible]. If you talk about vulnerability, and vulnerability to me is courage, and so when I hear women talk about their inability to be with a vulnerable man, it makes tons of sense to me. I wish I could say that the No. 1 perpetrator of shame with men were all those shitty dads and terrible coaches and those buddies.

But the No. 1 perpetrator of shame with men is women. So I often say, show me a woman who can sit with a man in real fear and vulnerability. I will show you a woman who’s done her own work around vulnerability and doesn’t derive her power or status from that man. You show me a man who can sit with a woman who’s in real fear and vulnerability and I’ll show you a man who’s done his own work around vulnerability and doesn’t derive his power from being Oz, the all-knowing and all-fixing. Because what men have a

tendency to do when we're feeling vulnerable or afraid is try to fix it, because it's how we're socialized. When you talk about how we're raising boys today, here's what I can tell you from 150,000 pieces of data.

Looking back from what I've learned from men, the men who were raised to be open and feeling and tender and loving and given no skills and no information on how to navigate boy culture and male culture do not do well. The boys who were raised on how to navigate male culture, king of the hill, and had no tools on how to be open and vulnerable and emotionally available, do worse. But they also don't do well. So it's about we need to stop with these false separations between tough and tender. Tough and tender can coexist. To me, that's kind of the equation for bad assery. It can also exist in women.

Grit and grace. Tough and tender. Afraid and brave. This idea that we're either courageous or chicken shit is just not true, because most of us are afraid and brave at the exact same moment, all day long. So to take courage and vulnerability, to not teach that to our kids, boys or girls, is not teaching them how to be emotionally available or tender either. So I think what concerns me is about the need to drive a stake through the middle of these things. I think that's what's really important. To be both.

Tim Ferriss:

I agree with you. I think they're not mutually exclusive. There's no need for false dichotomy. I think a lot of it comes back to sort of choosing the appropriate environment for expressing that vulnerability, if that makes sense. It's a toughie. It seems tough. Because you find men who have the armor plating on and can never take it off. For what it's worth, the guys I've met who are operating at the highest level in say, Special Forces, do not have that problem. They tend not to suffer from a lot of PTSD, for instance. And they are very empathetic and emotionally attune; at least in the subset of folks that I've met.

But they've been subjected to just insane amounts of abuse and conditioning for mental and physical toughness, but at the same time, I see them playing with their kids or with their wives and they're extremely present. But it's a tough needle to thread.

So speaking of just the challenges people have with, say vulnerability, what are some daily practices or exercises that people can test to help them develop more vulnerability, less shame, etc.?

Brené Brown:

I think it's interesting that you talk about daily practices, because I think vulnerability is a daily practice. For a lot of us, at least for me when it was new, it was about trying on new ways of being and kind of testing it out. One of the things that emerged from the data is this idea of trust and the relationship between trust and vulnerability. People always ask me, you gain trust first and then you're vulnerable with people. But the truth is, you can't really earn trust over time with people without being somewhat vulnerable, so it's a little bit of a back and forth.

It's a little bit of sharing things that are maybe not super deeply personal, but are meaningful to you and seeing how that feels to share them and be open. One thing that you said that I've never thought about until this interview, but it was such a remarkable insight from you that I want to go back to when you talk about daily practice, is when you were talking about perfectionism being future-focused and also kind of presenting some struggles about staying in the now.

I think that's why – and again, I'm just putting this insight together, your insight. I think that's why a lot of people who are that super, uber-competitive, high-strung, overachieving don't get the same results in their personal lives with their partners and their children as they do in their professional endeavors or their recreational endeavors.

Because our personal relationships with the people we love, those intimate relationships, require a presence, a focus on now that a lot of times professional success does not depend on that as much.

Tim Ferriss:

That's very true.

Brené Brown:

You can fly fast and you know if you're in a little Cessna two-seater, you're in the here and now and you've got to pay attention to every bump and every gauge. But if you're in a jet, you can't afford to be thinking about now. You have to be thinking about five minutes from now. So I thought it was a really remarkable insight on your part because when I do think about those ten friends in Silicon Valley or I think about my own life even, I think that the research has changed most is it has had a huge impact on my professional success.

But more than anything, when I get home, I walk into a marriage and to a relationship with kids that are fundamentally than they were before I became okay with vulnerability and okay with less-than-perfect.

Tim Ferriss: What does the first 60 to 90 minutes of your day look like? Your morning routines and rituals outside of book launch times and things like that. Let's just assume that you have control of your optimal day. What do your morning rituals look like? What does your first 60 to 90 minutes look like?

Brené Brown: I wake up early.

Tim Ferriss: What time do you wake up?

Brené Brown: 6:30ish. I wake up. I do a lot of deep breathing to stave off an absolute desperate need for a hit of data from my phone or from my computer. So I try very hard not to check email or texts, because I sleep with my phone downstairs.

I don't sleep with any kind of computer next to me. And then it's really super normal. I wake up kids. I make breakfast. I pack lunches. I go through the calendar of the day. I zip up backpacks. I drive carpool. I usually go from carpool to swim. I'm a swimmer, ex-competitive swimmer, so I like to swim. And I swim and walk. Swimming is kind of the trifecta for me. It is meditation, exercise and therapy. And then I usually start my work day.

Tim Ferriss: What time do you finish swimming and how long is the swim session?

Brené Brown: My best case scenario is I run and swim. I don't swim fast enough anymore. I don't time swim anymore, likes 50s on every 20 or anything like I used to, so it's not as cardio as it used to be.

So I like to run on the treadmill for 30 minutes and then I like to swim for half an hour. And if I was a bike rider, I could be a triathlete, but I tried it once and the bike, going that fast, next to that many people going that fast is really uncomfortable for me.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I'd imagine.

Brené Brown: So I'm a duo-athlete, a slow duo-athlete.

Tim Ferriss: What book, besides your own, have you gifted to other people most? What book have you often given as a gift?

Brené Brown: I have given so many copies of *The Alchemist* to people, that I should get a little royalty on it.

Tim Ferriss: It's a great book. Speaking of books, so you have a new book out, *Rising Strong*, and it seems to be like this completes trilogy in a sense. It seems like the three books go together very well. But could you give people a description of the latest book and why you wrote it?

Brené Brown: Yeah, sure. I think they do go together. I wasn't intentional on that, but I think *The Gift* is "be you," *Daring Greatly* is "be all in," and this book is "get your ass kicked, get up, and do it again." This is about the physics of vulnerability. If you're brave enough often enough, you're going to fall. You're going to experience heartbreak, disappointment, failure. It's going to happen. And so going into this research, the question for me was, what do men and women who experience falls and get back up and are even more courageous and more tenacious, what do they have in common? So *Rising Strong* is about the process that emerged from that question.

Tim Ferriss: And can you describe your research method? How do you find your interviewees? What does the interview format look like? What do you do with the data afterwards, etc.?

Brené Brown: About 70 percent of my interviews are individuals and more focus groups in the last dataset. So some of them, for example, I went to West Point and sat down with – I think there were six officers who had all come back from active combat duty. So sometimes I'll do focus groups, but the majority of them are individuals. A lot of it is snowball sampling, meaning I've interviewed you, Tim, and I'm like, you know what? This is really helpful, I would love to interview some of the folks that you know in Silicon Valley around perfectionism, would you mind doing a warm introduction?

And some of them are just kind of calls. This book is a lot about the power of story and the stories we tell ourselves. So I interviewed Shonda Rhimes, the show runner for *Scandal*. So it's a lot easier to get people now than when I first started.

I was like, "Hi, my name's Brené and I'd like to talk to you about shame." That was slow going. But now it's more that I just do mostly individual and focus groups. So then I get the data. We don't record it. I take what we call in the field "anthropological field notes." So I capture exact phrases and sentences during our interview. I let participants look at them if they want to when they're done. Some people say yes, some say no. And then I code what I learned against what I already know, for patterns and saturation in the data.

Meaning if I am trying to study perfectionism and entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, I'll start interviewing them and I'll know that I've reached saturation when I can predict what the next person's going to say. Because one of the really tough rules of grounded theory research are we don't allow for any outliers.

And so if I'm almost done and then I sit down with you and you say anything something that doesn't fit with the theory that I'm developing in my head about what's happening, then I have to go back to the drawing board and keep interviewing, because every lived experience is real and matters.

Tim Ferriss: Right. So it would be like interviewing 100 people in Silicon Valley are saying they're trying to democratize pizza ordering, democratize kitty litter delivery, democratize this, and then someone said, "I'm really looking to establish a silo of command and control like a North Korean dictator for X" and you'd be like, ugh, all right. Well, then I have to keep going.

Brené Brown: Yes. So if that happened, then I have to question what I'm hearing. I have to question what I'm hearing from the kitty litter and the other folks. I have to figure what do you all meaningfully have in common?

Tim Ferriss: It seems to me Rising Strong is a must-have, not a nice-to-have. I'm not saying that the "be yourself, dare greatly" are nice-to-haves, but if you don't have the resilience to recover from mistakes, you're never going to dare greatly in the first place, in some respect it would seem. Right? What order would you recommend people read your books in? Understanding that this is the latest, of course, but what's the ideal sequence?

Brené Brown: I think they go together, but they don't. They can each be read independently, so I think sometimes it's helpful to pick up the book based on where you are. If you're really struggling with hustling for perfection and proving and perfecting and pretending, I think The Gifts is great. If you really are, like the rest of us, sick and tired of being afraid, and you want to be brave and you want to feel like what does that look like? I think Daring Greatly is the place to start.

And if you find yourself face-down in the arena and you're thinking, God, I just got my ass handed to me, I think Rising Strong would be a good place to start. It probably makes sense. There's a sequence, so I think if you're just like, wow, I'm interested. I would start with The Gifts. But I also think for your

audience, it's probably helpful to know that I spent the last couple of years probably exclusively working with leaders and entrepreneurs. So Daring Greatly and Rising Strong have much more of my research from organizations and from leaders than The Gifts does.

Got it. No, that is helpful. Just a few more questions. I know we're coming up on time, so I'll ask just a couple of rapid-fire questions, but the answers don't have to be rapid. I'm very curious about this one. When you think of the word "successful," who is the first person who comes to mind for you and why?

Brené Brown: You know what's so weird? I don't picture anybody. I picture the word "redefine." That has been such a dangerous word in my research, the word "successful" or "success."

Tim Ferriss: I agree.

Brené Brown: That I don't even use it anymore. Because what does that mean? So okay, I am the CEO of this company, I make a shit ton of money, this is my title. This is the influence and power I have. I'm on my fourth marriage and no relationship with my adult children. So I think when I hear the word "successful," my answer is be clear that your ladder is leaning against the right building.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, right. Bad word. Next question.

Brené Brown: Yeah, I don't know why I had a strong response.

Tim Ferriss: No, I agree with you. I think happiness is actually similar.

Brené Brown: Oh, God, yes.

Tim Ferriss: That's a scary, nebulous, dangerous term as well.

Brené Brown: Totally.

Tim Ferriss: What \$100.00 or less purchase has most positively impacted your life in recent memory?

Brené Brown: Triathlon goggles. Because – I don't know – for some reason they're softer. So then I don't have goggle marks all day.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, really? I had no idea. Do you know the brand of goggles offhand?

Brené Brown: I don't, but they're like the most famous triathlon. And they're really paddy and you look like – we all swam with the Speedo band pusher, like little goggles because that meant you were bad ass and the bigger your goggle, the goofier you were. But now it's time for the goofy goggle for me.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I really like the Aquasphere Kaiman goggles – K-A-I-M-A-N. And Laird Hamilton, who's this big-wave surfer uses. I will look them up. Goggles. For those people interested, I put them in my latest 5-Bullet Friday. You can search my name and 5-Bullet Fridays. But yeah, it does seem like the bigger goggle is coming back.

If you could have one billboard anywhere with anything on it, what would it say and where would you put it?

Brené Brown: I would put it in Washington, D.C. And it would say, “Shut up and Listen.”

Tim Ferriss: That's great. That could be put anywhere. I would love to put that on the Highway 101 and 280 in Silicon Valley, too. Because man, oh, man, are people talking a lot these days and pitching really hard without asking many good questions.

Brené Brown: You know what? I wouldn't say shut up, because my kids would be like, oh, my God, we're not even allowed to say that word. So I would say “Talk less, listen more.” But in my heart, I would be saying “Shut up.”

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, we could split test. That could be the hashtag. Just shut your face. What advice would you give your 30-year-old self?

Brené Brown: It's okay to be afraid. You don't have to be so scary when you're scared.

Tim Ferriss: Huh. Meaning what? Put on airs of confidence and over compensate?

Brené Brown: Yes. Like the 30s are so exhausting. It's the age of perfecting, proving, pretending. And there's so liberation that came for me in my 40s. There was a breakdown, of course, but followed by some liberation that came in my 40s. So I would just say, you know, stop hustling.

Tim Ferriss: Right. You mentioned the breakdown, the breakthrough disguised as a breakdown.

Brené Brown: What would you say to your 30-year-old self?

Tim Ferriss: Start mediating and chill the fuck out.

Brené Brown: Me too.

Tim Ferriss: You don't need to have a resting pulse of 150 beats per minute to get a lot of big things done.

Brené Brown: But they're similar messages, right?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, very similar. I think it's very easy for people and I'm sure I still do this, but to mistake the symptoms of success with the things that cause success. They're not the same, right?

Brené Brown: They're not the same.

Tim Ferriss: Do you have any asks or requests for all the people listening? Of course, I would highly recommend that they check out your work, including *Rising Strong*, the latest book, which I will link to in the show notes for everybody. But any other ask, request or recommendation for everybody listening?

Brené Brown: I would just say keep being part of the conversation about these tougher topics. About vulnerability, about shame, about being brave. Just lean into some discomfort because I think these seemingly impossible problems that we have around race and homophobia and the environment, and just the lack of love sometimes, are not going to be solved in a comfortable way. You have to choose comfort or courage, you just can't have both. So I guess my ask would be more of a big metaphysical ask that give vulnerability a shot. Give discomfort its due. Because I think there is a really strong relationship between your willingness, he or she who is willing to be the most uncomfortable is not only the bravest, but rises the fastest.

Tim Ferriss: Totally agree. Well, I think the only way to ensure long-term comfort is to have continual short-term discomfort. Well, this has been a blast. Brené, where can people say hello to you online? Where can they find out more about you, find you on the social networks?

Brené Brown: Yeah. I am @brenebrown on Twitter and Instagram and Brené Brown on Facebook. We just launched a new project that we're excited about called CourageWorks, which is bringing all of my

teachings online for individuals and leaders and organizations. That's just courageworks.com. I'm in all of those places.

Tim Ferriss: Well, I enjoy your work, I appreciate your work, and thank you so much for taking the time.

Folks listening, you can find links to everything that we discussed, show notes, etc. at fourhourworkweek.com and just click on podcast. All spelled out, fourhourworkweek.com. And please say hello to Brené on the interwebs and join the conversation. I'll also have a question of the day in the blog post so that you guys can continue this conversation as Brené suggested. But Brené, thank you so much for making the time.

Brené Brown: It was awesome. Thank you so much, Tim. I appreciate it. And everybody listening, as always, thank you for listening. Until next time, pura vida and face your discomfort, practice discomfort. Thanks for listening.