

Lessons Learned: Being Vulnerable

Being inspired is like a drug for me. Seriously. Today, I spent my morning having coffee with a dear old friend, catching up on life, work and everything in between. We talked about what motivates us and our shared passion to make change. I left that table at Abide Coffee filled with energy and passion...I could have run home if I chose to.

And then there's my girlfriend. One of the reasons I love and admire her so much is her ability to continuously inspire me and excite me with her outlook on life, family, and work. Whether it's a quick one liner or an all-night talk, she always knows what to say and when to say it.

One of her favorite people in the world is Brene Brown. I'm sure you (and 15 million other people) have watched her infamous TedTalk in Houston. Earlier this week, my girlfriend cued up Brene Brown's Netflix special "The Call to Courage" - after enduring three days of NFL draft coverage she had every right to do this. I was immediately hooked. And as with all great documentaries, specials, and books, it had my mind racing. I started searching for more Brene Brown quotes and talks. And I came across this:

"Vulnerability is not knowing victory or defeat, it's understanding the necessity of both; it's engaging. It's being all in."

So deep, so profound, so perfect. I decided to keep going. Then I came across this one:

"Let go of who you think you're supposed to be; embrace who you are."

Ugh. This one hit me hard. I alluded to some of my personal struggles in my opening blog. I spent the better part of my life not understanding anxiety or depression, why I lacked confidence, or how I let external factors (and people) negatively impact my life. I got extremely good at masking these things over time. Real good. People viewed me as this happy, outgoing person who loved to live each day to the fullest. Meanwhile, each morning was a battle, just to pull myself together to walk out the front door. I poured my energy into the person I thought I needed to be and who everyone wanted me to be.

It wasn't until I read the book [13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do](#) (Amy Morin) that I began to see things a little more clearly. After each chapter, I would audibly yell "Oh My God-that's me!" Especially when I got to Chapters 4 and 5:

Chapter 4: They Don't Focus on Things They Can't Control

Chapter 5: They Don't Worry About Pleasing Everyone

The book is amazing, and I suggest you pick it up. It's a great one-two punch with a Brene Brown Netflix special. It seriously changed my life and helped me understand how important it was to embrace who I was as a person. I finally dropped the mask. My friends, family, and

especially my girlfriend were so supportive. And they continue to help me to this day. After 40+ years they are finally getting to know the real me. It was like hitting the reset button. Scary but worth it as it allowed me to open my eyes for the first time and really acknowledge what makes me happy, what motivates me, and what I want out of life.

Today, having that coffee with my friend, was a great reminder of how much I love to be inspired. But it also made me unpack my mindset and actions during the early part of my career, or pre-Amy Morin and Brene Brown. There's no doubt that my innovative and creative spirit I know today was in there, but why wasn't it coming out? Simple. It was constantly being squashed by fear. I never allowed myself to be vulnerable. My mind was just plagued with the same questions: Would people think I'm different? What if I say something stupid? What if I fail? Fear played me like a fiddle.

So now, as I sit here as COO at ENX2, I spend my days constantly reminding our team how "Innovation and creativity can (and will) come from every corner of the room." I say that hoping to create the mindset that the next big idea will be born right in our conference room from someone you might not expect. It doesn't matter your name, title, position, or background, your voice will carry in that conference room. Speak up and change the world.

And I spent tonight thinking about those words, reflecting on Brene Brown and calling back to Amy Morin's book. I realized how motivating those words can be for some, yet so hollow for others. If that phrase is going to ring true in our office, it's on me to create a conducive environment around that statement, and allow the team to be vulnerable and embrace the concept. To be themselves and let their amazing innovative and creative minds flow. If not, all we are doing is wasting hours, spewing hot air in a conference room pretending to be creative.

Today's "Lesson Learned" is that actions speak louder than words. I can't simply roll out a phrase, wave a wand, clap my hands, and make it happen. If my boss gave me that innovation and creativity line twenty years ago, I'd be in a pure panic, literally praying that I was never called on. In fact I would have probably called off of work. Don't get me wrong, the innovative and creative spirit has always been there inside of me, but to let it out, in public, in front of my co-workers? No way.

If I'm going to repeat that line ten times a day, it's on me to create a safe environment around that concept. A place where the team feels comfortable, safe, and most importantly can open up and become vulnerable. They were hired for a reason and most of the time singled out by our CEO and Founder Nicole Farber, who can identify talent a mile away. It's now on me to break down the walls and remove the masks to expose that raw talent. Only then will innovation and creativity truly flow from each corner of the room.

And that takes me back to my day today. My friend from this morning and my girlfriend have something in common. Both of them inspire me not just with their words, but with their actions, by being open, honest, and vulnerable around me. And that's what I need to do. I need to be open and honest with the team. I need them to know what I've gone through and my fears. I

need to let them know it's okay, or it will be okay. I need to inspire. I need to be vulnerable. And they need to be vulnerable, especially if we intend to dominate the world from our conference room.

What do you think? Is fear holding you back? Do you have a favorite Brene Brown quote? Have you read Amy Morin's book? Drop me a line at joseph@enx2marketing.com.

Side Note

Today was a deep dive into my soul. A pretty serious and heavy conversation. I need to lighten it up a little on this edition of Side Note. I've talked about Dylan, Uncle Neil, Pearl Jam, and DMB shows in previous blogs. But here's a fun fact. My first concert? Vanilla Ice at the F.M. Kirby Center on March 9, 1991. I was in 7th Grade AND I took a date. For the sake of embarrassment, I won't mention her name, but now understand why we eventually broke up. My mom dropped us off and picked us up. But Vanilla did perform Ice Ice Baby twice, so it was totally worth the \$20. And during my time at State College (Penn State University), he did come through town and played a small club, during his punk/rock phase in like 1999. However, I decided to skip the show and keep the memory of the Kirby Center and the real Vanilla Ice. I hope you're laughing after reading this, because I sure am.