Lessons Learned On The Self Improvement Journey And Their Action Steps

BEING VULNERABLE ALLOWS YOU TO GROW THE MOST

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A Look At Vulnerability

One of the greatest lessons learned on the self-improvement journey is that being vulnerable allows you to grow the most.

Vulnerability is a misunderstood concept. In fact, if you find it in a thesaurus and look at the synonyms, you will see there is a reason it is so misunderstood. Weakness. Danger. Exposure. Well, no wonder we find it such a terrifying prospect, the idea of what vulnerability is or means is baked into our language. This abiding challenge is something you may have reflected on from time to time over the years, wondering what it really means or looks like in action.

How much do you open up? How much trust do you give? What do you show? And to who?

It's not easy but being vulnerable allows you to grow the most. It's equal parts scary and liberating. But *why*?

Probably because with vulnerability comes uncertainty, there is a risk in being vulnerable because you are trusting someone as you expose your emotions and innermost thoughts.

I want you to think about it differently. Think about the people you love, whether it's your parents and siblings, your partner and children, or your friends. Think about the energy it takes to love others unconditionally and the vulnerability you extend to those people without a second thought.

Love is everything that vulnerability is, it's teeming with risk, it's brimming with uncertainty. While your family may be less likely to drop you and walk away, there is a risk in maintaining vulnerable platonic and romantic relationships. As much as you love someone, there is always the risk that they won't love you back, that they won't love you as passionately as you love them, or that they will walk away.

You have likely experienced loss in your life, whether it was the cancellation of a friendship or a romantic breakup. You were so close to that person and yet it fell down around you, whether they stabbed you in the back or the separation was tamer than that. It can be heartrending.

There is an element of vulnerability to creative people putting their work on display. Whether it's posting a poem on social media, releasing your first book, playing a song, or showing your artwork. You don't know how people will react. They might laugh. They might not like it. They might talk about you behind your back. You cannot predict how others will perceive you and your creative body of work. No wonder creative types are so shy about sharing their work, with even the people closest to them.

There's a reason that so many people work so hard to create a mask. So many of us work hard to maintain a deadpan face that we maintain no matter what someone says or suggests to us. We tell ourselves that it's professional, we make excuses that it's a benefit, but while you may wear a poker face the anxiety is still churning internally.

What we need more of in this world is people brave enough to share their story, warts, and all. No one is perfect and the idea that anyone can be is ridiculous. Unfortunately, we hold people to the standard of perfection and tear them down when they fail to maintain it.

Of course, we wouldn't hold them to this standard if we could stop ourselves from elevating people to pedestals. We build others up and then tear ourselves down for not maintaining the standard that the elevated person hasn't even achieved. A vicious cycle that stunts growth and prevents us from being vulnerable with others.

Before you can be vulnerable with others, you need to develop an innate compassion for yourself, then for others, and use that to build a strong, authentic connection with others. You cannot achieve that if you are not being authentic. Think of those friendships and loves you lost. Were you your authentic self in those situations?

There's a good chance you kept parts of you hidden or misrepresented who you were just so that someone would like you. Why? Because, deep down, we are all afraid of being rejected for who we really are. So, it becomes easier to paint a different picture of who we are and present that as fact. You can't wear the mask forever.

You can choose to go out of your way to be a vulnerable person. Or you can choose to embrace it fully.

What makes you vulnerable is what makes you beautiful. Chasing perfectionism, attempting to be a stronger person, those are excuses we hide behind in an attempt to avoid vulnerability.

Perhaps the biggest issue we have with vulnerability is our inability to numb particular emotions. When you try to shove fear, disappointment, or anxiety down and stuff it away, you also do the same with happiness, joy, and gratitude.

There is this idea we all had as children that those were our most vulnerable moments and by the time, we'd reach adulthood that vulnerability would fade to black. The reality of the matter is that vulnerability is a natural part of life. It's part of the human experience.

The Myths Of Vulnerability

For the last two decades, research professor Dr. Brene Brown has been studying vulnerability, empathy, shame, and courage. She has written bestselling books on the subject and even has a Netflix special, but more importantly, she has identified certain *myths* of vulnerability and they're an important piece of the puzzle (https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/shyness-is-nice/201905/bren-browns-netflix-special-busts-six-vulnerability-myths).

It's A Weakness

We kind of already addressed this, but it's important enough to touch on again. Whatever you have believed in the past, whatever people try to tell you now, being vulnerable is *not* a weakness. It's human. Here's the thing. When someone else opens up to you, how do you feel? Pretty amazing, right?

It feels *great* to know that someone trusts you enough to share a piece of themselves with you. It feels wonderful to know they can be open and honest with you. Yet, when it's your turn you start to freak out. You don't see their vulnerability as a weakness, you only see it as a weakness for yourself.

You send yourself a very clear message by doing so, a message that suggests your emotions make you weak. Vulnerability is what connects you to the people in your life. It might involve strong emotions, but those strong emotions include empathy, love, happiness, and joy. It's time to start reframing how you see vulnerability and what it means to you.

It's Not Natural

A lot of people have convinced themselves that not everyone experiences vulnerability. They just *don't* engage with it. They either aren't wired that way or refuse to engage. Either way, that's just false. We *all* do vulnerability. Human life in and of itself is vulnerable. It isn't a

choice we actively make, the choice we actively make is how we react and respond when faced with moments of vulnerability. It's how you respond when uncertainty creeps in. It's how you respond when faced with risk. It's how you respond when dealing with emotional exposure.

A lot of us respond by avoiding it, but that doesn't mean it's not natural nor does it mean we're not wired that way. What it *does* mean, however, is that you are very good at avoiding your emotions and convincing yourself it's because you're invulnerable.

It's About Spilling Secrets

We all have secrets and the idea that we have to open up and share them? Oh, no. That's not what vulnerability *is*. It isn't a case of spilling your secrets or wearing them on your sleeve. You're not walking around with your secrets hanging out telling your business to every stranger you encounter. It's sharing your experiences, sharing your feelings, and doing so with the people who deserve to hear them.

It's the people who have earned the right to listen to those things because they have been vulnerable with you and they have your trust. Vulnerability isn't a weakness, it's courage in action and it's worth it. It's worth it for personal growth and it's worth it to deepen the connection you have with others.

Vulnerability In Action

You might believe that your imperfections undercut you. However, they can enhance you and help you grow. If you think about it, life is a bit of an experiment. We don't get an instruction manual on day one, so it should be expected that we have shortcomings and make mistakes. When you embrace *that* it creates a healthy environment for others to do the exact same.

Without vulnerability, where would we be? There would be no creativity. There would be little to no innovation. It's the core of all of us. You can't opt-out of uncertainty. You can't opt-out of emotional exposure. You can't opt-out of risk. Even though you may try. If you are convinced that you're not capable of vulnerability, or that you can simply disengage from it, then there's a good chance it's in control and not in a healthy way. Being vulnerable is natural, it's part of being human. The best leaders and role models aren't afraid to show that. The strongest people aren't afraid to let people in and show others who they are.

Where did your idea of vulnerability come from? Was it instilled in you by society? Or did it start in family life? A lot of parents instill in their children the idea that the world should see only your best bits. That you need to just *get on with it*. That the wider world isn't interested in seeing your dark parts or getting to know your vulnerabilities. Life will, if it hasn't already, show you otherwise.

The coping wall you spent a lifetime building is just one major life event away from breaking down. Sometimes that's what it takes, or a series of minor events, to allow you the strength to show your vulnerability to others. Perhaps you will find your vulnerability in allowing those around you to find theirs.

It's easy to doubt yourself, especially when you are putting yourself out there. You aren't showing weakness by putting it on the line, you're showing the world your true self and that is as courageous as anything you can do.

What Makes Being Vulnerable Easier

In order to be truly vulnerable, you first have to learn to accept yourself as you are. All of you.

That's probably the biggest challenge. It isn't just showing off the shiny bits, it's showing all of you and it's difficult to do that when you're deeply uncomfortable with your flaws or imperfections. Before we can highlight the action steps to being more vulnerable, we need to talk about what's going to make it easier.

It's Easier When You Love Yourself

There is something deeply comforting in John Legend's song *All of Me*. The message in it is that "all of me loves all of you" and that sums vulnerability up so much better than most people can manage. In it, he highlights some of those imperfections and essentially explains that he accepts them. Then, when he hits the bridge it says *everything* "cards on the table, we're both showing hearts.

Risking it all, though it's hard". There is no better way to explain vulnerability than this. Vulnerability, true vulnerability, is a two-way street and before you can navigate it you have to come to terms with self-acceptance and self-love.

Think about the dark parts of you, the parts that you don't like so much. The more you dislike them the more difficult it is to share them with others and the less vulnerable you make yourself to the people who love and care about you. It gets to the point where it feels like there's a gap so big it might as well be the Grand Canyon. You can't imagine ever bridging that gap, but at some point, you have to accept yourself for who you are and take the leap of faith.

When you learn to accept yourself and love yourself, *all of yourself*, then you stop worrying so much about what others think of you. When you truly love yourself, you become much less terrified of rejection. That makes a place of openness much easier to step into.

It Takes Practice

Here's the thing about vulnerability, it isn't a case of doing it once and then flying free. It isn't a case of one and done. You won't make yourself vulnerable once and then suddenly find it easy to open up to everyone about everything. There are still going to be moments where it's a struggle, what's important to remember is that it takes practice so don't give up.

The Benefits Of Vulnerability

Honest Connections

What we all crave are conversations that are deep, meaningful, and honest. Vulnerability provides the basis for those types of conversations with the people in your life which means your connections become more honest, including the connection you have with yourself.

No Pressure For Perfection

People who strive for perfection try to sell it as an attempt to be self-disciplined or incredibly organized. The reality of the matter, though, is that it stems from fear. The fear of failure, or the shame that comes from slipping up. Perfectionism is the myth and vulnerability is the buster that allows you the space to learn that no one is perfect and mistakes are normal and okay to make.

You Become An Inspiration

When you choose to open yourself up and be vulnerable by sharing yourself with others you become a role model, you become an inspiration. We're always so busy dealing with our own things we rarely stop to think about how many other people are going through the same things. Your vulnerability makes space for others to be vulnerable and you move into a position of role model.

You Find Yourself

This is a two-fold benefit. First, vulnerability allows you to grow into your uniqueness and discover more of it for yourself. When you start to talk about your accomplishments, feelings, challenges, and dreams with others it's a healthy way to self-reflect. It's a healthy way to get

to grips with your personality traits. Those characteristics that you may have not realized before you possessed are part of who you are.

Getting to know those traits can help you become the person you truly are. They can help you become your authentic self. In overcoming shame, fear, and embracing vulnerability you realize just how strong you are and that helps you build confidence.

The second part of this is that all of this facilitates your ability to be who you are and to do so unapologetically. As you grew up you probably spent a lot of time trying to fit into the expectations of others. You fell in line with what you thought other people wanted you to do, whether it was your parents, your friends, or even your teachers. You didn't follow your dreams.

At some point, you lost sight of them and instead decided to conform. Vulnerability allows you to find your authentic self and it allows you the space to explore yourself and become who you were always meant to be.

Immeasurable Rewards

When you open yourself up and show your authentic self to the people in your life, you will experience immeasurable rewards. When you're open, people tend to meet you there. And when you meet people in the middle, in a place of vulnerability, the connection you form can only grow.

There is nothing the two of you cannot accomplish. Vulnerability builds true connections. Vulnerability builds true self-love. Vulnerability attracts vulnerable people who are inspired by how open you are.

It isn't easy and you might be surprised by just how powerful the connections you make will be when you are vulnerable. But showing your complexity helps build trust.

Action Steps

Accept Your Worthiness

If you want to be okay with being vulnerable then you first need to accept that you are worthy of receiving both positive responses and vulnerability in return. If you open up to someone you must believe that you warrant that respect and love in return. If you are striving for a dream or chasing a goal you must believe that you possess the motivation and skills to make it happen. You won't get far if you don't believe you deserve the result.

Start by loving yourself, start by appreciating yourself. The rest will follow.

Identify Your Issues With Fears Of Being Vulnerable

It's natural that you should want to shield yourself from pain in order to avoid it. The problem is it isn't possible, at least not all of the time. It may work briefly, but you're just putting it off. When you block out that pain, or at least try to, all you accomplish is blocking out the light. Despite your best efforts, the boundaries you build in an attempt to protect your heart from hurt are only serving to hurt you. Effectively you have drawn yourself into a corner and trapped yourself in an unhealthy place. You may successfully block out the discomfort for a time, but you also block out your propensity for passion, joy, and love.

It is only when you embrace your true self that you become able to embrace your inner strength to find the courage to be vulnerable with others. You block your feelings off entirely when you try to block your heart or guard it too carefully.

Why are you so scared of being vulnerable? The only way to overcome those fears is to identify those fears. You don't have to build walls to be strong. You don't have to erect boundaries around yourself to be powerful. There is power and strength in vulnerability.

Your feelings are there to teach you something. They teach you more about yourself and your desires. You cannot access those feelings or those lessons until you drop your walls.

You might have had a good reason to build those walls in the first place, you may have protected yourself from harm thus far because of those walls, but you are fueling a dysfunctional way of life. It prevents you from enjoying happiness and joy because even when you experience those feelings you are too guarded to truly enjoy them. You're not being strong by doing so.

You can't continue moving through life believing that vulnerability is a weakness. It's a state of courage and from it, everything is possible.

Embrace Vulnerability

How much do you keep to yourself? Are there reactions, feelings, or opinions that you hide and keep to yourself? Do you have a constant narration streaming through your mind and you wonder about judgment, a lack of understanding, people thinking you're weird, or just a total fear of putting yourself out there? You're not alone. That's generally what holds most people back from being truly vulnerable. It wouldn't be difficult to write out a list of worries ten pages long if you wanted to.

However, the experiences that life hands you should change that. The more experience in life you gain, the more you should recognize the power of vulnerability and the benefits vulnerability bring. If your goal is to surround yourself with people who understand you and whom you also understand, then you first must understand *yourself*.

If you are going to say what you feel and think, then the people around you are going to be close enough to see who you are. And as a result, they will reciprocate. You will get a chance to see who they are.

You may have allowed fear to win for a long time, but it's time to close the chapter on fear and open the door to vulnerability. There are four key things you can work on to improve your vulnerability.

- Gaining Awareness
- Improving Honesty
- Acceptance
- Breaking Free

Fight Your Tendencies, But Stop Resisting

When faced with an opportunity to embrace vulnerability, you will have an equal opportunity to flee. That reaction is often knee-jerk. The problem is when you follow that reaction you will only regret it.

Get in tune with yourself and the feelings you get when you tend to run and train yourself to overcome those urges. It will take time and some trial and error to become familiar with such an intense feeling that comes on quickly, but practice will help you get to grips with it.

A journal is a good way to keep track of your emotions and pay attention to how you feel in the moment. When you're aware of those signals and the triggers you can stop them in their tracks.

Do not clench when you feel a moment of vulnerability approach. Do not erect the wall and hide behind it. Give yourself permission to experience the feelings that come, regardless of whether they are positive or negative.

You may be faced with an intimate moment, it might be that you have to share a hard truth, something embarrassing, or even resisting the impulse to exaggerate a story to make yourself look better. Those are all vulnerable moments and ones we navigate often. While those emotions and feelings may be uncomfortable, they are ones that we have to get used to.

Know that no matter the outcome you are strong enough to deal with it. If you share yourself with someone and you are met with indifference or rejection, know that while it may hurt you are strong enough to overcome it. The consequence will be a varying level of pain or hurt. It isn't ideal, of course it isn't, but you are strong enough to pick yourself up and go again.

You can handle a war wound because your vulnerability is making you stronger, either way. That understanding is how you give yourself permission and embrace the freedom of vulnerability. Knowing that no matter what happens when you open up that you are strong enough to walk through it and make it to the other side.

Share Your Hurt

Imagine you make yourself vulnerable and it results in pain or hurt. If you struggle with being vulnerable then you may give in to the instinct to run and cope with your feelings and the fallout by yourself. That would be a mistake. If you open up to someone about your failures, your feelings, your thoughts, you do two things.

You have someone who can offer comfort as you deal with those emotions and you have an opportunity to practice your being vulnerable. When you rely on someone else to soothe you in a moment of vulnerability you are opening yourself to that person and increasing your feelings of vulnerability.

I want you to bring it full circle, back to the start with worthiness. When you shun vulnerability, you give away power. When you open yourself up and show vulnerability you are making a conscious decision to show others that you (and they) are worthy. You show a belief that you can accept and be accepted by extending yourself to them.

When you close yourself off you erect barriers that put you at the mercy of everything and everyone around you. You aren't protecting yourself, you're giving your power away. You make yourself a victim of circumstance and internalize feelings of unworthiness. That only gives others the power to harm you.

Final Thoughts

You may believe that avoiding vulnerability helps you protect yourself, but in reality, it's harming you and ensuring you remain in a state of disappointment. You grow sad that you didn't allow an emotionally charged conversation to play out.

You feel disappointed that you allowed a good opportunity to pass by because you were too afraid to fail or get laughed at. You are frustrated that you didn't *try* to improve your situation. All of that is a result of *not* being vulnerable. Had you made yourself vulnerable, what was the worst that would have happened? Certainly, nothing as bad as the feeling you are experiencing now as a result of avoiding vulnerability.

Most important, being vulnerable allows you to grow the most. On the self-improvement journey, vulnerability improves opportunities for growth and allows you to take the steps to gain that growth.

It's scary, yes, but the alternative is even more terrifying. You're not protecting yourself by running from vulnerability. You're setting yourself up for a world of pain. Vulnerability is not weakness, it takes courage. The vulnerability we're suggesting is all-encompassing. It subsumes both who you are and what you can do.

It's about earning, building, reinforcing, and demonstrating trust to the people closest to you. While there are other ways to begin building trust, such as honoring your commitments, following through, being consistent, being respectful, and being supportive, there can be no greater way to engender trust than through vulnerability.

Those other steps are well and good, but they only get you so far. Trust driven by vulnerability makes you confident and comfortable to share your feelings, mistakes, concerns, failures, and concerns.

The things that you bottle up aren't serving you, releasing them isn't a weakness, you are enough as you are. It's time to open up, you never know what could happen, for all you know you will find contentment on the other side.

BEING VULNERABLE ALLOWS YOU TO GROW THE MOST

Mindmap

Being Vulnerable Allows You To Grow The Most

Action Steps Checklist

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Accept Your Worthiness

- ✓ If you want to be okay with being vulnerable then you first need to accept that you are worthy of receiving both positive responses and vulnerability in return.

- ✓ If you open up to someone you must believe that you warrant that respect and love in return. If you are striving for a dream or chasing a goal you must believe that you possess the motivation and skills to make it happen.

- ✓ You won't get far if you don't believe you deserve the result. Start by loving yourself, start by appreciating yourself. The rest will follow.

Identify Your Issues With Fears Of Being Vulnerable

- ✓ It is only when you embrace your true self that you become able to embrace your inner strength to find the courage to be vulnerable with others. You block your feelings off entirely when you try to block your heart or guard it too carefully.

- ✓ Why are you so scared of being vulnerable? The only way to overcome those fears is to identify those fears. You don't have to build walls to be strong. You don't have to erect boundaries around yourself to be powerful. There is power and strength in vulnerability.

- ✓ Your feelings are there to teach you something. They teach you more about yourself and your desires. You cannot access those feelings or those lessons until you drop your walls.

- ✓ You might have had a good reason to build those walls in the first place, you may have protected yourself from harm thus far because of those walls, but you are fueling a dysfunctional way of life. It prevents you from enjoying happiness and joy because even when you experience those feelings you are too guarded to truly enjoy them. You're not being strong by doing so.

- ✓ You can't continue moving through life believing that vulnerability is a weakness. It's a state of courage and from it, everything is possible.

Embrace Vulnerability

- ✓ How much do you keep to yourself? Are there reactions, feelings, or opinions that you hide and keep to yourself? Do you have a constant narration streaming through your mind and you wonder about judgment, a lack of understanding, people thinking you're weird, or just a total fear of putting yourself out there? The more experience in life you gain, the more you should recognize the power of vulnerability and the benefits vulnerability bring. If your goal is to surround yourself with people who understand you and whom you also understand, then you first must understand yourself.

- ✓ If you are going to say what you feel and think, then the people around you are going to be close enough to see who you are. And as a result, they will reciprocate. You will get a chance to see who they are.

- ✓ You may have allowed fear to win for a long time, but it's time to close the chapter on fear and open the door to vulnerability.

- ✓ There are four key things you can work on to improve your vulnerability.

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    - Improving Honesty
    - Acceptance
    - Breaking Free

Fight Your Tendencies, But Stop Resisting

- ✓ Get in tune with yourself and the feelings you get when you tend to run and train yourself to overcome the urges to flee when the opportunity arises to be vulnerable. It will take time and some trial and error to become familiar with such an intense feeling that comes on quickly, but practice will help you get to grips with it.

- ✓ A journal is a good way to keep track of your emotions and pay attention to how you feel in the moment. When you're aware of those signals and the triggers you can stop them in their tracks.

- ✓ Do not clench when you feel a moment of vulnerability approach. Do not erect the wall and hide behind it. Give yourself permission to experience the feelings that come, regardless of whether they are positive or negative.

- ✓ You may be faced with an intimate moment, it might be that you have to share a hard truth, something embarrassing, or even resisting the impulse to exaggerate a story to make yourself look better. Those are all vulnerable moments and ones we navigate often. While those emotions and feelings may be uncomfortable, they are ones that we have to get used to.

- ✓ Know that no matter the outcome you are strong enough to deal with it. If you share yourself with someone and you are met with indifference or rejection, know that while it may hurt you are strong enough to overcome it. The consequence will be a varying level of pain or hurt. It isn't ideal, of course it isn't, but you are strong enough to pick yourself up and go again.

- ✓ You can handle a war wound because your vulnerability is making you stronger, either way. That understanding is how you give yourself permission and embrace the freedom of vulnerability. Knowing that no matter what happens when you open up that you are strong enough to walk through it and make it to the other side.

Share Your Hurt

- ✓ Share your hurt and do it often. You have someone who can offer comfort as you deal with those emotions and you have an opportunity to practice being vulnerable. When you rely on someone else to soothe you in a moment of vulnerability you are opening yourself to that person and increasing your feelings of vulnerability.

- ✓ Bring it back full circle to worthiness. When you shun vulnerability, you give away power. When you open yourself up and show vulnerability you are making a conscious decision to show others that you (and they) are

worthy. You show a belief that you can accept and be accepted by extending yourself to them.

- ✓ When you close yourself off you erect barriers that put you at the mercy of everything and everyone around you. You aren't protecting yourself, you're giving your power away. You make yourself a victim of circumstance and internalize feelings of unworthiness. That only gives others the power to harm you.

Being Vulnerable Allows You To Grow The Most Action Steps

Workbook

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Complete each sentence prompt 1

The biggest enemy of self-esteem is negative thoughts. I want you to focus on a single negative thought for this exercise, one that bubbles up inside you often. 2

Is there any evidence to support this negative thought? 2

Is there any evidence that contradicts this negative thought? 4

Am I trying to interpret this situation or thought without first collecting all of the evidence? 5

What would my closest friend make of this situation? 6

What would I make of this situation if it was my closest friend going through this? 7

If I reframe this situation through a positive lens, how does it change things? 8

Will this situation or thought matter in a meaningful way one year from now? 9

Will this situation or thought matter in a meaningful way five years from now? 10

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Accept Your Worthiness

There are all different ways in which low self-esteem can manifest. Low self-esteem contributes to anxiety and depression, behavioral problems, productivity issues, and more. So, it's vital to you that you build a strong self-esteem. Part of that and part of being vulnerable is accepting that you are worthy of the same respect and kindness that you extend to others. The three exercises below can help you increase your self-esteem and accept your worthiness.

Complete each sentence prompt

I am at my happiest when I _____.

One of the traits I possess that my friends like/appreciate is_____.

I am proudest of_____.

My partner/family/friend group is happiest when_____.

At work, I am at my best when_____.

One thing that makes me unique is_____.

That's a little getting to know you exercise to get started, now I want to take it a step further. You can complete this over the week ahead or you can complete it retroactively for the week that has just gone by.

Day 1	Today, I did this well…	
	Today, I enjoyed...	
	Today, I was proud when…	
Day 2	Today, I did this well…	
	Today, I enjoyed...	
	Today, I was proud when…	
Day 3	Today, I did this well…	
	Today, I enjoyed...	
	Today, I was proud when…	

Day 4	Today, I did this well…	
	Today, I enjoyed...	
	Today, I was proud when…	
Day 5	Today, I did this well…	
	Today, I enjoyed...	
	Today, I was proud when…	
Day 6	Today, I did this well…	
	Today, I enjoyed...	
	Today, I was proud when…	
Day 7	Today, I did this well…	
	Today, I enjoyed...	
	Today, I was proud when…	

The biggest enemy of self-esteem is negative thoughts. I want you to focus on a single negative thought for this exercise, one that bubbles up inside you often.

However, you can run through this exercise whenever a negative thought manages to bubble to the surface.

Is there any evidence to support this negative thought?

Is there any evidence that contradicts this negative thought?

Am I trying to interpret this situation or thought without first collecting all of the evidence?

What would my closest friend make of this situation?

What would I make of this situation if it was my closest friend going through this?

If I reframe this situation through a positive lens, how does it change things?

Will this situation or thought matter in a meaningful way one year from now?

Will this situation or thought matter in a meaningful way five years from now?

Identify Your Issues With Fears Of Being Vulnerable

Vulnerability Quiz

Let's dig into your impression of vulnerability, what it means, and what it looks like with the quiz below.

1. What Is Vulnerability?

a. Risk, uncertainty, emotional exposure.
b. Foolishness
c. Weakness
d. Attention seeking

2. Being vulnerable means?

a. Seeking sympathy by showing someone how much pain you are experiencing or have experienced.
b. Making stories up in order to gain attention.
c. Sharing private information about yourself to test your relationships.
d. To truly express yourself and show courage.

3. Vulnerability doesn't depend or hinge on the relationship you have with the other person involved.

□ True
□ False

4. Vulnerability requires _____ from the person listening.

a. Time
b. Loyalty, patience, and kindness
c. Effort

5. The belief behind perfectionism is…

a. I can and will do everything well.
b. I can minimize pain, avoid blame, judgment, or shame if I do everything perfectly.
c. Living up to the standard I set for myself.

6. Vulnerability can help you…

a. connect to others.
b. detach from other people.
c. feel poorly about yourself.
d. feel better about yourself.

Answers:
1. A, 2. D, 3. False, 4. B, 5. B, 6. A.

How did you fair? Do you have a good sense of what vulnerability is and what it looks like in action? Let's get into your fear surrounding vulnerability.

Do you hate making yourself vulnerable because it triggers fear? What fear is it triggering for you?

What is it about making yourself vulnerable that makes you feel anxious? What triggers that anxiety or leaves you feeling uneasy and nervous? At what point does it kick in?

What is your biggest, most obvious fear relating to vulnerability?

Is there a moment in your childhood or earlier life that created this fear of vulnerability?

Is there someone you want to get vulnerable with, but there is a fear holding you back? What fear is holding you back and why?

Have you avoided certain people or situations because you are too afraid to make yourself vulnerable?

Do you think there's a deeper fear it could be based on or in?

What topics do you find uncomfortable to discuss? Why? What fear is that based on?

Are you in an unhealthy relationship that you are too afraid to leave?

Are you in an unhappy relationship that could use the work of vulnerability, but you're too afraid of losing that person to reach out?

Are you in a situation that requires vulnerability, but you have been avoiding it due to fear? What fear? Why?

Are you afraid of making yourself vulnerable because you are afraid of having home truths delivered?

Do you feel scared, shy, nervous, anxious, or uncomfortable when someone tries to be vulnerable with you?

Do you hesitate to make yourself vulnerable because you worry about what others think about you?

What is it about that that scares you?

Does uncertainty make you feel uncomfortable? Is that what is holding you back from being vulnerable?

Does change scare you or is it something you feel uncomfortable with? Why?

Do you enjoy spending time alone? If not, what fear drives that?

Are you comfortable making yourself vulnerable?

If not, what fear can you pinpoint as a reason for this?

The answers you provided above should help you get to grips with your deepest fears with regards to making yourself vulnerable. If it is a rational, factual, or logical fear, then create a plan to overcome it.

Embrace Vulnerability

Gaining Awareness

Find a quiet place and get comfortable. I want to walk you through a meditation process you can use to gain awareness. As you close your eyes and allow the tension to roll off of you, I want you to focus on the moment. Forget about the past. Don't think about the future. Just focus on your breath, notice how it feels as it moves in and out of your body. Notice how every breath you inhale and exhale differs slightly from the last. Pay attention to the thoughts that come and go, if you feel anxious or worried you can recognize it before letting it go. You can make a mental note of your thoughts, but don't hold onto them. Just sit with yourself and breathe for a few minutes.

What did this exercise teach you? Gaining awareness about yourself, thoughts, and feelings is the first step to embracing vulnerability.

Fight Your Tendencies, But Stop Resisting

You might feel like running when moments of vulnerability approach, but you cannot give in to that tendency. That is the tendency to fight. You have to stop resisting every opportunity you have to make yourself vulnerable. With that in mind, let's work through your emotional avoidance.

Think about a previous experience where you felt overwhelmed.

You experienced unwanted feelings, memories, or events that you wanted to avoid and you did avoid it rather than engaging. It can be at work, within your family, a friendship situation, or even back to your school days. Write about that experience below.

Note the feelings that cropped up when thinking about this experience.

How did you try to avoid engaging with those emotions?

How useful was that avoidance?

Did you eventually have to deal with those emotions and how did you do so?

Review what you have written above and consider how the vulnerability could have guided this situation more effectively.

How would you deal with this same situation if it were to arise now and you were to employ vulnerability?

Share Your Hurt

Plan what you will share

We don't need to make this more complicated than necessary. This is simply a challenge to share some of your emotional pain with someone close to you, someone you trust. Take some time to write about what you will share, who you will share with, and how you plan to share it.

Reflect on your share

Once you sit down with this person, I want you to return to this workbook and record the experience below. Make a note of how it felt, how the person responded, and how you feel as a result of opening yourself up.

How can this exercise improve your experiences going forward?

Free Journal