

Why Great Leaders Must Be Vulnerable

You don't know it all. There are limits to your knowledge, ability, and energy. And while the competitive nature of our culture, which often sneaks into our lives in ministry, would have us to hid all of our weaknesses in fear, there is tremendous power in becoming vulnerable with people.

Deciding to become vulnerable is risky. As church leaders, there will be people in our congregations who don't want us to be human. They would prefer that we wear a halo and pretend that we're never really tempted to sin in the same ways that they are. They feel safer if we, as spiritual leaders, are immune to the crass realities of life.

But when we hide our weaknesses, three big problems arise:

- Our weaknesses get worse, feeding off of the shame and secrecy.
- We become dishonest and hypocritical.
- The truth inevitably comes out and people are disillusioned as a result.

So is bearing our vulnerability worth the risk? Absolutely. Here are some important reasons why vulnerability is a forgotten virtue of great leadership...

1. It's emotionally healthy.

Maintaining an image of perfection requires enormous amounts of emotional energy. One of the reasons we sometimes get so stressed out and depressed is because we're working so hard to stay behind the facade and keep everyone convinced that we're strong.

If you are worried about your image, you are heading for burnout. Keeping people happy and impressing others is terribly exhausting, and it's always temporary. Eventually, people get to know our weaknesses all at once.

Being real and vulnerable, on the other hand, is liberating. It's freeing. In fact, it's really the only way to live. James 5:16 says, *"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed"* (NLT). We need to confess our sins to God to be forgiven, but we also need to talk about our weaknesses with others to find healing.

In fact, some faults won't budge *until* you confess them to others.

2. It's spiritually empowering.

James also says, *"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble"* (James 4:6 NLT). It is impossible to lead in ministry without the grace of God. And how do you find the grace you need? You find it by humbling yourself before God and others.

Remember, **pride prevents power!**

3. It's relationally attractive.

Everybody is wearing a mask, and it's what we expect others to do as well. When we choose to throw our masks away, we surprise people with our authenticity. Being real is the fastest way to endear yourself to others.

We tend to love people who are real, honest, humble, and vulnerable and we tend to despise people who are deceitful, arrogant, and hypocritical. Paul told the Thessalonian believers, "*We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News, but our own lives, too*" (1 Thessalonians 2:8 NLT).

When you share your strengths, you create competition. But when you share your weaknesses, you create community. You let people know, *we're all in this together*.

Pastors are often incredibly lonely people. Why? I believe it's in large part because they're so afraid of the cost of being vulnerable.

4. It's a mark of leadership.

We only follow leaders we trust. The first requirement for effective leadership is credibility, and the more *honest* you are, the more *credible* you become.

Real leaders lead by example. They go first. If your desire is that the church, group, or organization you're leading be a place where people are open, you must be the first to open up.

You must decide whether you want to **impress** people (which you can do from a distance) or **influence** people (which you can only do up close).

5. It increases the impact of your preaching.

The concept of [preaching from our vulnerability](#) is something I've written about before because it's a really big idea. In the previous generation of great preachers, we usually asked *what's the most **powerful** way to preach this?* Now, we should be asking *what's the most **personal** way to preach this?*

You will always be more effective as a personal witness and a storyteller than as a skilled orator. As you preach and lead, try to answer these questions...

- What struggles and weaknesses should I share with others?
- What progress am I making that others could learn from?
- What am I currently learning, especially from my failures?

Remember this: ***The minister is the message.***

> [Read more from Rick.](#)