part two

LIVING INTO OUR VALUES

Daring leaders who live into their values are never silent about hard things.

*t*he arena, particularly during dark and hard moments when we're trying to be really brave, can be confusing and overwhelming: distractions, noise, a rapidly blinking Exit sign that promises immediate relief from the discomfort, and the cynics in the stands. In those tough matches, when the critics are being extra loud and rowdy, it's easy to start hustling—to try to prove, perfect, perform, and please. God knows these are my four big *p*'s. We can either hustle to show the crowd that we deserve to be there, or we can let them scare us off. Either way, it's easy to let them get in our head and hijack our efforts.

In those moments when we start putting other voices in front of our own, we forget what made us go into the arena in the first place, the reason we're there. We forget our values. Or, frequently, we don't even know what they are or how to name them. If we do not have clarity of values, if we don't have anywhere else to look or focus, if we don't have that light up above to remind you why we're there, the cynics and the critics can bring us to our knees.

More often than not, our values are what lead us to the arena door—we're willing to do something uncomfortable and daring because of our beliefs. And when we get in there and stumble or fall, we need our values to remind us why we went in, especially when we are facedown, covered in dust and sweat and blood.

Here's the thing about values: While courage requires checking our armor and weapons at the arena door, we do not have to enter every tough conversation and difficult rumble completely empty-handed.

The daring leaders we interviewed were never empty-handed in the arena. In addition to rumble skills and tools, they always carried with them clarity of values. This clarity is an essential support, a North Star in times of darkness.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* values are "principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgment of what is important in life." In our

work, I simplify the definition: **A *value* is a way of being or believing that we hold most important.**

Living into our values means that we do more than profess our values, we practice them. We walk our talk—we are clear about what we believe and hold important, and we take care that our intentions, words, thoughts, and behaviors align with those beliefs.

Living into our values requires some upfront work—contemplation that most of us have never taken the time to do. And, as much as I don't want to make this part feel like a workbook, it's going to be work-in-a-book. I'll take you through the five steps and share some of my experiences (good and bad), so if you hang with me, after a few short pages, I bet you'll know more about yourself and how to live into your values than you do right now.

Step One: We Can't Live into Values That We Can't Name

The first step of living into our values is divining what's most important to us. What is our North Star? What values do we hold most sacred? We can't work to stay aligned with values when we haven't spent any time getting curious about, or naming, what we care about most.

When I facilitate this work in organizations, I always get this question: "Do you want me to identify my professional values or my personal values?" Here's the rub: **We have only one set of values**. We don't shift our values based on context. We are called to live in a way that is aligned with what we hold most important regardless of the setting or situation. This, of course, is the challenge of living into our values: those moments when our values are in conflict with the values of our organization, our friends, a stranger in line at the grocery store or polling station, or even our family.

Below is the list of values that we use in our work. As you can see, there are blank spaces for you to write in values that we may not have included. The task is to pick the two that you hold most important. I know this is tough, because almost everyone we've done this work with (including me) wants to pick somewhere between ten and fifteen. I can soften the blow by suggesting that you start by circling those fifteen. But you can't stop until you're down to two core values.

Here's why: The research participants who demonstrated the most willingness to rumble with vulnerability and practice courage tethered their behavior to one or two values, not ten. This makes sense for a couple of reasons. First, I see it the same way that I see Jim Collins's mandate "If you have more than three priorities, you have no priorities." At some point, if everything on the list is important, then nothing is truly a driver for you. It's just a gauzy list of feel-good words.

Second, I've taken more than ten thousand people through this work, and when people are willing to stay with the process long enough to whittle their big list down to two, they always come to the same conclusion that I did with my own values process: My two core values are where all of the "second tier" circled values are tested.

list of values

Accountability
Achievement
Adaptability
Adventure
Altruism
Ambition
Authenticity
Balance
Beauty
Being the best
Belonging
Career
Caring
Collaboration
Commitment
Community
Compassion
Competence
Confidence
Connection
Contentment
Contribution
Cooperation
Courage
Creativity
Curiosity
Dignity
Diversity
Environment
Efficiency
Equality
Ethics
Excellence
Fairness
Faith

Forgiveness
Freedom
Friendship
Fun
Future generations
Generosity
Giving back
Grace
Gratitude
Growth
Harmony
Health
Home
Honesty
Hope
Humility
Humor
Inclusion
Independence
Initiative
Integrity
Intuition
Job security
Joy
Justice
Kindness
Knowledge
Leadership
Learning
Legacy
Leisure
Love
Loyalty
Making a difference
Nature
Openness
Optimism
Order
Parenting
Patience
Patriotism

Personal fulfillment
Power
Pride
Recognition
Reliability
Resourcefulness
Respect
Responsibility
Risk taking
Safety
Security
Self-discipline
Self-expression
Self-respect
Serenity
Service
Simplicity
Spirituality
Sportsmanship
Stewardship
Success
Teamwork
Thrift
Time
Tradition
Travel
Trust
Truth
Understanding
Uniqueness
Usefulness
Vision
Vulnerability
Wealth
Well-being
Wholeheartedness
Wisdom

Write your own:
_____

Faith   Patriotism

Family   Peace

Financial stability   Perseverance

Here's how that works in my life: My two central values are faith and courage. I hated not circling "family." But as I dug in, I realized that while my family is the most important thing in my life, my commitment to them is fueled by my faith and my courage.

For example, when I say no to an exciting work opportunity because I don't want to miss driving carpool, I lean into my courage and faith. It may be different for you, but I have to be brave enough to say no and not let the fear that someone might think I'm being ungrateful for not taking the opportunity get the best of me. I also need the strength of my faith to remind me that if I do what's right for me, there will be other opportunities. Sometimes my prayer is simply *If I miss the boat, it wasn't my boat.*

Our values should be so crystallized in our minds, so infallible, so precise and clear and unassailable, that they don't feel like a choice—they are simply a definition of who we are in our lives. In those hard moments, we know that we are going to pick what's right, right now, over what is easy. Because that is **integrity—choosing courage over comfort; it's choosing what's right over what's fun, fast, or easy; and it's practicing your values, not just professing them**.

Choose one or two values—the beliefs that are most important and dear to you, that help you find your way in the dark, that fill you with a feeling of purpose. As you read them, you should feel a deep resonance of self-identification. Resist holding on to words that resemble something you've been coached to be, words that have never felt true for you.

Ask yourself:

Does this define me?

Is this who I am at my best?

Is this a filter that I use to make hard decisions?

Step Two: Taking Values from BS to Behavior

The reason we roll our eyes when people start talking about values is that everyone talks a big values game but *very* few people actually practice one. It can be infuriating, and it's not just individuals who fall short of the talk. In our experience, only about 10 percent of organizations have operationalized their values into teachable and observable behaviors that are

used to train their employees and hold them accountable. *Ten percent. (*And yes, I've taken to the occasional "izing" of words.)

If you're not going to take the time to translate values from ideals to behaviors—if you're not going to teach people the skills they need to show up in a way that's aligned with those values and then create a culture in which you hold one another accountable for staying aligned with the values —it's better not to profess any values at all. They become a joke. A cat poster. Total BS.

In this second step of the Living into Our Values process, we need to define three or four behaviors that support our values and three or four "slippery behaviors"—actions we find ourselves tempted to do even though they are counter to our values. And get explicit. There's no magic in three or four behaviors—it's just enough to force us to think beyond what's easy and not so many that we're just making a list.

The best way to do this is to think through some arena moments when you either did or did not show up in a way that felt aligned with your values. For example, I often find myself in dust-ups on social media around social justice issues. People will leave comments like "Stick to the writing —immigration isn't your issue," or "Stop talking about race so much." These sentiments even show up at my public events during the Q&A sessions.

My value of courage calls on me to stand up and speak out for my beliefs. If you say something to me, or in front of me, that I find racist, or sexist, or homophobic, even if other people are laughing, I'm not going to laugh. I'm going to ask you not to say that stuff around me. I don't do this out of self-righteousness or being "better than"—trust me, there are times when I'd rather just shoot you a dirty look and walk away. I say something because courage is one of my key values, and for me to feel physically, emotionally, and spiritually okay, courage *insists* that I honor it by choosing my voice over my comfort.

If there's an issue that I feel passionate about, I'm going to write about it and post about it on social media. If you leave a shaming comment or you're hateful toward me or anyone in my community, I'm going to delete it and ban you from my page. One of my courage behaviors is *Don't choose*

silence over what is right. It's not my job to make others more comfortable or to be liked by everyone.

Faith has been so tough for me over the past year because one of my faith behaviors is to *find the face of God in everyone*. Ugh. That means rather than hating people, I have to hate only their ideas. Rather than shaming and blaming people, I have to hold them accountable. *Blame is so easy and accountability is such a time-suck. And no fun at all.* I tried reworking faith to be finding God in the face of people I like and with whom I agree, but that didn't last more than a day. I quickly turned into someone I didn't like —I couldn't find God in myself.

Another one of my faith behaviors is *no dehumanizing language.* I've been living into this value for close to twenty years, and now I cringe when I hear anything dehumanizing from either side of the aisle. I cringe a lot and I have to take regular social media sabbaticals. It's the most difficult when I have to say something to someone who shares my politics and justifies dehumanizing language because "we're the good guys."

We all know what it feels like to walk outside our values. We all know what it feels like to stay silent and comfortable instead of voicing what we believe. I test my values all the time. I see how far I can push and cajole them before they break. I'm imperfect and scared a lot. We all are.

But think about those moments when something really hard has happened to someone in our lives—maybe a friend or a colleague has a partner or parent or child who has been hurt or killed. And we know that we need to make a call to check in and see how we can support. But rather than doing that, we zigzag; we walk past the phone so many times that we eventually convince ourselves that it's too embarrassingly late to make the call.

It starts with "Okay, I should call, but they're probably eating dinner, I'll call later." Several hours go by. "You know what, it's bedtime, I'm going to call tomorrow." You wake up the next morning: "I bet they still have a lot of family over. I'll call in a few days when it's quieter." And what do we feel when we never make that call, and we run into that colleague or friend two or three weeks later at the grocery store? Most of us feel shame, and we feel completely outside our integrity. On my list of courage behaviors is

something my mom taught us growing up: *Show up for people in pain and don't look away.*

From my experience and from what I've learned from the daring leaders I've interviewed, I will pick those five to ten seconds of discomfort any day over pulling in to my driveway and turning off the car while thinking about what I did, or didn't do, and how missing the opportunity to do or say something was a betrayal of what I value most. Another courage behavior for me: *Choose courage over comfort.*

And I'll share a little hack with you about those seconds of discomfort. I did an experiment several years ago to see how long the intense, in-the-moment discomfort lasts. After a couple of months of tracking it, I landed on eight seconds. In most situations, there are eight seconds of intense discomfort. I told Steve, "Oh, my God! It's like riding a bull! You have to make it eight seconds!" So now, when I know something hard is "fixin' to happen," I always think of George Strait's "Amarillo by Morning":

> *But I'll be looking for eight*
> *When they pull that gate.*

I mean, c'mon. We can do anything for eight seconds, right? The discomfort may linger long after, but the hardest part of the ride has settled down. Below are some questions and prompts to help you think through operationalizing your values.

Value #1 _____

    1. What are three behaviors that support your value?

    2. What are three slippery behaviors that are outside your value?

    3. What's an example of a time when you were fully living into this value?

Value #2 _____

    1. What are three behaviors that support your value?

    2. What are three slippery behaviors that are outside your value?

3. What's an example of a time when you were fully living into this value?

Step Three: Empathy and Self-Compassion: The Two Most Important Seats in the Arena

One of the greatest challenges during our arena moments is the people in the stands, specifically the hardened season ticket holders who show up whether it's rain, shine, or sleet. The arena is full of seats, but these are the seats we choose to focus on. Shame has two of those season tickets. Gremlins travel in pairs so they can squeeze you from both sides: *Not good enough* and *Who do you think you are?* Scarcity and comparison are also in seats close by. Scarcity is the voice of "Never enough time, money, love, attention…," and comparison brings "Look how other people are doing it so much better than you."

The box seats are the privileged seats. They are filled with the people who built the arena. And they built that arena to benefit the people who look like them in terms of race, class, sexual orientation, ability, and status. These people have already determined your odds based on stereotypes, misinformation, and fear. And we have to acknowledge this and talk about it. **Regardless of the values you pick, daring leaders who live into their values are never silent about hard things.**

There is an incredibly important, uncomfortable, and brave discussion that every single leader and every organization in the world should be having about privilege. The truth is, when I walk into the arena, I do not have the same experience as other people walking into the same arena. I'm white, I'm straight, I'm educated. There are a lot of people in those stands who are expecting me to do well and are cheering me on. Do I have something to overcome around gender? Absolutely. But there is no doubt that I operate from a place that is far more privileged than others. When we think about the arena, we have to think about factors like race, age, gender, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, and cognitive ability, to name just a few.

I haven't been in a company in five years where people aren't whispering, "This is great, but, um, how do we talk about race?" My

response: "You first *listen* about race. You will make a lot of mistakes. It will be super uncomfortable. And there's no way to talk about it without getting some criticism. But you can't be silent." To opt out of conversations about privilege and oppression because they make you uncomfortable is the epitome of privilege.

Silence is not brave leadership, and silence is not a component of brave cultures. Showing up and being courageous around these difficult conversations is not a path you can predetermine. A brave leader is not someone who is armed with all the answers. A brave leader is not someone who can facilitate a flawless discussion on hard topics. A brave leader is someone who says *I see you. I hear you. I don't have all the answers, but I'm going to keep listening and asking questions.* We all have the capacity to do that. We all have the ability to foster empathy. If we want to do good work, it's imperative that we continue to flesh out these harder conversations, to push against secrecy, silence, and judgment. It's the only way to eradicate shame from the workplace, to clear the way for a performance in the arena that correlates with our highest values and not the fearmongers from the stands.

The most important seats in the arena, the ones we need to be able to focus on, especially in difficult times, are reserved for empathy and self-compassion. In the empathy seat, or seats, we just need one or two people who know our values and support our efforts to put them into action. And the self-compassion seat is for us. It's a reminder that if we can't cheer ourselves on, we shouldn't expect others to do it. If we don't make our values priorities, we can't ask others to do it for us.

1. Who is someone who knows your values and supports your efforts to live into them?
2. What does support from this person look like?
3. What can you do as an act of self-compassion to support yourself in the hard work of living into your values?
4. What are the early warning indicators or signs that you're living outside your values?
5. What does it feel like when you're living into your values?

6. How does living into your two key values shape the way you give and receive feedback?

I'm lucky because I feel I have an empathy section behind my empathy seat. The empathy seat belongs to Steve. Even when he knows that my taking on an issue will bring stress to our house, he will say, "This is what you have to do. It's who you are and why I love you. Now let's batten down the hatches and do this thing." My sisters, and even my kids, now that they're older, are often in that empathy hot seat. It's not always easy to support someone who has a public presence. They know that the backlash from speaking up can be cruel and even threatening at times. My work team is also a huge part of my empathy section. I couldn't do the work I do without them.

Support looks like love, encouragement, straight talk, boundary setting, and the occasional "No—I don't support this, and here's why."

Self-compassion is an easy list to write, and a hard list to live. For me, it's all about sleep, healthy food, exercise, and connection. It's what I mentioned in the concussion story—the best predictor of living into my values is being in physical, spiritual, and emotional shape.

I know I'm living outside my values when I am…*drum roll…this is a huge issue for me*…resentful. Resentment is my barometer and my early warning system. It's the canary in the coal mine. It shows up when I stay quiet in order not to piss off someone. It shows up when I put work before my well-being, and it blows the doors off the hinges when I'm not setting good boundaries.

Faith and courage take a lot of work. You are far enough into this book that you know how much effort and skill it takes to be brave. Faith is the same. My favorite definition of spirituality is from my friend and mentor Pittman McGehee. Pittman is a Jungian analyst, Episcopal priest, and author whose work has been a tremendous help to me. Pittman says, "Spirituality is the deep human longing to experience the transcendent in our ordinary life—it's the expectation to experience the extraordinary in the ordinary, the miraculous in the mundane, and the sacred camouflaged in the profane."

My faith requires serious daily practice. I don't have time to get caught up in some bullshit beef on Twitter with a stranger. I'm busy trying to find the miraculous in the mundane (I feel a new out-of-office automated email reply coming on). When it hits me that I'm squandering precious time, I get resentful and mad at myself. If you're thinking "Maybe your Twitter fight is the sacred camouflaged in the profane?"—I'm not quite there yet.

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What it feels like when I'm living into my values: How I think about this question has changed over the years. I used to believe that we would always know we're in our values when the decision comes easily, but I've learned as a leader that it's actually the opposite: I know I'm in my values when a decision is somewhere between tough and really tough. I wish doing the right thing was the easy thing, but it rarely is. I no longer expect wonderful moments. Instead, I look for quiet moments when I feel strong and solid. And, usually, tired. To quote Leonard Cohen, as I often do about the tough arena moments, "Love is not a victory march. It's a cold and it's a broken hallelujah."

Living into Our Values and Feedback

One of the biggest challenges we face, especially at work, is staying aligned with our values when giving and receiving feedback.

I put together the engaged feedback checklist for *Daring Greatly,* which is worth revisiting here. I wrote it based on the research we did for that book, and I'm happy to report that it stands the test of the new leadership data as well.

This is a guideline for readiness. Are you in the right headspace to sit down and give someone feedback?

1. I know I'm ready to give feedback when I'm ready to sit next to you rather than across from you.

Often, sitting across from someone is not just about logistics. It reflects that we think about relationships as inherently adversarial. Maybe it's okay to occasionally sit across from someone, but if there's something huge between you, then a massive desk is only going to create more distance. It is also a representation of a power differential.

2. I know I'm ready to give feedback when I'm willing to put the problem in front of us rather than between us (or sliding it toward you).

A big lumbering issue between two people is very different than sitting next to someone and putting the issue in front of both of you, so that you can look at the problem from the same perspective. Often, this requires a shift in language from "You are wrong here" to "There's something that needs to change." It is a completely different physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual experience when someone is on your side and helping you through the hurdle rather than pointing out your participation in the problem.

3. I know I'm ready to give feedback when I'm ready to listen, ask questions, and accept that I may not fully understand the issue.

Often, in the midst of a feedback session, we forget that we're supposed to be facilitating and fact finding from a place of curiosity, not lecturing. When we lecture, we're typically focused on getting it over with, on shoveling one lesson into one session. We want to get this difficult feedback or hard conversation over with, and we certainly don't want to string it along over multiple sessions. Instead, we must lean into our grounded confidence: "Here's what I'm seeing; here's what I'm making up about what I see. I have a lot of questions. Can you help me understand?" Then dig in, take notes, and ask questions, followed by: "I need some time to think about this. Can we circle back tomorrow? I'll come to you if more questions come up, and if you have questions, please come to me."

4. I know I'm ready to give feedback when I'm ready to acknowledge what you do well instead of just picking apart your mistakes.

Now, this can be tricky. Sometimes there's a crisis, and sometimes there is a work product or a deliverable that has a tight timeline and is not coming along according to expectations. In those moments, it doesn't always feel authentic to sit down and say "Hey, thanks for your time. Here are three things you do well" when you're dying to cut to the chase with "This is not right, and it's due at five o'clock." But the latter doesn't serve. I think back to Ken Blanchard's wisdom and how catching people doing things right is so much more powerful than just angrily listing the mistakes. It takes two minutes to say "I know this is due at five o'clock, and the executive summary looks pitch perfect. The tables need some serious work, though. What does support look like?"

5. I know I'm ready to give feedback when I recognize your strengths and how you can use them to address your challenges.

I believe a strengths-based feedback style is the best approach, in which you explain some of the strengths or things that they do really well that have not been applied to the current situation. "One of your great strengths is attention to detail. You do sweat the small stuff and it makes a big difference in our team. As I look at this, I don't see you applying that skill here, and we need it." If you are in such a state of anger that you cannot come up with a single positive quality that this person possesses, then you are not in the right headspace to give good feedback until you can be less emotionally reactive.

6. I know I'm ready to give feedback when I can hold you accountable without shaming or blaming.

Unfortunately, many of us were raised in families where feedback came in only one of two packages—shame or blame. Giving productive and respectful feedback is a skill set that most of us have never learned. It can be helpful to think through a conversation and make note of where it might get shaming. When you acknowledge your potential to go to that place, you're in a safer mindset to avoid it.

7. I know I'm ready to give feedback when I'm open to owning my part.

If you're not ready to own anything, if you're convinced that you did nothing to contribute to the issue, you're not ready to meet. As I mentioned in "The Call to Courage," I've never seen a situation that required feedback where the person delivering the feedback didn't own some part.

8. I know I'm ready to give feedback when I can genuinely thank someone for their efforts rather than just criticizing them for their failings.

Look for opportunities to call out the good: "I want to share some feedback with you about that phone call. I think you did a really good job putting a time fence around this project with our clients. I know that was very difficult, and I think you kicked ass on that."

9. I know I'm ready to give feedback when I can talk about how resolving these challenges will lead to growth and opportunity.

Be prepared to discuss what needs to change within the context of productive feedback and career tracking. "What I'm asking you to change ties directly to what we've talked about as one of your personal growth areas or one of your personal challenges." It's essential to tie what you're observing to what's important for the people you're talking to.

10. I know I'm ready to give feedback when I can model the vulnerability and openness that I expect to see from you.

If you're expecting someone to operate from a place of receptivity, then you had better show up open, curious, vulnerable, and full of questions. You have to model the behavior. You can't hold yourself to a different set of expectations and standards. If you come in defensive, guarded, and ready to kick some ass with hard feedback, that feedback will bounce right off someone sitting across from you who is also defensive, guarded, and ready to kick some ass.

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In addition to this readiness checklist, we have to think about how we're going to live into our values while giving and receiving feedback. Before I deliver feedback, whether it's to direct reports, other leaders, or partners outside the business, I think carefully about how I want to show up in the conversation. One of the most painful things we experience in difficult interactions is coming out of our values and stepping out of our integrity.

I always bring my core values to feedback conversations. I specifically bring courage, which means that I don't choose comfort over being respectful and honest—choosing politeness over respect is not respectful. Second, I allow people to have feelings without taking responsibility for those feelings. If I'm sharing something that's difficult, I need to make space for people to feel the way they feel—in contrast to either punishing them for having those feelings because I'm uncomfortable, or trying to caretake and rescue them from their feelings, because that's not courageous, and that's not my job. And it gets in the way of good feedback.

GETTING GOOD AT RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Our core values are relevant here as well, but in a different way. The primary question here is *How do we stay aligned with our values while we're receiving feedback, regardless of the skill of the person delivering it?*

One of the most difficult through-lines of our lives is that we are on the receiving end of feedback starting at birth: parents, teachers, clergy, coaches, college professors, and then those thirty or forty years of bosses, managers, and colleagues. Giving good feedback is a skill and some do it well. Others do not.

We have to be able to take feedback—regardless of how it's delivered—and apply it productively. We have to do this for a simple reason: Mastery requires feedback. I don't care what we're trying to master—and whether we're trying to develop greatness or proficiency—it always requires feedback.

Receiving feedback is tricky for several reasons. One, we might be receiving feedback from someone who lacks delivery skills. Two, we might

be at the hands of a skilled person, but we don't know their intentions. Three, unlike when we're giving feedback and we schedule it and know precisely what we're going to say or do, when we're receiving feedback, we can sometimes be taken off guard. Someone calls us into their office, or we pick up the phone and it's a client, and they say, "Hey, we're looking at the pitch you all submitted. We think it sucks, and it's so far off brief, and we can't believe you think we're going to spend this much money with you." And that's feedback. Does it feel productive? Is it easy to stay open and receptive to it? Not so much after we hear the word *sucks*.

But there are several tactics that can help. When receiving feedback, we can identify a value-supporting behavior or a piece of self-talk to help in the moment. Here's mine: When I'm receiving feedback, and I want to stay aligned with my value of courage, I say to myself, "I'm brave enough to listen." I actually put it on repeat: "I'm brave enough to listen. I don't have to take it all in or add it to my load, but I'm brave enough to listen."

Another thing I repeat to myself, particularly when I'm sitting across from, or with, someone who does not have great feedback delivery skills, is "There's something valuable here, there's something valuable here. Take what works and leave the rest."

The third thing I repeat to myself, even if the person who is offering feedback is skilled and it's a productive conversation, but I'm still reeling because it's hard to hear, is "This is the path to mastery, this is the path to mastery," or "These people care about this as much as I do." I get feedback all the time about my speaking style, or what I'm wearing onstage, or how I'm coming across in a video. I have to remind myself that the person who is offering it has in mind the best interest of what we're trying to create. I stay embedded in my value of courage by the way I talk to myself when the hard things are happening.

A man who took one of our courses and cites knowledge as a core value explained that feedback is an essential lever for understanding himself better: "I always stay curious about what I'm hearing, because I know I can take this feedback and turn it into a learning, or use the knowledge I already have to improve or better understand." I asked a woman whose core value is family how she shows up when receiving feedback, and her response moved me: "I show up how I would want my niece to watch me showing

up; be calm, respectful, listen, don't get discouraged, keep asking questions."

It also takes practice to stay present and avoid being defensive. Achieving this is a huge success in and of itself because everything in you is likely wanting to shut down in a strategy of disconnection. If my body is saying, "This doesn't feel safe or good, you'd better shut down," I'm not going to hear anything you're telling me, I'm just going to mutter, "Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, got it."

Think back to a recent feedback conversation in which you became defensive. Physical signs: arms folded over chest (or hands in pockets), dry mouth. Thought patterns: listening for what you don't agree with ("They haven't heard my side of the story," "They aren't seeing the big picture"). Emotional signs: feeling anxious, frustrated, overwhelmed.

If we find ourselves in this position frequently, it is important that we work to develop behaviors and self-talk phrases that reposition how we show up so that we can lean into curiosity, ask questions, learn the other person's perspective, and slow down the conversation. If we're truly overwhelmed, we need to be able to suggest making time to talk about the issue later.

The ultimate goal in receiving feedback: a skillful blend of listening, integrating feedback, and reflecting it back with accountability. Being able to fully acknowledge and hold the discomfort gives us power in both the giving and receiving of feedback. If I'm sitting there getting hard feedback, feeling overwhelmed by all these things I'm not doing well, or all the ways in which I've failed, it's okay to say: "You know what, I'm overloaded right now. If we can pick one of these and dig into it, and then make time to come back and talk through the other issues, I'm willing to do that, but I can only hear so much right now." That is productive and respectful and brave.

Because of my core value of courage, I give myself permission to say "I need a break" or "The way you're acting is keeping me from hearing what you're saying. I get that you're pissed, that's okay, but we're going to have to find a different way to do this because I'm just defending myself." For me, that aligns with courage. Ask for more time; ask to circle back; ask them to say more. When you can walk out of a difficult feedback session

and say "I stayed connected, I stayed courageous, I stayed authentic, I stayed curious," then that itself is daring, and that in itself is a win.

To close this section on feedback, I want to share a story from Natalie Dumond, the chief culture officer at Miovision, a smart city technology company that provides cities with the data, tools, and insights they need to reduce traffic congestion, make intelligent urban planning decisions, and improve safety on their roads. It's a powerful example of how it's possible to create a feedback culture that works.

Natalie writes:

> Like many organizations, Miovision has struggled for years to find a way to make performance management—more specifically, performance feedback—have meaning and offer valuable perspectives for each employee. When we started on this journey we implemented long-winded performance forms with star rating systems and lists of competencies. After the form was established we eventually incorporated 360 reviews, which seemed to promote passive-aggressive behaviors and make employees anxious about what was being said about them.
>
> Human resources and team leaders were having to police the program to ensure everyone was participating. To make it worse, leaders weren't equipped to have hard conversations. As a result, they were avoiding the conversations entirely or executing them poorly. Overall, the program wasn't working, and it wasn't adding meaning or value for the employees. The program also wasn't cultivating or promoting the behaviors we wanted to see throughout the organization. Behaviors like trust, vulnerability, curiosity, positive intent, and self-awareness.
>
> After years of trying to find a meaningful performance management system, we decided to strip it all away and do something radical and vulnerable. We put the employees in the driver's seat, with their leads riding shotgun, and feedback and growth became everyone's responsibility. Our goal was to create a culture of trust built through courageous feedback,

where employees leaned into their vulnerability and sought out feedback from their colleagues one-on-one. We envisioned a culture where employees have the courage and skills to say the hard things to their peers, and where leaders see the value in candor and how difficult conversations lead to growth.

We were successful in implementing this approach, and it's now a part of our culture. A lot of the vision and inspiration behind this program came from Brené's Daring Leadership program, especially our focus on courageous feedback. That work taught us that meaningful feedback requires getting to the heart of issues, with heart, and that we had to teach and encourage appropriate vulnerability skills. We continue to train employees and leaders to lead with courage and heart, and we teach them how to give and receive daring feedback. This is how we build a culture of trust, curiosity, positive intent, and self-awareness, a culture that thrives.

Today, what you will see at Miovision is a performance management program where employees share feedback with their colleagues on a continual basis; where nothing is anonymous, hard conversations are the norm, and this whole process is run by the employee, including how they want to integrate the feedback they receive. We encourage them to lean into the feedback and share what they have learned from their peers with their leaders, so the leaders can coach them. We truly want employees to own their performance, and create authentic relationships with their colleagues while cultivating a growth mindset.

A major key to the success of our program is training leaders and employees on what courageous feedback looks and feels like. We offer workshops to employees where they practice giving feedback to each other in real time to help strengthen their "feedback muscle." As an organization, it's incredibly liberating to have employees own their own performance and feedback, and it's incredibly powerful when you set your leaders up to be strong coaches who are equipped to have hard

conversations. We've found that this approach builds and promotes the right behaviors for all employees, and encourages everyone to lean into their courage.

KNOW MY VALUES = KNOW ME. NO VALUES = NO ME.

Sharing values is a massive trust and connection builder for teams. I pride myself on being connected to the people I lead. But after we spent a morning sharing our two values and some of the answers to the questions from the last section with one another, I realized that you don't really know people until you take the time to understand their values. One of my direct reports was relatively new and had been struggling with a sense of belonging in our culture. I tried various things but nothing seemed to really move the needle.

During our values-sharing exercise, I learned that one of her values is connection. She identified one of the behaviors that supports that value as taking the time to make small, human connections, not just connecting on work issues as colleagues. For example, checking in and saying hello in the morning, or catching up on our lives outside work. So easy. I love these small connections too, but I didn't do them on a regular basis. Now I do, and I enjoy it as much as she does. It made a big difference for her and in our relationship.

Another example of how value sharing strengthened a relationship was with my friend Chaz. To be honest, we've known each other for so long, I wasn't sure that any more connecting was possible. But when he left his job as CFO at a very successful ad agency to come work with me, there were some difficult shifts. During our values exercise, I learned that one of his values is financial stability. Now, you're probably thinking, *That makes sense—he's your CFO and one of your closest confidants.* But honestly, I had no idea. And when I wanted to take big risks or make large investments in new businesses, I made up the story that he was pushing back and asking a million questions because he didn't trust me, or because he thought his job was to talk me out of stuff. When I learned that it was his value—not just his job—I wanted to cry. In that moment it became one of my favorite things about him. I trust him so much I could cry just writing about this. We don't fully see people until we know their values.

I've done this exercise with leadership groups all over the world, some of whom have worked together for twenty-plus years and were shocked to learn their colleagues', or in many cases friends', values. Last year we did a really great exercise to close out the year. We did a companywide read and asked every team to do a twenty-minute presentation on the year-end state of their team, incorporating two to three learnings from the book. It was a very university-professor move—integrating and teaching others is the best way to embed learning from a book. At the beginning of the two-day event, every person wrote their two values on a large poster. Over the course of the two days, we all wrote down on each poster one reason we appreciated that person and how they live into their values. It was beautiful. I still have mine. It's hanging in my study as a reminder.

THE VALUES OPERATIONALIZINATOR

My all-time favorite innovator is Dr. Heinz Doofenshmirtz. Born in Drusselstein, he's the founder of Doofenshmirtz Evil Incorporated, a company committed to wreaking havoc and asserting his rule across the entire tri-state area.

If you or your kids are fans of the Disney cartoon *Phineas and Ferb* (2007–2015, RIP), you know who I'm talking about. If you don't watch this cartoon, you should. Heinz Doofenshmirtz is one of many awesome characters. My favorite thing about Doofenshmirtz is that all of his inventions are suffixed with *-inator*. Here are a few examples or a little catch-up-inator for the uninitiated:

Pop-Up-inator—trying to place his own evil pop-up ads virtually everywhere in the tri-state area.

Dodo-Bird-Incubator-inator—trying to create a fierce bird-monster that can help him take over the tri-state area.

Salt-Water-Taffy-inator—trying to give all kids in the tri-state area cavities.

Chicken-Soup-inator—trying to put a deli out of business that refused to serve him.

While I would never try to compete with Doofenshmirtz, my team and I have created a values operationalizinator. Many of the companies that we work with have asked us to help them operationalize their values into skills-based behaviors that can be taught, observed, and evaluated. We don't have a machine with a giant funnel or even a cool algorithm (yet), but we do have a bank of several hundred behaviors that ladder up to some of the most widely adopted organizational values.

Let me give you an example from our own organization. At Brené Brown Education and Research Group, we are called to live into the following values:

Be brave.
Serve the work.
Take good care.

Each of these has been operationalized into behaviors that we are all held accountable for demonstrating. Each behavior is evaluated on a Likert scale (5–1, always to never) by the employee and their manager separately, and then compared in a series of one-on-one conversations throughout the year. In these conversations we identify strengths and opportunities for growth, areas where people need coaching, and places where they might offer mentoring or help to others.

"Be brave" is tied to the courage-building work presented in this book. Here is an example of three behaviors that support that value:

- I set clear boundaries with others.
- I lean into difficult conversations, meetings, and decisions.
- I talk to people, not about them.

"Serve the work" is about stewardship. Three of these behaviors are:

- I take responsibility for our community's and consumers' experience.

- I am responsible for the energy I bring to situations, so I work to stay positive.
- I take ownership of adapting to the fast pace of this environment.

"Take good care" has to do with how we take care of ourselves and each other:

- I treat my colleagues with respect and compassion by responding when appropriate in a timely and professional manner.
- I practice gratitude with my team and colleagues.
- I am mindful of other people's time.

You can see how this process takes lofty and subjective values and makes them real and actionable. *Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind.*

In addition to setting clear expectations, the process gives us shared language and a well-defined culture. It helps us determine cultural fit during hiring, and offers us very straightforward standards of behavior when there are non-performance-related issues.

Operationalized values also drive productive decision making. When values aren't clear, we can easily become paralyzed—or, just as dangerous, we become too impulsive. Operationalized values drive what I think of as the sweet spot of decision making: thoughtful and decisive.

Melinda Gates, who has shared some of her daring leadership experiences with us throughout the book, writes:

> It's much easier to deal with conflicts when you are able to engage your team in a values conversation. People, and I include Bill and myself, can get attached to specific tactics. But when you're forced to tie those tactics to core values and then explain them to others, you are better able to question your own assumptions and help others question theirs. At the foundation, our guiding principle is equity. So when we disagree about, say, whether we should spend more on delivering imperfect tools to

save lives now or discovering better tools to save more lives later, we can always go back to how each of those tactics aligns with the core value of equity.

The thing is, there's not a correct answer to any of these debates. Each side has merit. But making my case through the lens of equity gives me a sense of solidity about what I feel and why I feel it. Sometimes we go in a different direction from what I initially suggested, but it's usually okay because I understand how other people see their preferences advancing equity. A values focus just leads to a much more productive conversation—and a feeling of satisfaction, of being heard, no matter what decisions those conversations lead to.

Operationalizing values also forces us to get clear on the skills or combination of skills that undergird values. A great example of this is the value of "assumption of positive intent." This is a very popular value that we see adopted across diverse organizations. It basically means that we will extend the most generous interpretation possible to the intentions, words, and actions of others.

Well, it sounds straightforward enough, but I've studied positive intent for years, and I can tell you that it's a skill set that is not easy to learn and practice. I can also tell you that I've never once seen the actual skill set that supports an assumption of positive intent explicated or taught in an organization that holds this as a value. What's the foundational skill of assuming the best in people? Setting and maintaining boundaries. What's the fundamental belief underpinning the assumption of positive intent? That people are doing the best they can. We're going to take these one at a time, but from the get-go you should know that most people don't have the skills to set boundaries, and only about 50 percent of the people we've interviewed believe that people are doing the best they can. So, as you can see, it's easy to have the value on the company poster, but way more difficult to practice it. Let's look at boundary setting first.

The people who are the most generous in their assumptions of others have the clearest boundaries. The most compassionate and generous people I've interviewed in my career are the most boundaried. It turns out that we

assume the worst about people's intentions when they're not respectful of our boundaries: It is easy to believe that they are trying to disappoint us on purpose. However, we can be very compassionate toward people who acknowledge and respect what's okay and what's not.

This is why we actually call this value **Living BIG** (boundaries, integrity, and generosity). The assumption of positive intent is only sustainable when people ask themselves this question:

What boundaries need to be in place for me to be in my integrity and generous with my assumptions about the intentions, words, and actions of others?

When you have a value printed on posters hanging in the halls but you don't dig into the behaviors that support it and teach people those behaviors, you're in BS territory. It starts to corrode trust.

In addition to boundaries, an assumption of positive intent relies on the core belief that people are doing the best they can with what they've got, versus that people are lazy, disengaged, and maybe even trying to piss us off on purpose. Sure, we're all capable of change and growth, but assuming positive intent requires the belief that people are really trying in that moment.

I've spent years researching this idea. When you ask people if they believe that everyone is doing the best they can, you get either an emphatic "Hell no," from people who are as tough on themselves as they are on other people, or a quasi-apologetic "Well, I actually do believe that," from people who are stronger practitioners of self-compassion and empathy. I think the apologetic tone comes from knowing that theirs is not a popular sentiment in the world today. There is very little between those answers, and as a former "Hell no" person, I hate to report that in the early studies, the people we categorized as practicing wholeheartedness were constantly in the "Yes, people are doing the best they can" camp and those who actively struggled with perfectionism, like me, were in the "No, they are not" camp. With our new focus on daring leadership, the pattern holds. Daring leaders work from the assumption that people are doing the best they can; leaders struggling with ego, armor, and/or a lack of skills do not make that assumption.

Ultimately, Steve's response moved me from my staunch "Hell no" position. When I asked him if he believed that people are doing the best

they can with what they have, he said, "I don't think you can ever know for certain. But I do know that my life is better when I work from the assumption that everyone is doing the best they can."

In *Rising Strong,* I shared the outcome of an exercise I sometimes do with people. I want to share it with you here because it really drives home the point. For the exercise, we ask folks to write down the name of someone who fills them with frustration, disappointment, and/or resentment, and then we propose the idea that that person is doing the best they can. The responses have been wide-ranging. "Crap," one man said. "If he's really doing the best he can, I'm a total jerk, and I need to stop harassing him and start helping him." One woman said, "If this was true and my mother was doing the best she can, I would be grief-stricken. I'd rather be angry than sad, so it's easier to believe she's letting me down on purpose than to grieve the fact that my mother is never going to be who I need her to be."

Asking leaders to answer this question is almost always difficult because they quickly move to believing that if people are doing the best they can, they don't know how to lead them. Their strategies of pushing and grinding on the same issues must give way to the difficult tasks of teaching their team, reassessing their skill gaps, reassigning them, or letting them go.

As crazy as it sounds, many of us will choose to stay in the resentment, disappointment, and frustration that come with believing people aren't trying rather than face a difficult conversation about real deficits. One of the most profound responses to this exercise came out of a focus group I did with a group of leaders at West Point. One officer pushed me a little on "the accuracy of the intel" and kept asking, "You are 100 percent certain that this person is doing the best he can?"

After I answered yes two or three times, the officer took a deep breath and said, "Then move the rock."

I was confused. "What do you mean by 'move the rock'?"

He shook his head. "I have to stop kicking the rock. I need to move it. It's hurting both of us. He's not the right person for this position, and there's no amount of pushing or getting on him that's going to change that. He needs to be reassigned to a position where he can make a contribution."

Assuming positive intent does *not* mean that we stop helping people set goals or that we stop expecting people to grow and change. It's a commitment to stop respecting and evaluating people based solely on what we think they should accomplish, and start respecting them for who they are and holding them accountable for what they're actually doing. And when we're overwhelmed and struggling, it also means turning those positive assumptions toward ourselves: *I'm doing the very best I can right now.*

The behaviors and skills that support seemingly simple values are not always as complex as those that undergird the assumption of positive intent; however, they are almost always more complex than what we assume. If we want to be values-driven, we have to operationalize our values into behaviors and skills that are teachable and observable. And we have to do the difficult work of holding ourselves and others accountable for showing up in a way aligned with those values.

In the next part, you'll see more work from the operationalizinator as we break down the concept of trust. For now, it's important to remember that there are no guarantees in the arena. We will struggle. We will even fail. There will be darkness. But if we are clear about the values that guide us in our efforts to show up and be seen, we will always be able to find the light. We will know what it means to live brave.