part three

BRAVING TRUST

Integrity is 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.

I've seen the word *trust* turn an openhearted person into a Transformer in a matter of seconds. Just the slightest inkling that someone is questioning our trustworthiness is enough to set total vulnerability lockdown in motion. You can almost see it happening*: Shields engaged? Check. Armor up? Check. Heart closed? Check. Defenses activated? Check.*

Once we're in lockdown, we can't really hear or process anything that's being said because we've been hijacked by the limbic system and we're in emotional survival mode. We all want to believe that we are trustworthy, even though, ironically, many of us struggle to trust others. Most people believe they're completely trustworthy, yet they trust only a handful of their colleagues. The math just doesn't work, because believing we're trustworthy and being perceived as trustworthy by others are two different things.

Charles Feltman's definitions of trust and distrust are completely aligned with how our research participants talked about trust. In *The Thin Book of Trust*, Feltman defines trust as "choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions." He describes distrust as deciding that "what is important to me is not safe with this person in this situation (or any situation)."

Just reading those definitions helps us understand why we can go full-on Transformer when we talk about trust. How terrible would it be to hear someone say, "Brené, what is important to me is not safe with you in this situation, or really in any situation." It would be awful because, true or not, it threatens how I see myself on one of the most important dimensions of a social species. No trust, no connection.

Because talking about trust is tough, and because these conversations have the potential to go sideways fast, we often avoid the rumble. And that's even more dangerous. First, when we're struggling with trust and don't have the tools or skills to talk about it directly with the person

involved, it leads us to talk *about* people instead of *to* them. It also leads to lots of energy-wasting zigzagging. Both are major values violations in our organization, and I bet they conflict with most of our personal values too.

Second, trust is the glue that holds teams and organizations together. We ignore trust issues at the expense of our own performance, and the expense of our team's and organization's success. And there's plenty of research to back up that statement.

In a *Harvard Business Review* article by Stephen M. R. Covey and Doug R. Conant—two leaders who have shaped how I try to show up in my own leadership—they described how "Inspiring Trust" was Doug's number one mission in his remarkable ten-year turnaround of Campbell Soup Company. They quote information from the annual list of the "100 Best Companies to Work For," where *Fortune*'s research showed that "trust between managers and employees is the primary defining characteristic of the very best workplaces," and that companies with high levels of trust "beat the average annualized returns of the S&P 500 by a factor of three."

My favorite part of this article is this quote:

> While few leaders would argue against the idea that trust is necessary for building elite performance, not nearly enough realize the height of its importance, and far too many disregard trust-building as a "soft" or "secondary" competency. But in our joint experience, we've learned that trust is the one thing that changes everything. It's not a nice-to-have; it's a must-have. Without it, every part of your organization can fall, literally, into disrepair. With trust, all things are possible—most importantly: continuous improvement and sustainable, measurable, tangible results in the marketplace.

Trust Talk We Can Actually Hear

So, if trust is a "must-have" and many leaders experience the trust conversation as a "must-avoid," what's the solve?

Get specific. Rather than rumbling generally about trustworthiness and using the word *trust,* we need to point to specific behaviors. We need to be able to identify exactly where the breach lies and then speak to it. The more exact we can be, the more likely it is that people can hear us, that we can give feedback on behavior and stay away from character, and that we can support real change.

Let's imagine that my boss, Javier, pulls me into his office and says: "I know you're really disappointed that you didn't get that promotion. There are some trust issues that are getting in the way of putting you in a more senior position."

A statement like that has the real potential to spike fear, defensiveness, and probably shame in me. It would more than likely blow to bits any container we've built. *How and why am I only hearing about what feels like a character issue after I lost the promotion?* I use this as an example because it happens every day. We're so afraid to talk about trust that our team members don't even know it's an issue until there are irreversible consequences. It's totally demoralizing.

In our trust research, we started with a very interesting question that we wanted to answer: *What are we really talking about when we talk about trust?* What if we could determine the anatomy of this big triggering word—the elements that define it—so that when Javier calls me in to tell me about why I'm not getting the promotion, he could give me some actionable strategies for changing what's problematic? And, better yet, he could call me in before the decision and say, "Here are some specific behaviors that need to change if you want to be considered for this senior position. Let's make a plan."

To get specific, our team dug into *trust* and identified seven behaviors that make up the anatomy of trust. *Thankful again for that operationalizinator*. I came up with an acronym—BRAVING—for the behaviors that define trust. I think it's a good name for the inventory because it reminds us that trust is a vulnerable and courageous process.

The BRAVING Inventory

There's a saying from the Asaro tribe in Papua New Guinea that I love: "Knowledge is only rumor until it lives in the bones." The only way I know to get knowledge into our bones is to practice it, screw it up, learn more, repeat. The **BRAVING Inventory** is first and foremost a rumble tool—a conversation guide to use with colleagues that walks us through the conversation from a place of curiosity, learning, and ultimately trust-building. We're in the process of developing a trust assessment for teams and an instrument that allows you to measure your individual level of trustworthiness based on the seven behaviors. You can visit the Dare to Lead hub at brenebrown.com for more information.

We use the inventory with our colleagues in a similar way to how we talk about values. Each person fills out the BRAVING Inventory independently, then meets one-on-one to discuss where experiences align and where they differ. It's a relational process that, when practiced well and within a safe container, transforms relationships.

Let's look at the seven elements. Some are very straightforward and some require unpacking, which I'll do after the list.

Boundaries: You respect my boundaries, and when you're not clear about what's okay and not okay, you ask. You're willing to say no.

Reliability: You do what you say you'll do. At work, this means staying aware of your competencies and limitations so you don't overpromise and are able to deliver on commitments and balance competing priorities.

Accountability: You own your mistakes, apologize, and make amends.

Vault: You don't share information or experiences that are not yours to share. I need to know that my confidences are kept, and that you're not sharing with me any information about other people that should be confidential.

Integrity: You choose courage over comfort. You choose what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy. And you choose to practice your values rather than simply professing them.

Nonjudgment: I can ask for what I need, and you can ask for what you need. We can talk about how we feel without judgment. We can ask each other for help without judgment.

Generosity: You extend the most generous interpretation possible to the intentions, words, and actions of others.

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Unpacking *vault*: The subtleties of confidentiality have been one of my biggest learnings. Let's go back to the trust conversation with Javier, who has turned me down for the promotion. Instead of saying "There are some trust issues," he says "There are some vault, or confidentiality, issues."

I'm shocked. I look at Javier and say, "We share a lot of proprietary stuff in here, and I have never once shared a single thing outside this office that you have shared with me."

He nods and responds: "I believe that, but you frequently come into this office and share things with me that are not yours to share."

People forget about that side of confidentiality. How many of you have had that experience where someone doesn't betray your confidence but constantly tells you things they shouldn't? When they walk out of your office, do you trust them less? Even though I have no proof that they've broken a confidence with me, I am skeptical of their ability to hold information that does not belong to them without feeling compelled to share it.

When it comes to secrets, it's easy to understand our impulsivity—a lot of us have bought in to the myth that gossiping or secret sharing hotwires connection. But it doesn't. When I walk into a co-worker's office and spill, there might be a moment of connection, but it's counterfeit connection. The second I walk out, that colleague is likely thinking, "I should be careful about what I tell Brené; she's got no boundaries."

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Unpacking *integrity*: The word *integrity* may be overused, watered down, and written on way too many inspirational eagle posters from the '90s, but that doesn't make the concept any less important. When I was doing the research for *Rising Strong*, I looked all over for a definition of integrity that

reflected what we were seeing in the data. Nothing captured all three of the properties that were emerging from the data, so I developed this definition:

Integrity is 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.

In today's culture of fun, fast, and easy, that's the biggest stumbling block to integrity. It is easy to justify shortcuts based on expediency or cost. But integrity does not work that way. I can safely say that I've never done anything meaningful in my life that wasn't hard and that did not take time. Integrity is a big one—the perception of a lack of it, or even of a tendency to cut corners, creates instant wariness.

One of the best tools for putting these new skills and tools into practice is finding an integrity partner—someone at work who we can check in with to make sure we're acting in our integrity. This should be someone we can talk to when we're questioning how we showed up in a recent exchange or if we want to role-play a hard conversation. I have two integrity partners at work and we role-play, circle back, and practice together on a daily basis. Building courage with a partner or in a team is more powerful than doing it alone.

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Unpacking *nonjudgment*: This element is a tough one. The desire to judge is strong in most of us. What's interesting is that from a research perspective, we can quantify it: There are two variables that predict when we judge and whom we judge. Typically, we pick someone doing worse than we're doing in an area where we're the most susceptible to shame: *Look at him. I may suck, but he sucks worse*. This is also why parenting is a judgment minefield. In our parenting, we're all screwing up, all the time—it's such a relief to catch someone in worse struggle, even if it's just for five minutes.

Going back to that filter of susceptibility to shame—when it comes to work, we're afraid of being judged for a lack of knowledge or lack of understanding. We hate asking for help. But that's where it gets wild. We asked a thousand leaders to list marble-earning behaviors—what do your

team members do that earns your trust? The most common answer: asking for help. When it comes to people who do not habitually ask for help, the leaders we polled explained that they would not delegate important work to them because the leaders did not trust that they would raise their hands and ask for help. Mind. Blown.

When we refuse to ask for help, we will find that we keep getting the same projects that leaders know we can do. We will not be given anything that might stretch our capacity or skill set because they don't believe we will ask for help if we find ourselves in over our heads. Within my own team, I see this play out all the time: To the team members I trust the most, I will hand over important projects simply because I know that if they're stuck, if they don't understand, if it's too much work or it doesn't make sense, they will come back to me—that makes me feel safe in delegation. Not only will things not get too far down the wrong path, but the team member who is acknowledging a need for assistance also leaves space for me to come in and help guide. It has nothing to do with intelligence or competency or raw talent; it has everything to do with a relationship of trust.

When you are operating in a space of nonjudgment—I can ask for what I need, and you can ask for what you need—then we can talk about how we feel without fear of judgment. When I start to feel that smugness of judgment welling up, I immediately think, "What's the insecurity, Brené?"

Asking for help is a power move. It's a sign of strength to ask and a sign of strength to fight off judgment when other people raise their hands. It reflects a self-awareness that is an essential element in braving trust.

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An example of *generosity*: In the previous part we talked about Living BIG and why generosity requires boundaries:

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?

To add some color to this concept, I want to share a story from Dara Schmidt, the director of the Cedar Rapids Library.

Dara writes:

> Daring Leadership has changed the way I work with my team. It's made me a better listener and given me the tools to be brave enough to deal with the stuff that's always easier to avoid. Choosing what's right over what's easy has become my mantra.
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> All of the work leads back to self-awareness and personal accountability. Knowing who I am and what I'm about makes me brave enough to do "what's right," including confronting unproductive patterns that I developed in response to long-term institutional issues. In the end, it was embracing personal accountability that gave me the courage to change.
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> My biggest problem as a leader was that sometimes people made me crazy. It was as if they were purposefully ignoring me. So I'd respond by getting bigger and louder so I could make myself heard. When I learned what it means to assume positive intent and set boundaries, everything changed.
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> I had to accept the fact that when I assumed negativity, it was my fault, not theirs. When I examined the times I assumed negative intent, I could see those were times where either I or my organization failed to provide appropriate boundaries or guidelines. I learned to recognize "making me crazy" or "feeling frustrated" as huge red flags for my own behaviors. Now when I start to go negative, I stop. I breathe and think and stay in my integrity. When I'm ready to respond rather than react emotionally, I first ask myself if I'm the problem.
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> When I provide clear expectations and set boundaries, people perform admirably. It's not difficult to assume positive intent when I do my part to set people up for success. I'm a better leader and a better person for it.

PUTTING THE BRAVING INVENTORY INTO PRACTICE

Let's start with a real example from a leader who uses the inventory with his team:

> I recently sat down with my direct report to go through the BRAVING Inventory and talk about the strengths and areas for growth in our working relationship. When we got to *R*—reliability—an issue surfaced about how I was often late to our meetings or needed to postpone them due to meetings with our executive team running late or being called at the last minute. It made my teammate think that I didn't prioritize our time together. We came up with a plan together to address this issue by building in more time between meetings so I can be on time, and by getting clearer in our communication about how we address meeting changes when my schedule shifts. We left feeling committed to a new way of working together that has led to deeper trust. I'm not sure this issue would have surfaced if we didn't have the BRAVING Inventory to walk us through the issues and didn't make the time to engage in the process. Without a tool and an investment of time, things fester and go bad in teams before you know it.

We also encourage teams to work together to develop one or two observable behaviors for each of the seven elements. These behaviors can be specific to your work style and your culture. They should reflect how your team wants to operationalize the specific element, and each behavior should be something that you're willing to do, be held accountable for doing, and hold others accountable for doing.

We tell teams that they can each fill out the BRAVING Inventory worksheet (available online) individually, then share their answers as you build the team expectation worksheet, or the team can jump straight to building the team worksheet. Both ways work. This is a great example of building trust at the same time you're operationalizing it.

Also—returning to the marble jar story and the research finding that trust is earned in small moments—getting specific with the seven elements of BRAVING helps us identify how and what small trust-building moments ladder up to the different elements of trust.

There's a terrible pattern in organizations in which leaders turn to their teams, or their investors, or their board, and say "You need to trust me."

Typically, that happens in a moment of crisis, when it is far too late. Trust is the stacking of small moments over time, something that cannot be summoned with a command—there are either marbles in the jar or there are not.

We don't earn trust by demanding it with "Trust me!" We earn it when we say "How is your mom's chemotherapy going?" or "I've been thinking a lot about what you asked, and I want to dig in deeper and figure this out with you." Even when you've put in the legwork to build a sturdy foundation of trust, and you've checked in with your folks using BRAVING, trust is a living process that requires ongoing attention. And if you haven't made the investment and there's nothing substantial there, there's no way to duct-tape it together. You cannot establish trust in two days when you find yourself in an organizational crisis; it's either already there or it's not.

I love what Melinda Gates shares about the marble jar and the BRAVING process:

> After you taught me your metaphor about marbles in a jar, I adopted it as my entire framework for thinking about trust. Every small gesture I make in support of a colleague puts one marble in the jar. But any time I undercut a colleague—any time I betray trust—a huge handful of marbles goes out of the jar. Thinking in this way makes me more aware of the seemingly small things that lead to building trust, and also the small things that might break trust.
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> The seven elements of BRAVING have helped me think more clearly about what those small things are. For example, I focus on integrity, on matching actions to words. The foundation is a values-driven organization. If I am behaving in ways that are consistent with what we say we're all about—if I treat people equally, if I welcome open dialogue—then I am putting marbles in the jar. But if I act counter to those values—if I resist innovative approaches because I'm worried about the risk, for example—I take a lot of marbles out. I also concentrate on accountability. As the leader of the organization, there aren't

> as many structures to hold me accountable. I don't have regular meetings with my boss. So I have to be very careful about being my own boss, about asking myself how I'm doing and owning up to what I'm doing wrong.

Again, the intention behind the BRAVING Inventory is a tool for creating the time, space, and intention to talk about trust in a way that's productive and actionable. It's a rumble tool, a guide, and a touchstone.

The Basics of Self-Trust

While trust is inherently relational and most pronounced in practice with other people, the foundation of trust with others is really based on our ability to trust ourselves. Unfortunately, self-trust is one of the first casualties when we fail or experience disappointment or setbacks. Whether it's conscious or not, when we're wondering how we ended up facedown in the arena, we often reach for the blanket statement "I don't trust myself anymore." We assume that we must have made a bad decision and therefore it is a fallacy to count on ourselves to deliver.

Think about a time where you experienced a setback or a disappointment—a small thing, not a big glaring failure where there might be extra baggage to unpack. Instead, focus on a time where you hit a bump, and that stumbling block made you call into question your ability to depend on yourself to follow through on what you know is important. We all have those moments. As you hold that memory in your mind, go back through BRAVING quickly and recontextualize the elements for self-trust.

Boundaries: Did I respect my own boundaries in the situation? Was I clear with myself and then others about what's okay and what's not okay?

Reliability: Could I count on myself? Or was my self-talk: "Brené, you know, you set these intentions at seven A.M. when you wake up. I need the exhausted four P.M. Brené to follow through on all that stuff with the same passion that you had when you popped up in the morning."

Accountability: Did I hold myself accountable or did I blame others? And did I hold others accountable when I should have?

Vault: Did I honor the vault, and did I share, or not share, appropriately? Did I stop other people who were sharing inappropriately?

Integrity: Did I choose courage over comfort? Did I practice my values? Did I do what I thought was right, or did I opt for fast and easy?

Nonjudgment: Did I ask for help when I needed it? Was I judgmental about needing help? Did I practice nonjudgment with myself?

Generosity: Was I generous toward myself? Did I have self-compassion? Did I talk to myself with kindness and respect and like someone I love? When I screwed up, did I turn to myself and say "You gave it the best shot you could. You did what you could do with the data you had at that time. Let's clean it up, it's going to be okay," or did I skip the self-love and go straight into berating myself?

You are in control of your relationship with self-trust, and you can hold yourself accountable where you might be falling short. This isn't always possible when you are working through BRAVING in relationship with someone else, where the absence of trust might be muddied by ambiguity of intention. When you're on the mat with yourself, it's much easier to put a spotlight on where you need to work.

As you begin to address those areas that need improvement, remember one of the founding concepts of this part: Trust is built in small moments. If you struggle with reliability, make small and doable promises to yourself that are easy to fulfill, until you get a flywheel of reliability going again. If you struggle with boundaries, set small ones with your partner—like you will not be responsible for both cooking and cleaning up dinner—until you are adept at putting boundaries into action in a more meaningful way. That's how you fill your own marble jar. And never forget—we can't give people what we don't have.

I'll close this part with a story from Brent Ladd, who is the director of education at Purdue University for a National Science Foundation project. It's a powerful story that lives at the intersection of braving trust with others and with ourselves.

Brent writes:

I work at a large research university as a professional staff member. I often feel I'm in "no-man's-land" as my efforts overlap with many categories of people from researchers to instructors to administrators. Although I've "worn many hats" in my work, I have tended to work independently—almost like a solo contractor. I'm an introvert with a big dose of Puritan work ethic and a rural cultural background that taught me a successful man doesn't ask for help, he does it himself.

During the daring leadership work, all of this was thrown into stark relief, as I became self-aware that I had not been doing much to build positive relationships at my workplace. I started to see that the way I went about achieving results was likely telling others in my group that I didn't really trust them. I also have a perfectionistic vibe, and I was realizing that I judged others' work harshly—even if I kept that mostly to myself, it came through loud and clear anyway. I had even overstepped my role quite a bit at times, without even realizing it, by "helping" others do their job better—major facepalm. This all was a big wakeup call for me.

I made a commitment to start building trust and connection with the people I worked with each day by simply engaging with them for a few minutes on a personal level: asking them about this or that, and genuinely being interested in their personal lives or details they wanted to share. I am a good listener and usually am able to engage well one on one. This initially felt a little weird for me and was not easy for me to do. I tend to avoid personal encounters—and have tended to divide the work world from the "rest of my life" world. Over time these interactions became easier. I made it a priority each day to engage each person in the office for however long was naturally appropriate. I started to "show up" as a colleague. I saw my co-workers less as competition, or inept. I started to see everyone as people who were doing the best they could, just like I was doing. Over the last several months, trust and connection have

grown. I feel more of a sense of being part of a team, and have engaged in more sharing of professional efforts as a result.

Running parallel with these co-worker relationship-building efforts was becoming aware that I had a fear I had held on to for quite a few years—a "cave I didn't want to enter" but now knew I needed to. My backstory on this—years ago I had started my Ph.D. It was a dream to accomplish this, but unfortunately, everything went wrong that could go wrong. I ended up dropping my program, getting a divorce, withdrawing from the world for a period, returning home, and eventually remarrying and starting a family. I tried to return to my Ph.D. work at one point but ultimately dropped it again in order to focus on my children and wife, and my full-time job.

I have carried around this sense of "I'm not enough" due to the absence of achieving my doctorate. Fast-forward to a time period a few months ago when I had been tracking and analyzing data from a seven-year education project that I had designed and implemented. I had discovered some very interesting patterns and outcomes. Some of these results are scant or nonexistent in the literature. I had hesitated for several years to submit this type of work to a professional conference and present it to the scientific community. The old voice saying "You don't belong in that group—you don't have your Ph.D.—they won't take you seriously" kept me down. But I made a decision to submit the research work I had painstakingly conducted. My abstract was selected, and I joined a conference where I knew not a single soul. I was an outsider. However, I experienced a sense of belonging—that these might be "my people," "my tribe." What resulted is that my work was taken seriously, and I received genuine interest from others in this science community.

Another positive outcome of that decision is that in order for me to travel and participate in that science conference, I had to let go of something that I had held on to with a very tight grip for the past seven years: I had organized and run a successful

annual workshop from top to bottom. Every tiny aspect of it was “under my control.” The workshop had originally been planned for the same week as the conference where I wanted to present my results. I reached out to my co-workers, one in particular, and asked her if she would consider co-chairing the workshop with me. I said we could open up a larger chunk of the workshop to integrate some of her ideas. Though we’d been competitive, we worked together very well, and I learned a lot from her efforts, and she learned a lot from running the workshop in my absence. We both gained each other’s respect, and we felt like a team after that. Trust was built.

Through all of this experience the last six months I have come to realize some important things. I had shown up, put myself out there, and entered the cave. Only by showing up and being vulnerable was any of this possible. I couldn’t have done it as a lone wolf. I presented myself authentically. I reached out and made connections. I shared. I realized that I am a part of the larger science community, and that I am enough. I don’t need to attach my personal worth to what I produce. I bring a unique set of experiences and wisdom, and I can contribute as part of a team.

We can never overestimate the relationship between self-trust and trusting others. Maya Angelou said, “I don’t trust people who don’t love themselves and tell me, ‘I love you.’ There is an African saying which is: Be careful when a naked person offers you a shirt.”