EXECUTIVE VITALITY™: THE POWER OF VULNERABILITY

Just type "The Power of Vulnerability" into your browser and see what you get; results will probably start with Brené Brown. Watch her fun and thought-provoking TED Talk: [Brene Brown on Vulnerability](#).

Here is what we at EXCN believe about vulnerability - we know others would also say something similar:

> In order to grow, we have to be vulnerable. Just look at nature – a crab sheds its shell, a snake sheds its skin; lobsters, insects, birds, frogs and other natural beings all undergo some version of this, during which time they are soft and squishy (lobsters), can't breathe (insects), or can't eat (spiders) – in other words, vulnerable. The outcomes are: growth and increased strength.

On a recent flight from San Antonio to D.C., I sat next to a veteran who shared his story with me … and his vulnerability. His story was deep, compelling, exhilarating, and moving. I asked him, "How were you able to handle losing both your legs?" He said, "I had to allow myself to get help… and be open to it…"

Vulnerability is a sign of courage

In many organizations, we make it nearly impossible for people to ask for help or admit that they do not have all the answers. Not knowing, needing rest, asking for help, or needing more input—each one of those can sometimes be seen—in certain corporate cultures—as a sign of weakness, a waste of time, or worse. This attitude reflects a culture of invulnerability—a culture that totally stifles creative thinking, innovation, and growth.

The costs of invulnerability in an organization include:

- Mistakes made, which are not admitted to and, therefore, not corrected
- Impaired people (unrested) making poor decisions (see our Breakaway Performance article - [Executive Vitality Wired and Tired](#))
- Wasted time as people spin their wheels rather than get the direction or assistance they need
- Fear of taking a risk to innovate or try something new
- Less engagement/lower morale

The costs of invulnerability for an executive as a leader and as a person include:

- Lack of true connectedness to others inside the organization
- Lowered levels of trust from others
- Lower followership
- Lack of connectedness to others outside the organization (family and friends)
- Depression
- Isolation
- Damaged or lost relationships

Here are some things you can do to be more comfortable showing vulnerability:

1. Read the resources below from *Harvard Business Review* and *Forbes* for further perspective and information about the benefits of vulnerability.

   - [HBR: What Bosses Gain by Being Vulnerable](#)

   - [Forbes: Vulnerability is not a Weakness, it is Core to Effective Leadership](#)

2. Start small – practice at the grocery store or hardware store, for example, try asking for information. "How do I tell if this cantaloupe is ripe?" or "What kind of nail do I need for _____ …?"

3. Then, in a situation that may be more challenging—like in your place of work—try asking for help where you need it, or for something else you may need, like rest … or time to think.

What instances can you think of when you have showed your vulnerability and had a surprisingly positive outcome? Any instances of negative outcome? If so, what were the surrounding cultural factors? When might you have been able to improve a situation in your life/work by showing vulnerability?