Vulnerability: Empowering vs. Disempowering
Power Tool by Adina Morris

The word "Vulnerability" conjures up a variety of feelings for different people. The dictionary.com definition of "Vulnerability" is, "Capable of or susceptible to being wounded or hurt." Man is vulnerable to outside forces; that is the human condition. We never know what tomorrow may bring. Therefore, people often think of vulnerability as a negative disempowering feeling in that it leaves the person physically or emotionally open to the possibility of harm.

When you are in a relationship with another person, in order to create a bond with them, you have to open yourself up emotionally. This can leave you feeling vulnerable. If the other person is no longer interested, that leaves you feeling hurt. You have made yourself vulnerable by opening your inner world to another person, hoping to create a caring and connected relationship. When doing so, you risk the possibility of being rejected.

When we are overly vulnerable it creates paralysis, inaction and poor choices, leaving us in a state of disempowerment. It happens when we are so aware of all of the possibilities of rejection or harm that we feel there is no solution, and we are trapped or that everyone is out to get us. This feeling paralyzes us and creates frustration and difficulty making effective decisions.

When clients come to their coach with their challenges, they may be in this stuck state of disempowerment. They feel vulnerable to their situation. Things are happening to them, and they experience little or no control. They feel vulnerable to their environment. They feel trapped at every turn and become accustomed to making reactionary decisions when amidst a crisis, feeling their back against the wall. This creates a situation where it seems to the client that it is impossible to make the most effective choices.

Case Study:

Sam had a difficult boss. This boss made the client miserable. He rejected all of Sam's ideas without clarifying communication. He was critical of his work, belittling and suspicious of his loyalty to the company without reason. The client felt vulnerable because at every turn he might be criticized or even worse fired with no new job possibility on the horizon. He had tried many different ways to work with this boss. He left work each day feeling drained, dejected and trapped.

 Sam heard about life coaching from a colleague and decided to give it a try. In that environment he was able to experience vulnerability as a power play instead of a trap. He found it to be a catalyst for success

through a trusted space to explore possibility. When Sam felt capable and empowered, the world was his oyster. When he didn't, he was stuck and paralyzed with fear. Allowing himself to be in a coaching situation was a vulnerable position in and of itself. However, when Sam was vulnerable, in a trusted and safe coaching space, it allowed him to open up more deeply with the intention of understanding and the possibility of change.

Through this new openness, creativity is born, visualizing possibility, and encouraging Sam to be proactive. These steps through the action of allowing his vulnerability, exposing who he is and what he would like to accomplish are all parts of a process that leads to empowerment.

Coaching + Vulnerability = Creativity

Creativity + Vulnerability = Possibility

Possibility + Vulnerability = Proactivity

Vulnerability} Creativity + Possibility + Proactivity =EMPOWERMENT

The client worked with his coach to find out his strengths, creating an "Aha Moment" of realization that he was capable and qualified. When recognizing his boss's difficult personal situation, the client was able to feel empathy and therefore release judgment about the boss. In turn, the client was then able to release the boss's unmet expectations because he knew more about the whole picture. Through visualization, the client packaged the negative self talk and moved it aside. With a shift in perspective, the client began to realize his self value.

The client is now working on a force field to protect him from the negative work environment and create a positive image for himself among his coworkers, through affirmations and a vision board. This newfound breathing space of positive energy allows the client to see his potential as he actualizes it through forward steps of creating and implementing an action and maintenance plan for continued growth. Sam takes calculated knowledgeable risks, allowing for some vulnerability, however propelling himself forward into a better position more suited for his skills.

Sam began to take back control of his emotions and how he dealt with this boss. He couldn't change anyone but himself. When he realized that it was in his power to choose whether to be affected by this boss or to look beyond his criticism, it gave him the strength to realize that he was not the sum total of his boss's estimation. Sam had tremendous abilities and qualities that would allow him to find a great

job better suited to his capabilities, in a work environment where he would be valued, appreciated and could soar to new career heights.

He now looks at his vulnerability in a new light. Yes, he is aware of being susceptible to his boss's criticism, but it is temporary and he does not allow himself to wallow in it because he knows his real worth. He is now being smart and proactive in his decisions, which allows him to use his vulnerability to lead him to empowerment and success. He is learning from his experience to make the most of his situation and to work to position himself for a bright future.

Coaching Application:

Client's Disempowered Vulnerability Processing	Coach's Tool	Client's Empowered Vulnerability
Internalized Belief system of belittlement, unqualified & chipped away	Strengths Finding	Aha Moment of qualified & capable
Unmet Expectations	Releasing Judgment	Empathy
Paralysis, Stuck	Visualization	Move stuck emotions aside
Feeling Disempowered	Shifting Perspectives	Recognizing overall value
Feeling Vulnerable	Force field, creating breathing space	Protect from barrage of negativity that still exists
Feeling Empowered	Encouraging Steps Forward	Creating & implementing action plan and maintenance for continued growth

Feeling overly vulnerable can leave one paralyzed and unable to take action. Through self awareness of vulnerability, it can lead one to be proactive, avoiding major mistakes and therefore garnering greater success.

Author of "_The Gifts of Imperfection_" and "_Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead_," **Brene Brown** discusses the empowering state of vulnerability as courage. "Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light."
 https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/162578.Bren_Brown

She goes on to say how truth, clarity and meaning are the value in being vulnerable. "Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weaknesses….Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change….It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path….Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it."

— Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* **https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/162578.Bren_Brown**

Self Application:
As the coach, we may feel vulnerable in our own capabilities. Are we good as a coach? Are we really capable and qualified to help our clients? We can paralyze ourselves with fear, with disempowering vulnerable thoughts.

We can empower ourselves by seeking out our strengths, getting properly trained to be a coach with accepted certification and gaining as much as possible from our learning. We can release the judgment from ourselves that we have the answers for the client; because we do not! The client has the agenda and the answers; we are the facilitator for them to seek out and find their own truths. We can support the client through visualization to move aside any negative self talk that leaves the client feeling incapable. We create a shift in our perspective and recognize our worth and value. We place a force field around ourselves to protect against the negative self talk that may try to creep in and crack our confidence. We take steps forward, creating and implementing an action plan for our continued growth as an excellent coach!

Reflections:
When we create rapport, trust and intimacy with our client, we are giving them a safe space to be vulnerable and a way for the client to express their self in order to gain clarity through reflection with the coach. This is a forward movement through vulnerability.

When a client comes to the coach beaten down by a difficult situation, the coach needs to first build the client back up before the coach can move them forward. Here are some questions the coach can ask to help the client:

1) What skills do you excel at?
2) What is the best part of your job?
3) How could you best utilize your skill set?
4) Are there ways to implement your best skills in your position?
5) What is creating the negative energy around your job?
6) What do you know about the person or situation?
7) How can you release judgment from this person or situation?

8) How can you release expectations from this person or situation?
9) What could introduce a positive energy around your position?
10) How can you create a more positive work space and atmosphere?
11) How can you protect yourself from the inevitable negativity you may encounter?
12) What type of image would you like to exude among coworkers?
13) How would that look?
14) How can you create that image?