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Vulnerability as a Leadership Skill

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"Leaders who are vulnerable are far more trusted by their employees," says Ori Brafman, bestselling author of *Click: The Magic of Instant Connections*. Brafman explains that vulnerability, while often seen as a weakness in business, is a valuable skill that can play a critical role in binding deep, immediate relationships in the workplace. To illustrate this point, Brafman shares the unique story of a hostage negotiator's willingness to reveal vulnerability to help form an intense, but unlikely, relationship.



Transcript

And you think about vulnerability, you often times think about it as weakness, as being too soft especially in business. And the data suggested that leaders who are vulnerable are far more trusted by their employees. People who are vulnerable tend to start more intimate relationships. We talked to a police officer from San Jose, down the street, who's a hostage negotiator. When we think about hostage negotiators, we oftentimes think of guys who are very gruff. You think of Bruce Willis types, right? And this guy's job is... Imagine this, someone took a hostage and you have to basically talk them down and you can't shoot them or anything like that because the hostages will obviously be killed. So this guy takes the hostages. And he's a two-time offender already which means that by getting caught now with the hostages, he's going to automatically go to prison for the rest of his life in that three strikes. The cops have a name for this tough scenario and it's called 'suicide by cop'.

The guy was so afraid of going to jail for the rest of his life that he's going to take himself out in a blaze of glory. This is any talks to this hostage taker. And he talks to him, imagine this, for 15 hours. He doesn't try to intimidate him. He doesn't try to play mind tricks on him. He just had a conversation. And at the end of the conversation, the hostage taker said something about his mother. And he says, "Yeah, my mother died awhile ago." And then Greg, our hostage negotiator, sees an opening. And authentically, he says "Yeah, I had my mom died on me too just last year. It was really, terrible painful experience." And all of a sudden, they bond, right? The most unlikely two people in the world all of a sudden clicked--the police officer and the hostage taker.

And they bond so intensely that at the end of the scenario, the guy finally gives himself up and when he goes out, the SWAT team is ready to pounce on him. And he says, "Wait. I want to give Greg a hug." And the SWAT team's still angry at Greg to this day for the fact that he actually gave the hostage taker a hug. And you're saying, "OK, so what's the big deal about two people giving each other a hug." I would say the big deal is that when people are, even artificially, told to express a level of vulnerability, they automatically form a connection and that connection again all of a sudden changed the tenor of the relationship. It brings in the soft power element.