Daniel Goleman: Find Strength In Admitting Your Weakness

The willingness to admit your weaknesses and your vulnerabilities is actually very powerful. You can gain strength by admitting your faults to yourself and your peers. When you admit it, you make it a part of what we share as information about ourselves. It makes it okay for me to bring it up, which is crucial for working through conflict. You can even joke about it to ease tension. “You’re doing that thing again.”

But if you keep it to yourself or worse, are unaware of your own faults, then people don’t know what to do. You become the elephant in the room.

I spoke with Bill George, Harvard Business School professor, for my Leadership: A Master Class series about authentic leadership. Bill talks about the dangers of only putting your best foot forward. Here’s what he had to say.

“I lead small group discussions with my students at Harvard. Everyone tells their life story. They share the good, the bad and the ugly. We also talk about how they “lost their way.” It’s liberating for everyone. It’s a relief to hear someone admit they’re not perfect. It allows me to share a similar experience, and how I bounced back.

I remember when I started playing the corporate CEO game. I thought I was on track. I thought I was a valued leader. But early on, it was hard for me to admit that I was losing the race. I had to come to my senses and get real about what was working and what wasn’t.

My greatest crucibles are now part of my story. I noticed that in telling my story, warts and all, people not only know who I am, but they don’t “reject me” when I tell them a less than flattering aspect about myself. People understand because chances are they’re been to some difficult places, too.

That level of acceptance gives me a sense of well-being. I’m okay. I’m not a failure. I don’t have to hide. That weight lifted allows me to focus on the things I’m good at. I don’t have to worry about all the things I’m not so good at because I know I can surround myself with people who can pick up the slack, so to speak.

You can’t be comfortable in your skin until you know who you are, and you’re willing to open up and admit who you are. I’ve never met anyone who didn’t have weaknesses. But I’ve met a lot of people who have blind spots. They won’t acknowledge or admit where they fall short.

Of course, in moving through a career, people are rather tacitly encouraged to present their best parts. Asking people to include their faults into the mix is a tough sell. But in every course I teach, I ask a simple question: When are you going to stop chasing the world’s adoration and admiration and follow your own deepest internal desires? The world is a fickle partner.
You can be hero one day and a bum the next. You have to be solid to withstand the rocky roads ahead."

**Learn How to Share Your Story**

Here are ways to help you become more comfortable with telling your whole story.

1. **Read Bill George’s book**, *True North*, which debunks the myth of the superhero top executive. Over 100 executives talk about their failures and personal tragedies, and how these setbacks shaped them as leaders.
2. **Keep a journal.** Not ready to go public with your faults and failures? Write them out first. According to Teresa Amabile, work diaries offer people a new perspective on themselves as professionals and what they needed to improve.
3. **Find a mentor.** We’ve all hit roadblocks in our career. It helps to talk with someone who has “been there” to guide you over the hurdles.