

NEXT CULTURE WORK: Strength Through Vulnerability

A misconception that has been established over decades and is still practiced continuously is: Vulnerability is unprofessional! Those who want to survive in business life and climb up the job ladder need instead a certain spin, a kind of steeliness, impudence, have to be hard-nosed and – a word that is very common these days – have to be *resilient*. Resilient means nothing else than being able to stand the stress and pressure at work.

There numerous trainings offering specific methods how to handle stress even better and keep upcoming feelings like fear or anger in check. When all is said and done in business life it is just about performance, day in, and day out. It is not surprising that every morning almost the same game starts at the entrance door of companies: Many employees figuratively hang their hearts on the coat rack, put on their business mask and also their fighting helmet. They actually switch into a different mode and change identity, which for many of them shows in the clothing, and then fully dedicate to logical facts, arguments, boring meetings, procedures and specifications in order to cope with the day in a seemingly professional manner. The question is: Professional for whom? Usually employees try to leave a professional impression with other people, who are also wearing a business mask. Isn't that a farce?

Wearing a business mask is neither good nor bad. It is just a well-known, adopted or individually varied protection or survival strategy to survive in the jungle of facts, figures, profits and limited positions on the job ladder. However, what falls by the wayside is authenticity and humanity. In many companies there a certainly also hearty contacts among colleagues, which is for many the last straw to actually survive in daily life in a job that only few people do with passion. At the same time it becomes more and more obvious that the times of the cool, professional business masks is coming to an end. The rising rates of burnout and other psychosomatic diseases are only one indication of employees having reached the limit of their capacities and signal that it is high time for a change. *(For background information: According to the German Absence Report 2015 the burnout rate has multiplied by seven between 2005 and 2014. According to health experts and health insurance companies, 13 million employees are affected by burnout in Germany. Days of disability due to mental illnesses have increased between 1997 and 20112 by 260 percent, while physical illness and injuries - as reason for disability – have stayed the same. In Germany already every fifth employee suffers from stress consequences – from sleep disorder to heart attack. Source: „German Absence Report“ und „TK Health Report & KKH-Allianz & WHO & Stress Report Germany“)*

The model of humans as functioning machines doesn't work anymore. So now what? The way of being with each other in companies could be completely different in the future. Returning to values such as humanity and authenticity could be an essential aspect of that. Yet, to get there, it is necessary to do away with the initially mentioned misconception that vulnerability is unprofessional. At this point it is useful to take a look at what vulnerability at work actually means or rather what the attitude towards vulnerability is.

Vulnerability – Current View	Vulnerability – New View
A sign of weakness	I sign of strength
I am attackable	Authentic
Unprofessional	Professional in an new sense
Destructive emotional explosions	Using feelings responsibly and consciously
I don't have myself under control	I own my feelings
Withdrawal, isolation	Creates new possibilities for being with
I have to protect myself no matter what, so I suppress my vulnerability	I can use the power of anger to set boundaries
High numbness bar	Low numbness bar
I am too soft for the job	Humane, reachable
Too sensitive	Valuable sensitiveness
Not resilient	„healthy“ resilient (resilient in a new context)
Not able to make decisions	Capable of making decisions
Sensible	Clear
It's better to hide	Opens up new possibilities of communication
Causes separation in the team. People being vulnerable easily become outsiders and are seen as a burden.	Sustainable team bonding
Go out of contact	Be in sincere contact

As becomes obvious in this table, vulnerability is very much connected to feelings, and that's where the vicious circle starts. Let us therefore take a short look at the topic of feelings.

In modern society the attitude towards feelings is based on the assumption that feelings are not okay – in general and definitely not at work. If you show feelings at work then you are regarded as weak, unprofessional and not resilient. In total there are four big feelings territories that can be distinguished: anger, sadness, fear and joy. There are further words for feelings, but they usually fit into one of the big territories (e. g. *nervousness* belongs to the territory of fear, while *resentment* belongs to the territory of anger) or they are a mixture of feelings.

Based on the assumption that feelings are not okay it is not surprising that most of the people try to demonstrate pretended resilience by somehow suppressing, swallowing or numbing their feelings. However, instead of actual resilience, i. e. resistance to stress, they get weaker and weaker and end up with burnout or other mental diseases (take into consideration that these diseases could be based on a mixture of unconscious feelings that have been suppressed over a long time). In modern society and in business life resilience means to keep the numbness bar (the threshold where you actually start feeling a certain feeling) as high as possible by e. g. eating, watching TV, excessive sports, internet, social media, shopping, alcohol, cigarettes and other drugs. However, feelings that are just numbed out and are not consciously expressed will sooner or later show in degrading health.

The following picture shows why it is not okay to feel the four mentioned feelings, based on the assumption that feelings are not okay.



MAP OF FOUR FEELINGS (OLD SOFTWARE)

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ASSUMPTION: IT IS NOT OKAY TO FEEL ...

BECAUSE ANGER IS:

uncivilized, loud, destructive, unpredictable, impolite, might hurt someone, out of control, dangerous, insulting, immature, not taken seriously, chaotic, embarrassing, makes others angry, invites revenge, creates a mess, and starts wars.

BECAUSE SADNESS IS:

weak, emotional, childish, too soft, not fun, pathetic, victimy, unprofessional, not creative, too vulnerable, makes you look ridiculous, ruins other people's day, is discouraging, not inspiring, not part of modern happy society life, and no matter what, men don't cry.

BECAUSE JOY IS:

unrealistic, childish, giggly, not serious, pretentious, naïve, arrogant, temporary, means you are doing too well, not intellectual, not real world, blind to the problems of life, makes other people jealous. What do you have to be glad about anyway? If you are smiling people will think you are on drugs or do not have enough work to do.

BECAUSE FEAR IS:

cowardly, irrational, unstable, Chicken Little, impulsive, hysterical, nerve-wracking, paralyzing, powerless, stuck, weak, incompetent, untrustworthy over reactive and childish. It fogs decisions, cannot protect, cannot lead, gets out of control and can quickly cause general panic.

At this point the problem might be the solution. What if the solution was about taking on a new perspective with regard to feelings, consciously lowering your numbness bar while consciously and responsibly taking possession of the power of your feelings again? A new perspective with regard to feelings is based on the assumption that feelings are neutral energy and information that serve you, both in private life as well as professionally. They are like an inner navigation system that unerringly guides you through life. If you make this new assumption, how could the feelings actually serve you as neutral energy and information?

MAP OF FOUR FEELINGS (NEW SOFTWARE)

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ASSUMPTION: FEELINGS ARE NEUTRAL ENERGY AND INFORMATION THAT SERVE YOU PROFESSIONALLY.

WITH **ANGER** YOU CAN:

say no, say yes, start things, stop things, change things, clean out and get rid of things, create clarity, recognize unfairness, make boundaries, maintain integrity, show intention, make decisions, keep promises, hold space, pay attention, self-observe, ask for what you want, take a stand for something or someone, protect, take actions

WITH **SADNESS** YOU CAN:

open up, share, be vulnerable, be still, accept things, let things go, grieve, give in, get healed, listen, contemplate, be spacious, connect, recognize pain, be authentic, finish things up, mourn, be wrong, be human, be silent, care, take a supportive position, be intimate, be invisible.

WITH **JOY** YOU CAN:

be enthusiastic, inspire others, have vision, go ahead, enjoy possibilities, take adventures, experiment, discover, accept discomforts or hardships, dance through problems, be kind, be generous, support team spirit, inspire people to keep going, lead, be playful, be easeful, appreciate people for no reason.

WITH **FEAR** YOU CAN:

detect danger, measure risks, concentrate, be curious, make plans, avoid disasters, stay centered, make agreements, handle details, pay attention, be precise, ask dangerous questions, innovate, make mistakes, go nonlinear, stand there in the nothing and improvise, stay present, be alert, face the unknowable future.

Note that on the new map of feelings especially sadness serves you and allows you to be vulnerable, be in authentic contact with others and be empathic. If companies should become more authentic and humane again it is therefore indispensable to own the power of sadness again and make conscious use of it.

Owning the energy and power of the feelings again is possible in a safe training space. It is not about catharsis, which only focuses on expressing the feelings somewhere in the woods in order to get rid of them. Consciously taking possession of feelings is about cathexis, i. e. consciously feeling each feeling up to a maximum of 100% and get the experience in your body that you are bigger than each feeling. Out of this you develop a strength that nobody can take away from you. You reactivate your inner navigation system and can then use it by clearly and consciously

connecting to the energy and information of each feeling as soon as it appears. Then you can e. g. give clarity in your company to your colleagues.

The thought of actually using the feelings at work might be scary for some people. In the end most of the employees and colleagues for years did everything to suppress the feelings and not show them.

However, take the following into consideration:

The Earth needs people who have access to this inner feelings power, in order to bring more humanity and authenticity back into the business world, enable another kind for collaboration and being with each other and the Earth. The Earth needs people that are again able to consciously feel.

It was long enough that cold-hearted, two-fisted, self-made psychopaths who focus on competition the highest position on the job ladder and on profit led companies. This is not a valuation. Self-made psychopaths are just people switching off their feelings completely to survive in the patriarchal context and get as far as possible to be successful in the common sense. As initially mentioned this game doesn't work anymore. It produced results that make people and the Earth sick. Most of the people are longing for authentic contact and showing themselves as they are without fearing to be excluded or degraded.

Vulnerability in the new sense gives you an incredible power, a resource you can use to start a movement and finally establish a new context in the company you are working. You can start a context of authenticity, of sincere contact, of love and creative collaboration. Logic and hardness has been familiar to hitherto leaders and goal oriented colleagues. That's what they could handle in the business context, because they have practiced it over years. They are great in fighting positions and controlling others by using sharp arguments and top down specifications.

Vulnerability in the new sense (including the responsible possession of conscious feelings power) is what these business people cannot handle. So as of now you have the choice: You can keep playing the old game or you can start a movement in your company, by leading through vulnerability and authentic contact. So called *Edgeworkers* – i. e. people who are willing to take on a new direction in the company no matter on which hierarchical level they are – are authentic, humane, approachable and part of the team. They share authentically what they perceive and trust their feelings power in order to create clarity in their team and the company. In the old sense you would be vulnerable when sharing or using your feelings, especially sadness or fear. You would be attackable. However, through conscious feelings work you have the possibility to protect yourself at any time through the conscious use of your anger, by e. g. setting clear boundaries, even if you communicate authentically and vulnerably. So, one causes the other. With the conscious, responsible power of anger in the background, you can show vulnerability (using conscious sadness) at any time.

How can you experiment with first steps towards more vulnerability and authenticity?

One possibility is to start becoming aware during the next days about what you feel, when you e. g. are in a meeting with colleagues. Start observing yourself. What do you feel? When do you hold back, although you sense a clear impulse that something in the team is not in flow or that a decision is made you cannot support? Then start sharing – first on less dangerous occasions – what you feel. To be vulnerable starts with the clear communication “I feel angry/afraid/sad/glad, because...” Try this in your team first. When you do the first step in using this new kind of communication and showing yourself vulnerable then you automatically encourage others to be vulnerable also. You are longing for a different kind of collaboration in your working environment? Don't wait for others to start. The job is on your bench. It is up to you to do the first step. The Earth and the people need courageous pioneers who are willing to step onto this new path towards more humanity and decide for a different game world. You could be such a pioneer. Are you in?

Best vulnerable wishes,
Yours Nicola Nagel

Hint: You find more about "New Work" in the book „Edgeworker: Beyond Leadership – It is Time for the Management-(R)Evolution!“ from Nicola Nagel and Patrizia Servidio. Details about feelings and their great benefit can be found in the book „The Power of Conscious Feelings“ from Clinton Callahan.