

The heart, on the other hand, has no comebacks, no quips. Gentle, slow, and unprotected, an open heart is easily attacked, especially by a frightened mind. And feelings scare the mind.

Why are feelings so scary? I asked my friend and colleague, Jessica Gelson, a traditionally trained psychotherapist who specializes in body-based techniques to help people unblock their feelings.

“People are afraid of feelings for the same reason people are afraid of ghosts,” Jessica told me. “You can’t see them. You can’t put them in a box. And you can’t really control them.”

Most of us are never taught how to experience and understand our feelings. And since our mind hates things it doesn’t know, it reacts like a guard fending off an attack.

But why is that bad? Why not just rely on your agile and capable mind instead of exposing your heart, especially in a business or professional environment?

Because our hearts are the source of our real power.

The heart is how we connect with others. It’s how we engender trust. It’s the heart — both ours and theirs — that makes people want to follow us and throw everything they’ve got into making something successful. People follow leaders who show competence and warmth, head and heart. And there is **a growing body of evidence** that suggests we should start with the heart.

It takes tremendous courage to lead. And it takes even more courage to lead with heart. But that’s what leadership call us to do. Mostly, when people want to develop their leadership, they try to learn more about what to do. Which is precisely **why most leadership programs fail**. Because the hard part about leadership isn’t *knowing* what to do, it’s having the courage to *do it*.

Are you willing to experience the discomfort of speaking from your heart? Yes, it’s a risk. But a risk whose payoff includes the commitment, loyalty, and passion of the people around you.

Now, think back to how you answered the question at the beginning. Was your instinct to protect yourself and your open heart? Would you have resisted answering those questions honestly and openly? How can we be more emotionally courageous in those situations, both as the listener and the speaker?

1. **Notice.** Notice when your head wants to protect your heart. Notice how you might use humor to avoid feeling something. I am now aware that I do this

myself. Honestly, I like the positive attention I get when people laugh. But I'm now sensitive to the cost. How it shuts me – and other people – down. When your instinct is to make a joke, see if you can pause without saying anything and notice what you feel.

2. **Take risks.** Taking risks builds your emotional courage. And you don't even need to take big, emotional risks. Maybe your risk is speaking up in a meeting, or not speaking up, or asking about someone's day, or giving someone feedback. Courage begets courage. The more you take even small emotional risks, the more you'll be willing to show up authentically in all areas of your life. You'll have a chance to practice this, right here, in a moment.

At Eleanor's birthday dinner, I wavered. But, once I realized it, I saw it as an important opportunity to practice emotional courage. My risk was to call David, the person who first started the joking, and tell him that it felt hurtful. Without attacking him, I shared my disappointment and sadness.

He was defensive at first, but soon we engaged in a deep and real conversation about his discomfort and how hard it was for him to share his feelings at the dinner. We both learned some important lessons and felt closer after that call.

I'm still interested in how people choose to answer the questions I asked at that dinner party. I'd love to see your responses in the comments, if you feel comfortable sharing them. What do you feel gratitude for in your life? What new things do you feel are struggling to grow and be born in you? What do you want to let go of, so that the new can be born?

**Names and some details changed.*