

# Toward Rigor, Health, & Equanimity: The What, Why, & How of Cultivating Trusting Relationships

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Ambassador of Love & Kindness

UVA Innovations in Pedagogy Summit  
Wednesday, April 29, 2026

“One conversation with Professor Arco was the difference between me not being a student anymore and me being a successful student achieving a 4.0”

*Joshua Rodriguez*

JAMES M. KOUZES  
BARRY Z. POSNER

BESTSELLING AUTHORS OF *THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE*

# Credibility

How Leaders *Gain* and *Lose* It  
**WHY PEOPLE DEMAND IT**

ALL NEW AND REVISED

"A lot of leaders talk about this. See what happens when you actually do it."  
—from the foreword by SIMON SINEK, author of *Leaders Eat Last*

# Everybody MATTERS

The Extraordinary Power of Caring for  
Your *PEOPLE* Like *FAMILY*



BOB CHAPMAN  
CEO of BARRY-WEHMILLER

RAJ SISODIA

COAUTHOR of *CONSCIOUS CAPITALISM*

"Red-hot relevant!"

—William G. Parrett, CEO, Deloitte Touche, Tohmatsu

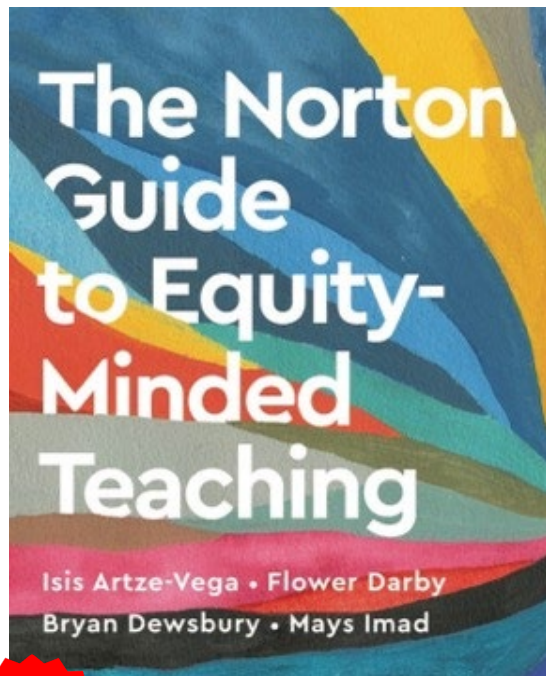
# THE SPEED OF TRUST

The One Thing That  
Changes *Everything*

Foreword by  
Stephen R.  
Covey  
Author of *The 7 Habits  
of Highly Effective  
People*

STEPHEN M. R.  
COVEY

WITH REBECCA R. MERRILL



**FREE**



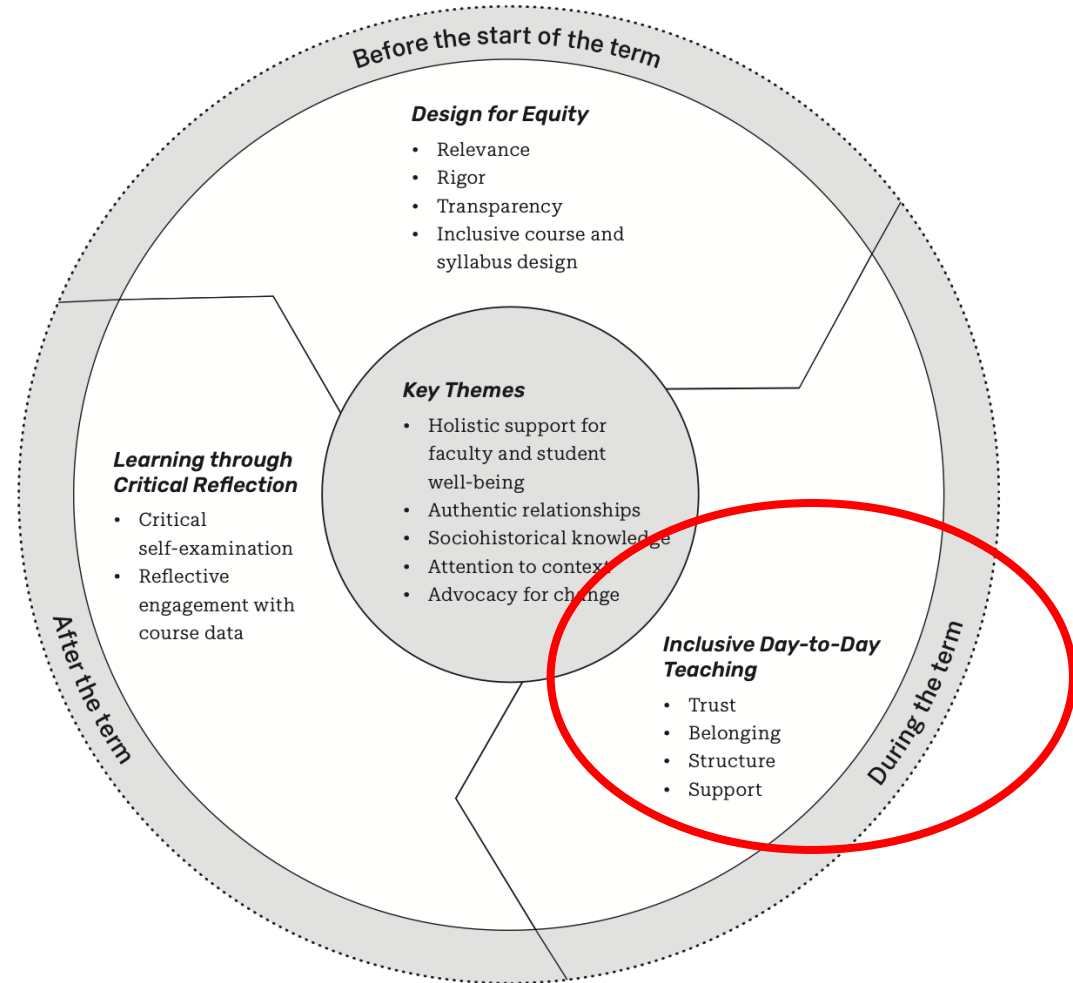
My brilliant  
co-authors

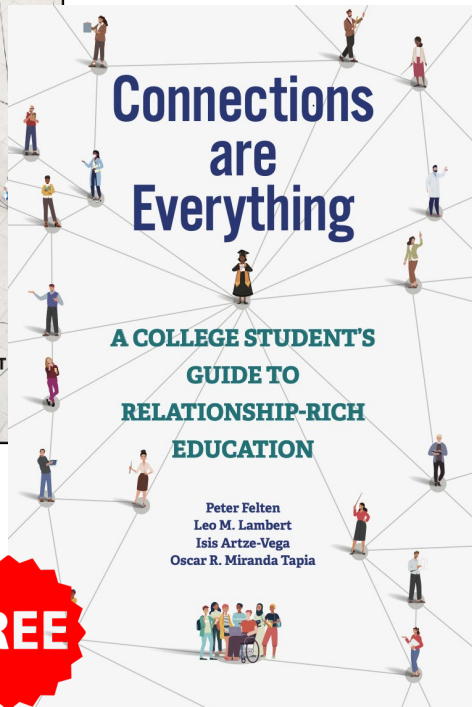
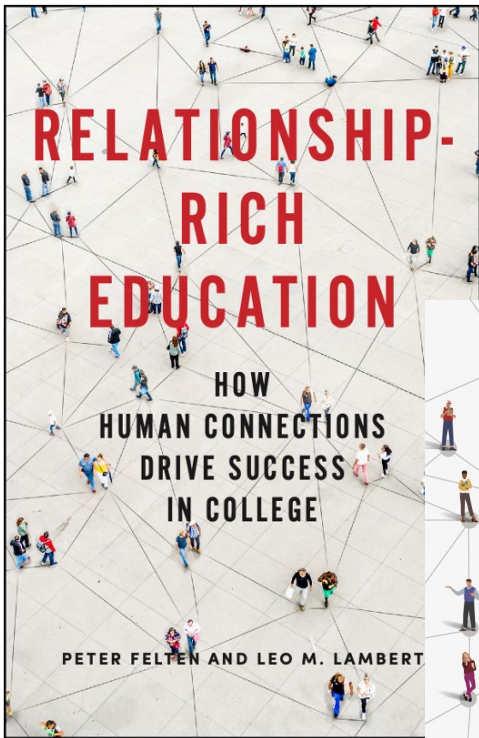
## The most effective college faculty:

(1) design online & in-person courses attending to relevance, rigor, & transparency;

(2) **teach** by fostering student belonging & trust and by facilitating learning in well-structured, highly relational physical & virtual environments;

(3) reflect on students' & their own experiences & outcomes, using reflection & data to identify areas for further enhancement.





**FREE**

A red, starburst-shaped badge with the word "FREE" in white, bold, capital letters.

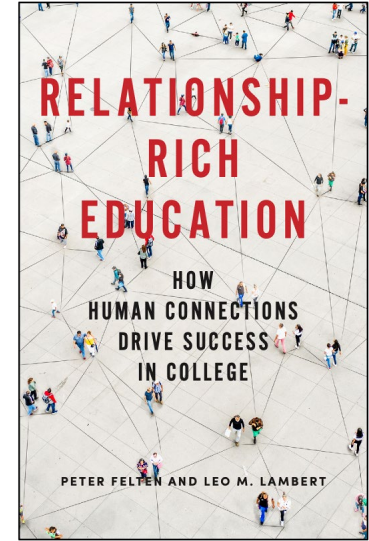


My brilliant  
co-authors

A teal speech bubble containing the text "My brilliant co-authors" in white, sans-serif font.

# Relationships drive college success


1. All students must experience **genuine welcome and deep care.**
2. Relationships are a powerful means to **inspire all students to learn.**
3. All students must develop **webs of significant relationships.**
4. All students need meaningful relationships to help them—and to challenge them—to **explore the big questions of their lives.**



# Goals for our time together

If all goes well, we'll:

- Describe some of the benefits of trusting relationships for students and for YOU ... including their impact on rigor, health, and equanimity
- Define trust & share frameworks
- Review what gets in the way of trusting relationships
- Identify even more ways to cultivate and maintain trust
- Practice a couple of trust moves



**You already  
know a lot  
about trust!**

# Benefits of Trusting Relationships

Strong, positive relationships are the most important factor for long-term happiness and health.

*The*  
Good Life



LESSONS FROM THE WORLD'S LONGEST  
SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF HAPPINESS

CREATE A MORE MEANINGFUL  
AND SATISFYING LIFE

Robert Waldinger, MD  
and Marc Schulz, PhD

# Benefits of Trust

- “People who say most people can be trusted report **greater life satisfaction** than those who say you can’t be too careful. They tend to report being **happier**, more **satisfied with their health**, and **more likely to describe their family life as excellent or very good**” (Silver et al., 2025)
- **Trust and well-being go hand in hand.**
  - Being able to trust others increased well-being—and feeling greater well-being allowed someone to trust more.
  - Trust is more critical for the well-being of children, adolescents, and elderly adults (Bi et al., 2025).

# Benefits Related to Teaching & Learning

“Both student trust and rapport motivated students to **work harder** and **take on greater challenges**, but the two factors had independent effects, and trust had a much larger impact on student behavior”

“Students are more willing to work hard and take on more challenging work when trust in the teacher is high” (Chew, 2023).

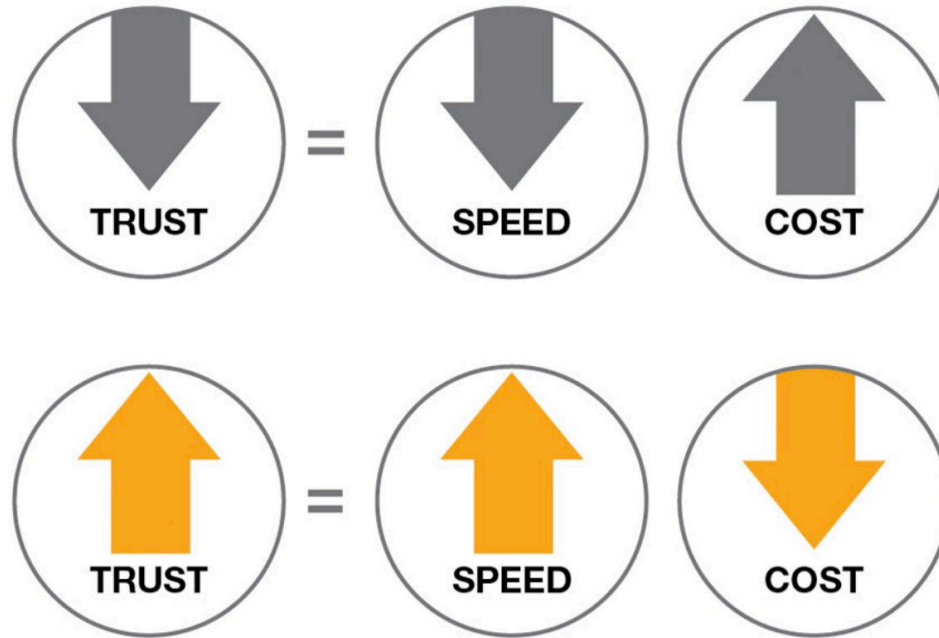
“When students trust that we have their best interests at heart,” she explains, “they give us permission to push them to higher levels of achievement” (Hammond, 2014).

# Why is Trust So Central to Learning?

The need to be connected to others is wired into the human brain; it's a survival instinct.

When we are alone or fail to have positive relationships, our brains become preoccupied with scanning our environment for threats—which can hinder our ability to focus and learn.

# The Economics of Trust



“Nothing is as fast as the speed of trust.” Stephen M.R. Covey

# Defining & Implementing Trust

# Definitions of Trust

- “Trust means *confidence*. The opposite of trust—distrust—is *suspicion*” (Covey, 2018).
- “An individual’s calculated exposure to the risk of harm from the actions of an influential other” (Hancock et al., 2023)
- Student trust: “a student’s willingness to risk vulnerability and pursue challenging work due to the belief that a teacher is competent, will demonstrate integrity, and will act in ways that are beneficial to the student’s learning and development” (Chew, 2023)



**SELF** TRUST

**RELATIONSHIP** TRUST

**ORGANIZATIONAL** TRUST

**MARKET** TRUST

**SOCIETAL** TRUST



# Societal Trust

**Americans trust each other less than they did a few decades ago.** The share of adults who said “most people can be trusted” declined from 46% in 1972 to 34% in 2018, according to the General Social Survey.

Silver et al., 2025

# Market Trust

## How to Fix the Crisis of Trust in Higher Education

March 6, 2024



Grose, 2024

Yale University

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# Report of the Committee on Trust in Higher Education

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 2026

# Organizational Trust

**HIGHER EDUCATION'S  
INTERNAL TRUST CRISIS**  
**WHY FACULTY, ADMINISTRATORS, AND TRUSTEES  
STRUGGLE TO WORK TOGETHER**

Smith, 2026



## **Turn & Talk:**

How do you earn & maintain your students' trust?



# Impediments to Faculty-Student Trust

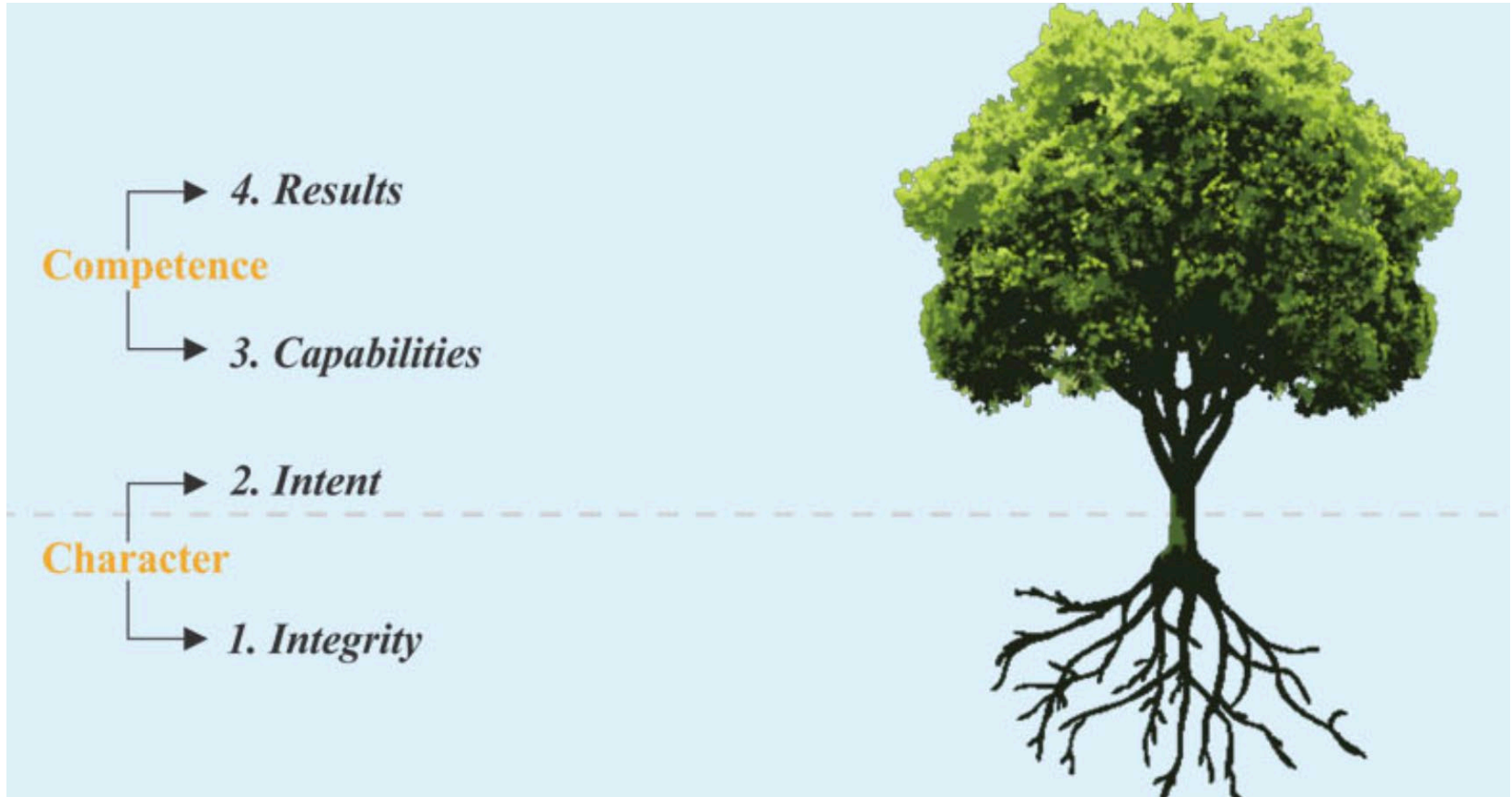
- Students' prior academic experiences (general and discipline-specific)
- Academic dishonesty - real and perceived
  - Unintended consequence of the rise of generative AI
- Student-educator differences
  - Generational
  - Racial/ethnic

# Ideas for Being More Intentional about Earning & Maintaining Trust



Image source: <https://medium.com/the-good-boss/the-leadership-equation-17bd106a3da2>

# Self Trust: The 4 Cores of Credibility



# Self Trust: Self-Assessment

Integrity	Intent	Capabilities	Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I consistently “walk” my “talk”</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Other people can clearly tell that I have their best interest at heart</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I have acquired the knowledge and mastered the skills required for my job</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I communicate my track record to others in a way that inspires confidence</li></ul>

# Self Trust: Each Core is Actionable

Integrity	Intent	Capabilities	Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Share your core values with students/ what you stand for</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tell your students your goals for them</li><li>• Demonstrate care for students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seek out resources or assistance with a <a href="#"><u>critical teaching behavior</u></a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tell your students about your success as an educator</li></ul>

# Relational Trust



## Responding to Students' Unspoken Questions about Trust

Adapted from Demerath et al. (2022)

**Why are  
they  
here?**

**How  
much do  
they  
respect  
me?**

**How much do  
they know  
and care  
about me?**



## **Responding to Students' Unspoken Questions about Trust**

Adapted from Demerath et al. (2022)

## Students' Unspoken Queries about Us

## Behaviors That Earn Trust

*Why are they here?*

Let students know what motivates you to teach.

*How much do they know and care about me?*

Make the effort to get to know your students and their backgrounds.

*How much do they respect me?*

Avoid unnecessary criticism and trust students with knowledge of your nonfaculty life.

*How real are they? Do they know who they are in relation to me?*

Demonstrate self-awareness, particularly relating to your identity (e.g., acknowledging the parts of your identity that have resulted in privilege), and look for common ground (as in gender, socioeconomic background, learning experience).



# Responding to Students' Unspoken Questions about Trust

Adapted from Demerath et al. (2022)

# Relational Trust Moves

## Consistently

- Express care for others. Don't fake it.
- Create **transparency** – and err on the side of disclosure.
- **Make things right when you're wrong.**
- Get better – develop feedback systems, and act on the feedback.
- Clarify expectations.
- Keep your commitments.
- Extend trust.

(Covey, 2018)

- Acknowledge student anxieties.
- **Be transparent** in your course goals and methods; explain the value of the course and the methods you are using to achieve course goals.
- Promote belongingness and community within your courses.
- Establish norms of dignity and respect.
- Give students multiple opportunities and means to demonstrate their learning.
- Provide frequent formative feedback.
- Show flexibility in assignments and deadlines to let students do their best work.
- **Admit when you are in error.**

(Chew, 2023)

# Zaretta Hammond's Trust Generators

[https://resources.corwin.com/sites/default/files/10\\_figure\\_5.2\\_trust\\_generator\\_s.pdf](https://resources.corwin.com/sites/default/files/10_figure_5.2_trust_generator_s.pdf)

Trust Generator	Defined as
Selective Vulnerability	People respect and connect with people who share their own non-perfect, human, vulnerable moments.
Familiarity	People develop a sense of familiarity with someone they see regularly in a particular setting.
Similarity of Interests	People create a bond/point of connection with people who share similar likes, dislikes, hobbies beyond any obvious race, class, or linguistic differences.
Concern	People connect when concern is shown for issues/event important to one another.
Competence	People tend to trust people who demonstrate skill/knowledge and willingness to help/support them.

# Let's practice 2 trust generators

Please turn to someone you don't know (or don't know well) and do two things:

1) **Selective vulnerability** – Share something human, non-perfect about you

2) **Competence** – Tell them how you know your teaching is effective or describe your top teaching skills

- Let's discuss: How did it feel to do this? How might you do this with students?

**What about YOUR  
trusting relationships?**



“

For our students to  
be well, they  
need us to be  
well.

– Eugenia Knight

Cavanagh, S.R. (2023, May 2). [‘They Need Us to Be Well’: The surprising recipe for building students’ emotional well-being in the classroom? Rest and joy — for professors.](#) *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

# To cultivate YOUR trusting connections...

## You can:

- Get to know students - reciprocal benefits
- Sign up for (or create/lead) opportunities for
  - teaching, writing, or wellness-focused collaboration
- Reach out to colleagues you've lost touch with
- Mentor a new colleague

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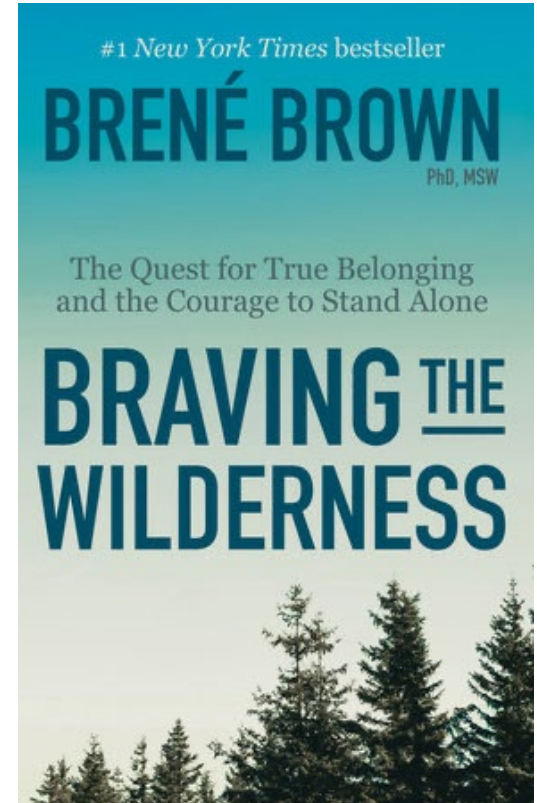
## **Supervisors & Leaders can:**

- Review climate data / administer climate surveys
- Carve out time for relationship-building
- Check in regularly with direct reports & constituents
- Visibly show care and support

**Q&A**

# Two Bonus Tips for ALL of Us

- “People are Hard to Hate Up Close. Move In.”
- “Hold Hands. With Strangers”



**Thank you for all you do!**  
It makes an enormous difference!

# References & Resources

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