



The following is excerpted from *THE MILLION-DOLLAR TOOLBOX: A Blueprint for Transforming Your Life and Your Career with Powerful Communication Skills* by Ty Boyd.

Tool Four, Becoming Vulnerable

At every Excellence in Speaking Institute we offer, we ask attendees what traits they see again and again in effective presentations. Every time we ask the question, the answers are the same. There are never any surprises.

That tells me we know exactly what effective communicators do. Once we bring that awareness forward, we can then take action to adopt those traits ourselves. Or polish them a little if they aren't as strong as they could be.

The list of traits typically includes:

- They have inner fire.
- They speak with authority.
- They connect with the audience.
- They tell a good story.
- They use their voices well.

Now, I'd like to add one of my own.

- They are vulnerable.

Vulnerable? Hmm.

My psychologist friends have to help me with this one. The actor in me is so strong it isn't always easy to allow myself to be genuinely vulnerable. The actor is always being somebody else, unlike the performer, who is simply using the actor's tools to be a more effective communicator. The actor is still behind the mask; the performer is putting him- or herself on the line.

There's certainly a place for the actor. But the thing that draws people to us is not our perfectness, not our plasticness, but our vulnerability.

Am I willing to let you see who I really am? Am I willing to let you see my frailties, my humanness? Am I willing to put myself on the line for something I believe in passionately? Powerful speakers who can be vulnerable on the platform, not perfect, not always the hero, not always totally in charge are the ones who are most powerful. It has been described as "being private in public."

Let's look at some examples.

John McCain. In the 2000 race for the Republican Presidential nomination, the American public embraced this man because he was willing to show them his emotional scars. When he talked about his harrowing experiences as a POW in Vietnam, we listened. We cared. We opened our hearts to him. Likewise, when he spoke with passion about reforming the way politics works in the U.S., many in this country were swept up in his enthusiasm. Especially when they learned that his passion had grown out of his own mistakes.

John McCain was willing to be vulnerable, to bare his soul to the American public. And the American public loved him for it.

Many of us, especially the men among us, have been trained to believe that we give away our power when we allow our emotions or our imperfections to show through. "Never let 'em see you sweat" is the macho mantra. That may work on the football field or the battlefield. But it doesn't work when our sincere goal is effective communication.

We never lose power when we use enthusiasm, emotion, intensity.

Certainly when we become vulnerable there is always the possibility of being hurt or taken advantage of. That's the nature of being vulnerable. But the rewards are so great that good communicators will risk it in order to achieve effective communication.

Who else makes vulnerability work for them?

How about Oprah Winfrey? This woman is never afraid to let us see how moved she is by the guests on her show. When they tell her why they think their adoptive mother is the greatest woman in the world, her eyes fill with tears. In fact, every topic she brings to the show is a reflection of what stirs her spirit, what matters deeply to her. Children battling illness, real people whose everyday actions are heroic, families struggling with trauma and betrayal and loss – Oprah Winfrey tells us what is in her heart every day she broadcasts a show.

The result? She is the most influential and powerful woman in broadcasting today, period.

And the most significant tool in her box is her willingness to open up and give us a glimpse into her heart. Her vulnerability is a cornerstone of her power.

Inner fire. Preparation. Connection. Storytelling. Voice. And vulnerability.

They're in your toolbox today.

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