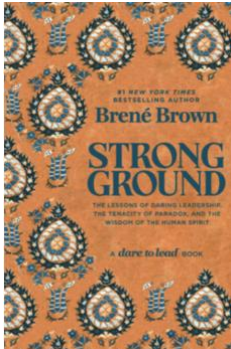


'CliffsNotes' Book Club Recap

DO YOU LOVE BOOKS ON LEADERSHIP, NEUROSCIENCE, AND BUSINESS, BUT NOT HAVE TIME TO READ ALL THE BOOKS?

Join the '**CliffsNotes' club**—where there's no pressure to pre-read the book, no membership required, no cost, and lots of discussion in just 90 minutes. Each month, you will hear a **summary of highlights** from a recently-published business book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. We'll keep you "in the know" on the latest and greatest concepts and models. **Register here** for upcoming events.



January 2026
Strong Ground

By Brené Brown

Book Summary

AI-generated summary; edited by Laura Mendelow

At its heart, *Strong Ground* reframes courageous leadership for an era of rapid change, uncertainty, and human disconnection. Brown's central argument is that **true leadership requires stability rooted in values, embodied confidence, and the capacity to navigate paradox without reflexively resolving tension**. She uses the metaphor of physical grounding—literally finding balance and strength in your body—as a **lens for understanding leadership, culture, and resilience**: without a firm base, attempts at strategy, innovation, or transformation collapse under pressure.

Brené's trainer, Tony: (chapter 1)

1. We will not build on dysfunction
2. You have a weak core
3. Our work here is going to be functional, dynamic, and adaptive. We're looking for intentionality and consistency over wild intensity.

Question: *What is grounded leadership?* (Note: this question is not included in the book but helps to organize the content for the purpose of this book club)

■ **Pocket Presence (chapter 14)**

- Football reference, 3 seconds and 1 200 pounds (defensive linemen)
- Ability for the quarterback to recognize what's happening around him inside the pocket while keeping his eyes downfield on his teammates
- "The most compelling leaders are those who show respect for others by being prepared, who show courage by demonstrating a learner mindset, and who show confidence by demonstrating humility."

- The enemies of pocket presence are fear and arrogance
 - o When you get into fear and don't trust yourself or teammates... you play small
 - o When you get too arrogant... you get careless.
- **Grounded Confidence:** (chapter 15) - a brand of confidence that is built not on arrogance or posturing, but rather on the solid ground of self-awareness, courage, and practice.
 - Our Core - includes Emotional Awareness and Regulation
 - Our Strength - includes Empathy and Humility (I'm here to get it right, not to be right).
 - Our Awareness
 - Our Thinking
 - Our Communication

Emotional Awareness and Regulation (chapter 15)

- **Biology** - understanding how our emotions show up in our body and why
- **Biography** - getting curious about how our families shape our beliefs about the connection between our feelings, thoughts, and behavior
- **Behavior** - examining our go-to emotions and behavior when we're experiencing specific feelings
- **Backstory** - recognizing the context of what we're feeling or thinking. What brought this on?

***TOOL: Developing Emotional Literacy (Places we go when...) p. 248**

Cognitive Empathy vs. Affective Empathy (p. 256)

***TOOL: Empathy Misses (p.258)**

- **Paradox as a Leadership Muscle** (chapter 3)

One of the most central concepts in *Strong Ground* is **paradoxical thinking**—being able to hold two seemingly opposing truths at once and work within tension rather than collapsing into one side.

“Performers are people. And the one thing we all have in common is straddling the paradox of being vulnerable enough to confront the work with our art, our tenderness, and our openness, while at the same time being tough enough to know our wholeheartedness won't always be received or returned. That's not solely the performer's dilemma - that's what it means to be human.”

Examples of leadership paradoxes:

- Plumbing and Poetry (chapter 4) - On Leadership by James March and Thierry Weil:
 - o There are two essential dimensions of leadership: “plumbing,” i.e., the capacity to apply known techniques effectively, and “poetry,” which draws on a leader's great actions and identity and pushes him or her to explore unexpected avenues, discover interesting meanings, and approach life with enthusiasm.
- Seed planting and radical change
- Gritty faith and Gritty facts
- Connection & individual accountability

Paradox is not a flaw to fix—it's **a creative container** for real leadership decisions.

Question: *What are Grounded Tools for Teams to use?* (Note: this question is not included in the book but helps to organize the content for the purpose of this book club)

- **The 5C's for Mission Clarity** (chapter 10) - St. Jude story
 1. Context: What's the broader context that we need to understand?
 2. Color: Can you describe your vision of what this looks like and how it works? Paint the most detailed picture you can.
 3. Connective Tissue: How does this (plan/strategy/decision) connect to other (plans/strategies/decisions)?
 4. Cost: What will it cost us to do this (money, time, bandwidth, priority shifts, focus, etc.)?
 5. Consequence: Are there consequences for not doing this? What unintended consequences can we anticipate?

- **Dare to Lead** (chapter 7)
 1. Living into our values
 2. Rumbling with vulnerability
 3. Braving Trust
 4. Learning to Rise

Tools:

 - Armored Leadership (self-protection) to Daring Leadership (grounded confidence)
 - Rumble Starters and Rumble Tools

- **Above/ Below the Line** (chapter 12)

(originated from Robert Kiyosaki, Rich Dad, Poor Dad. Later popularized by The Conscious Leadership Group in The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership)

 - Below the line, we're acting from fear (the hero (rescuer -"I'll do it myself"), the villain (persecutor - "No one understands") or the victim ("Someone needs to take the blame for this!" (work by Stephen Karpman Drama Triangle)
 - Above the line we are the creator, challenger, and coach (work by David Emerald's Empowerment dynamic)

- **Meeting ground rules for "Story rumbles"** (chapter 21) (e.g., What the hell happened? How did we miss this?)
 1. Everyone is responsible for the energy they bring into the room.
 2. Everyone is responsible for letting the group know when they go below the line. It's okay and human to go below the line: we expect it. Just please let us know so we can call a time-out. Or three.
 3. We're not looking for bad people, we're looking for bad systems
 4. We're going to start by surfacing the stories that everyone is making up about what happened.

Question: *What is a grounded organization?* (Note: this question is not included in the book but helps to organize the content for the purpose of this book club)

The Anatomy of Transformation (chapter 8)

Transformations are living, breathing systems that give and demand constant evaluation: Assessment sets → Mindsets → Skill sets → Tool sets → Coaching sets → System sets

Assessment sets:

- Why is armor necessary and/or rewarded here?
- What makes it difficult to speak out and challenge ideas or strategies here?
- How often are you receiving feedback and coaching?
- Can you tell us exactly how what you do every day allows this company to execute its mission? How many conversations about trust have you had with your manager or leader? What about in a team setting?
- How openly can folks talk about power here?
- When there's a failure or setback, how openly do people discuss the learning and how quickly is it embedded across the org?
- Who is giving you cover when you're encouraged to take risks? Have you seen that play out?

System sets: (James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits* said, "You do not rise to the level of your goals, you fall to the level of your systems.")

Coaching sets: Transformative coaching is the ROI maker on transformation investments

- Understanding and connection
- Inquiry and reflection
- Designing goals and action
- Guiding the process
- Expanding possibilities

RESOURCES

(The following are some of the resources referenced throughout the book that I thought would be most relevant for this group)

- *Falling Upward: A spirituality for the two halves of life.* Father Richard Rohr
- *On Leadership.* James March and Thierry Weil
- *Think Again.* Adam Grant
- *Dare to Lead.* Brené Brown
- *Atlas of the Heart.* Brené Brown
- Dare to Lead Podcast:
 - Dr. Linda Hill (Digital Transformation) and HBS "Working Knowledge" magazine article "Digital Transformation: A New Roadmap for Success"
 - Amy Webb, Future Today Strategy Group. "The decisions we make in the next five years will determine the long-term fate of human civilization"
 - Jim Collins - *Beyond Entrepreneurship 2.0: Turning your business into an enduring great company.* (Great to build strategic thinkers)
 - Sarah Lewis - Failure, creativity, and mastery
 - Charles Feltman - Trust: Building, maintaining, and restoring it
 - Amy Wambach - New Rules of Leadership (book *Wolfpack*)

- *The Man Who Broke Capitalism: How Jack Welch gutted the heartland and crushed the soul of corporate America—and how to undo his legacy.* David Gelles.
- BetterUp
- *Career Mapping.* Ginny Clarke. Fifth Dimensional Leadership
- “Dancing with Systems” (Elements, Interconnections, Function or purpose) article by Dr. Donella Meadows.
- *Thinking Fast and Slow* Daniel Kahneman and Gary Klein.
- *Making Work Human: How Human-Centered companies are changing the future of work and the world.* Eric Mosley and Derek Irvine.

About the Book Club In this monthly club, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, neuroscience, or coaching. Membership is not required, and there's no obligation to pre-read the book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For the full set of discussion summaries, [click here](#).