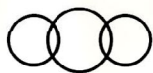# *Bring Your*
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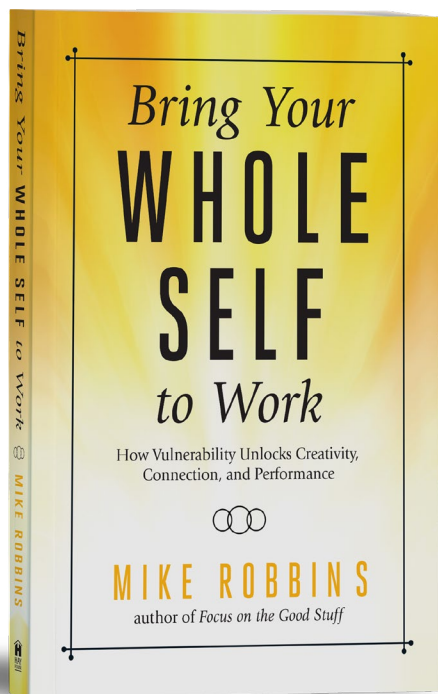# BRING YOUR WHOLE
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"In *Bring Your Whole Self to Work*, Mike Robbins teaches us that by revealing our imperfect, authentic selves at work, we give those around us permission to do the same, and the result is a more confident, compassionate, collaborative, and engaged work environment for all. Writing with his signature wisdom, candor, and care, Mike proves that work is like all our most important relationships: our experience and outcome is transformed when we stop pretending to be who we think we should be, and start showing up as who we really are."

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"Mike Robbins is an important thought leader for our times. He reminds us simultaneously to embrace and celebrate our diversity, and that we're way more alike than we are different. The ideas in *Bring Your Whole Self to Work* are fundamental to the success of leaders and teams in all aspects of our society today. This book could not have come at a better time."

— **Tim Ryan**, U.S. Representative for Ohio's 13th District and author of *A Mindful Nation*

"This book reminds us that leadership is about service, caring about the people we work with, and building strong teams. I've had the pleasure of working with Mike Robbins and I appreciate his commitment to these important principles. *Bring Your Whole Self to Work* will help you enhance your capacity and impact as a leader, and as a human being."

— **Hal Lawton**, President of Macy's

"Bringing our whole selves to work is about being radically candid and connecting with the humanity of those around us. Mike Robbins does a great job of laying out why this is important to our success and how to do it in this powerful book."

— **Kim Scott**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Radical Candor*

"As a CEO and little league coach, I've come to see shared purpose as the best predictor of group performance. Encouraging vulnerability and connection across your team is an unlock for both. *Bring Your Whole Self to Work* is a powerful guide to this type of leadership and culture."

— **Kevin Cleary**, CEO of Clif Bar & Company

"This book is a powerful tool. The world is calling for us to step up, speak up, and bring all of ourselves to the work we do. Mike Robbins challenges us to do this in an inspiring way."

— **Gabrielle Bernstein**, #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Universe Has Your Back*

"Mike Robbins is a trusted advisor to us, and has had a very positive impact on me personally, as well as on our leaders and the corporate culture at Nutanix. The ideas and principles in *Bring Your Whole Self to Work* are critical to teams that want to thrive in today's competitive business environment."

— **Dheeraj Pandey**, co-founder and CEO of Nutanix

"Mike Robbins has a unique knack for connecting personal fulfillment to business success. His important lessons of appreciation, authenticity, and empathy are universal and lead to more engaged employees. Not only do I use some of his exercises with our organization, but I even suggested one that my daughter's teacher used in class."

— **Amy Brooks**, President, Team Marketing & Business Operations and Chief Innovation Officer of the NBA

"I have witnessed the power of the principles in this book. I have seen how authentic and vulnerable leaders and teams come together and perform at a higher level and even win championships. Mike Robbins gives you the blueprint to lead and work more powerfully in this significant, pioneering, and must-read book."

— **Jon Gordon**, best-selling author of *The Power of Positive Leadership*

"The principles in Mike Robbins' *Bring Your Whole Self to Work* are important learnings, especially in today's complex business environment. Creating cultures of diverse and engaged employees is the secret to serving customers in a standout way that allows organizations to thrive, and employees to innovate and do their best work."

— **Donna Morris**, EVP, Customer and Employee Experience, Adobe

"We hear words like *integrity*, *authenticity*, and *empathy* kicked around these days. But what are they really? And, how do they play into our quest to contribute meaningfully to the world and to live a good life? In *Bring Your Whole Self to Work*, Mike Robbins digs into these questions and invites us to live more integrated lives and bring more of our true selves to work, so we can have the biggest impact on those around us and the world."

— **Jonathan Fields**, founder, Good Life Project® and author of *How to Live a Good Life*

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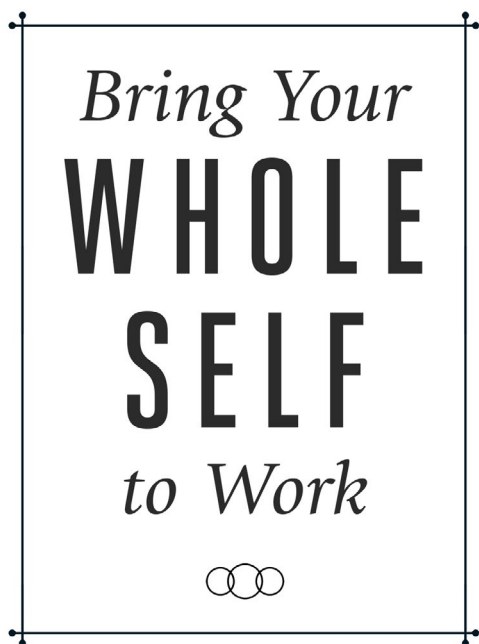
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Bring Your
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How Vulnerability Unlocks Creativity,
Connection, and Performance

MIKE ROBBINS

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INTRODUCTION

For us to truly succeed, especially in today's business world, we must be willing to bring our *whole selves* to the work that we do. And for the teams and organizations that we're a part of to thrive, it's also essential to create an environment where people feel safe enough to bring all of who they are to work. The lines between our personal and professional lives have blurred more than ever in recent years, even inside the most structured and traditional companies.

Bringing our whole selves to work means showing up authentically, leading with humility, and remembering that we're all vulnerable, imperfect human beings doing the best we can. It's also about having the courage to take risks, speak up, ask for help, connect with others in a genuine way, and allow ourselves to be truly seen. It's not always easy for us to show up this way, especially at work. And it takes commitment, intention, and courage for leaders and organizations to create environments that are conducive to this type of authenticity and humanity.

My research and experience have shown me that when we bring our whole selves to work in this way, not only are we more likely to create success and fulfillment for ourselves, but we are able to have the greatest impact on the people around us. And creating a culture that encourages us to show up fully allows us collectively to do our best, most innovative work together.

I decided to write this book because I wanted to share some of what I've witnessed, experienced, and learned through my own work over the past 17 years.

I've partnered with many different leaders, groups, and companies, and have seen some remarkable things—both positive and negative—in terms of what creates (or hinders) the success and fulfillment of individuals, teams, and organizations as a whole. Of course every work environment is unique. Working at Google in the heart of Silicon Valley is quite different from working for the City of San Antonio in Texas. Working for ourselves out of our spare bedroom in Ohio is also very different from leading a global team at Microsoft while being based in Europe and traveling internationally all the time.

According to Gallup, however, only 32 percent of people in the United States are engaged in their jobs, and worldwide the number is a staggeringly low 13 percent. This means that the vast majority of us are not fired up about or fulfilled in the work that we do. Lack of engagement leads to a whole host of problems for us personally—decreased performance, diminished fulfillment, increased stress, and greater likelihood of well-being issues. And for our teams and organizations, the impact of disengaged employees is significant, and often leads to a lack of results, collaboration, and innovation; it is also a primary cause of turnover. A study conducted by the human capital management company ADP estimated the real monetary cost at $2,246 per disengaged employee per year. The total economic impact of employee disengagement in the U.S. easily runs into billions of dollars each year—by one estimate, over $400 billion.

As I've seen and learned through my research and experience, one of the most important aspects of being engaged, fulfilled, and successful in our work is the ability to be ourselves. Organizations that have environments where people are more likely to engage, collaborate, and

perform, do what they can to encourage people to fully show up and be all of who they are at work.

This book will offer you insights, ideas, and tools to inspire you to bring your whole self to the work that you do—regardless of where you work, what kind of work you do, or with whom you do it—thus allowing you to be more satisfied, effective, and free. And if you're an owner, leader, or just someone who wants to have influence on those around you, this book will also give you specific techniques for how to build or enhance your team's culture in such a way that encourages others to bring all of who they are to work—which will unlock greater creativity, connection, and performance for your group and company.

My Recent Journey

As often happens for me with my work when I take on a new project, particularly a book, I see it reflected back to me in many areas of my life. Such was the case when I pitched the idea for this book to my publisher in December 2015. I was excited about this topic, looking forward both to refining some of the key principles I'd discovered and to exploring these ideas more deeply. I was also grateful to have a new creative project on which to focus. But I wasn't quite prepared for how soon after agreeing to write this book that the circumstances of my life would test my *own* ability to bring my whole self to my own work.

My sister Lori had been diagnosed with stage 3 ovarian cancer in April 2012, just 10 months after our mom died of lung cancer. Lori's diagnosis was shocking and scary—to her, to me, and to all of us around her. She was 42 years old at the time and her daughter was just seven. After almost a year in remission, Lori's cancer returned

in the fall of 2014. She went back into treatment and it seemed to be going well at first, but by the middle of 2015 things took a turn for the worse.

I was with Lori at her house just a few days after New Year's in 2016. Her situation had worsened quite rapidly in the previous few weeks—we had gone from checking in on her regularly, to rotating shifts of being with her overnight, to her needing 24-hour professional care.

Before I left her bedroom that afternoon, I kissed her on the forehead and said, "I'm flying down to Orlando in the morning for a speaking engagement on Wednesday. I'll be back to see you on Thursday. I love you."

"I love you too," Lori whispered as she closed her eyes to get some rest.

The hospice nurse followed me out, and I turned, meeting her gaze before asking in a hushed tone, "How long do you think she has left?"

"It's hard to know for sure," the nurse said, "but she's pretty strong. I'd say at least a month, maybe longer."

My trip to Orlando was a bit of a blur. I was speaking at an event for a client that I love working with, OneMain Financial. It was the annual kickoff meeting for all their branch managers and field leaders in the eastern half of the country—about 700 people total. Given what was going on with Lori, I found it very difficult to focus on my client, their event, and my speech. Yet, at the same time, I was grateful for the distraction. While I'm usually pretty open and transparent about what's going on in my life, even with my clients and when I speak publicly, I decided not to talk about Lori, but just to show up, be as present as possible, and put my attention on the people in that audience. Even when intense things are going on in our lives, we still have to show up for work and do the best we can, which is what I tried to do that day.

At the airport in Orlando on my way back home, I got a call from Lori's hospice nurse letting me know that things had taken another turn for the worse. "I know I told you on Monday that I thought she had a month or more left; I think it's probably more like a week now." Hearing her say this as I stood in the boarding area, I doubled over, trying to catch my breath.

The flight home that night seemed to take forever. I got back late and tried to get some sleep, which wasn't easy. The next morning I went over to Lori's house, planning to spend much of the day there before heading to San Francisco for an event I was scheduled to speak at that night. When I got to her house, the energy was much different than it had been just a few days earlier—it felt quiet and sad, yet calm. There was a reverence and sacredness in the air. A few of Lori's close friends were there, along with her nurse. There were some hugs and tears as we greeted each other. We didn't speak much, but a lot was said in the unsaid.

Throughout the day we took turns going into Lori's bedroom and spending time with her one-on-one. She was sleeping a lot. She seemed peaceful but wasn't verbally responsive, and her breathing was labored. I held her hand, touched her face, and let her know I loved her. I figured I would have more conversations with her in the coming days, but I felt compelled to talk to her at that moment about some of the ups and downs, joys and pains, twists and turns of our relationship over the years. Even though she wasn't verbally responsive and her eyes were opening and closing as I spoke to her, it felt like she could hear me.

As the time for my event in the city neared, I began to feel very uncomfortable about leaving. Even though I was scheduled to lead an evening workshop that people

had signed up and paid for, I decided to contact the event organizers and let them know I couldn't make it. They were shocked, but thankfully very understanding and compassionate. It felt scary, and seemed somewhat irresponsible of me, to make this call just a few hours before I was scheduled to speak; but it felt like the right thing to do. Keeping my word and showing up for work are important to me. And in that moment, being there with and for Lori felt *much more important.*

A few hours later, and just three days after the hospice nurse told us Lori had at least another month, she passed away peacefully. As we stood around her bed, holding hands, praying, crying, and hugging, many different emotions raced through me all at once.

In the days and weeks that followed I continued to feel a slew of emotions—shock, sadness, and disorientation, to name a few. We knew from the time she got diagnosed that Lori might die. And once the cancer returned and her condition worsened, it seemed likely that she would die. But the way things unfolded so fast in the final days and weeks of her life took me by surprise and knocked me off my feet.

I was also challenged by how to navigate all of this and still do my work. My life and schedule weren't set up for me to take time off to grieve, process everything, and take care of all that needed to be handled. Thankfully, as is often the case in situations like this, many amazing people showed up with love and support.

Since speaking is the primary way I make money and support our family, I continued to speak and travel a lot. It was challenging, but it also felt good to work and to focus on inspiring others, even as I was reeling in my own grief.

I spoke about Lori, her death, and my grief from time to time, but out of respect for her and her privacy I hadn't talked much publicly about her cancer before she passed. My close friends and family all knew she was sick, but I had chosen not to directly acknowledge it in my work. After she died, I did open up about it publicly, but due to the intensity of my emotions and the whole experience, I was discerning about when, where, and how. When I did feel compelled to speak about Lori and my loss, I was amazed by the response—so many people had their own grief stories to share. I continued to get a lot of support from my friends and family members, and also from some amazing counselors and therapists who helped me grieve and heal.

What I didn't have much space or energy for was writing—at least not for publication. I continued to journal, and I shared some of my grief experience in a series of Facebook posts over that first month or two, which actually felt both safe and healing. But sitting down to write blog posts, articles, and especially this book didn't feel good, right, or even possible at that time. I felt like I had a great deal to say and nothing to say, all at the same time. I wanted to write about Lori and about my grief, but also didn't want to, and I was scared it would be too intense for people to relate to, understand, or want to read about. But writing about anything else seemed weird and inauthentic to me.

Now here I am—just at the point where I'm ready and willing to write, with a lot to say and share about showing up, being real, and bringing our whole selves to work. Lori's death was a painful but important reminder to me that life is short and uncertain, and that it's a waste of time for me—for any of us—to worry about doing or saying the wrong thing, being "too much" for people to

handle, or not having everything figured out. I think we're all just doing our best, given the resources we have and the circumstances we're facing. The irony was not lost on me that, through one of the greatest losses of my life, I had to go even deeper within myself and practice how to bring all of me to work in a new way, before I could write this book.

As Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, wrote about the sudden death of her husband, Dave, in 2015 and in her wonderful book, *Option B*, which is both about her experience of grief and about ways we can all face adversity and build resilience, "If I believed in bringing my whole self to work before Dave died, what I learned after is that I have no choice. If my whole self is going through adversity and tragedy, that whole self comes to work."

I agree with Sheryl. Hiding who we are and what we're going through doesn't serve us or the people we work with, and in many cases it isn't even possible. We're all dealing with being human. Some of us may be experiencing significant pain, loss, or stress. Others of us may be going through incredibly exciting and wonderful times in life. In most cases, it's a mixed bag. And we're always dealing with ups, downs, and the inherent uncertainty and vulnerability of human life, all while having to show up at work and do our jobs.

Learning from Others

In addition to all that I've learned both personally and professionally, and much of what I've been speaking about, writing about, and teaching to my clients for the past 17 years, I'm excited about the different types of research I've done for this book. In the summer of

2016, as a way to immerse myself more deeply in this topic and learn from the wisdom of others, I decided to interview some of the most interesting business and thought leaders I know—asking them about their lives and careers, and about the twists and turns of their own journeys. I also wanted to inquire into what bringing their whole selves to work meant to them, and how they, as leaders, approached creating a culture conducive to this. I decided to record the interviews, and launched the *Bring Your Whole Self to Work* podcast. It has been fun to produce this show, and I've been amazed by the openness and different perspectives of my guests, as well as by all that I've learned from them and from going through this process.

Many of the people I've interviewed have been touched by loss, like me, and have also been forced to make changes, take risks, and recover from failure. I'm constantly amazed, although no longer surprised, to learn that even people who seem on the surface to "have it all together" still deal with some of the same self-doubt, fear, and insecurity that the rest of us do. These interviews have continued to remind me that although we're all unique individuals, with our own stories, we're much more alike than different. The insight I've gained from these conversations has enhanced the way I think, operate, and show up in my own life and work.

Chip Conley, founder and former CEO of Joie de Vivre Hospitality and current Strategic Advisor for Hospitality and Leadership for Airbnb, shared this pearl of wisdom during our interview: "Holding things back about ourselves is hard and actually takes energy. If we're willing to do the inner work of more fully understanding who we are and what truly matters to us, we'll have more clarity

about if where we're working and what we're doing is the right fit for us."

And Melissa Daimler, Senior Vice President of Talent at WeWork and former Head of Learning at Twitter, said in our podcast conversation, "I've always been interested in thinking about work as our learning lab. We can use work to grow and learn as human beings. There are so many opportunities to leverage every single day. I look at my job as helping people develop so that they can bring their whole selves to work."

Looking at Compelling Studies and Data

In addition to all the interviews I've done, I've taken a look at some of the most interesting and up-to-date studies and data on such things as employee engagement, company culture, leadership, mindfulness, well-being, emotional intelligence, and growth mindset. What's really exciting is that, over the past decade or two, many really smart people—in academia, science, and business—have become more interested in these important topics, which some people dismiss as "soft skills." But as we all know, soft skills are hard. And as leadership expert Peter Drucker famously said, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." These "soft" things drive the success (or failure) of our careers and of most businesses, and science and research are now backing this up in many ways.

A Harris Interactive study conducted for Deloitte found the following to be true:

- 83 percent of executives and 84 percent of employees rank having engaged and motivated people as the top factor

that substantially contributes to a
company's success.

• There is a correlation between employees
who say they are "happy at work" and
feel "valued by their company" and those
who say their organization has a clearly
articulated and lived culture.

In the 2016 Edelman Global Trust Barometer survey
of more than 33,000 people worldwide, only 27 percent
of leaders were seen as behaving in open and transparent
ways. In that same report in 2013, 82 percent of work-
ers said they did not trust their bosses to tell the truth.
Another study found that 85 percent of employees admit-
ted to withholding important concerns about critical
issues from their manager.

These statistics and so many others point to the fact
that the ability (or inability) for us and others to bring
our whole selves to and engage in our work has a huge
impact on our success, well-being, and fulfillment (or lack
thereof). And the willingness of leaders and organizations
to create the conditions for trust, connection, and a pos-
itive culture make a significant difference in the loyalty
and productiveness of their people.

How to Use This Book

In this book, I share stories from my own life and
work, as well as many stories and examples from the peo-
ple I've interviewed and the companies I've worked with
over the years. I also share some of the latest studies, along
with ideas, techniques, and best practices I've learned
from various experts, clients, and my own research.

The book is organized into five principles:

1. **Be Authentic.** The foundation of bringing our whole selves to work is authenticity, which is about showing up honestly, without self-righteousness, and with vulnerability. It takes courage to be authentic, and it's essential for trust, growth, and connection.

2. **Utilize the Power of Appreciation.** Appreciation is fundamental both to building strong relationships and to keeping things in a healthy and positive perspective. Bringing our whole selves to work is about being willing to be seen, and also about seeing and empowering the people around us, which is what appreciation provides.

3. **Focus on Emotional Intelligence.** Our emotional intelligence (EQ) is often more important than our skills, IQ, and experience—in terms of our ability both to manage our relationships and to bring our whole selves to work. EQ is both about us (self-awareness and self-management) and about how we relate to others (social awareness and relationship management).

4. **Embrace a Growth Mindset.** Growth mindset is a way of approaching our work and our life with an understanding that we can improve at anything if we're willing to work hard, dedicate ourselves, and practice. It's also about looking at everything we experience (even, indeed especially, our challenges) as opportunities for growth and

learning, which is fundamental to bringing our whole selves to work.

5. **Create a Championship Team.** The people we work with and the environment around us have a significant impact on our ability (or inability) to fully show up, engage, and thrive. And at the same time, the more willing we are to bring our whole selves to work, the more impact we can have on others. Creating a championship team is about building a culture that is safe and conducive to people being themselves, caring about each other, and being willing and able to do great work together.

These ideas and concepts are fairly easy to understand on the surface. But like many important aspects of life, growth, and business, it's not the understanding of them that makes the biggest difference, it's their *application*. Chapter by chapter, I lay out what each of these principles mean, why they can be difficult, and how to implement them both individually and in groups. The final chapter of the book focuses on how to bring the key elements of these five principles together and put them into action for yourself, your team, and all the people you work with.

I'm excited and honored that you've chosen to read this book. I look forward to leading you on this journey, and I hope you find it helpful, enlightening, and empowering. Here we go . . .

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