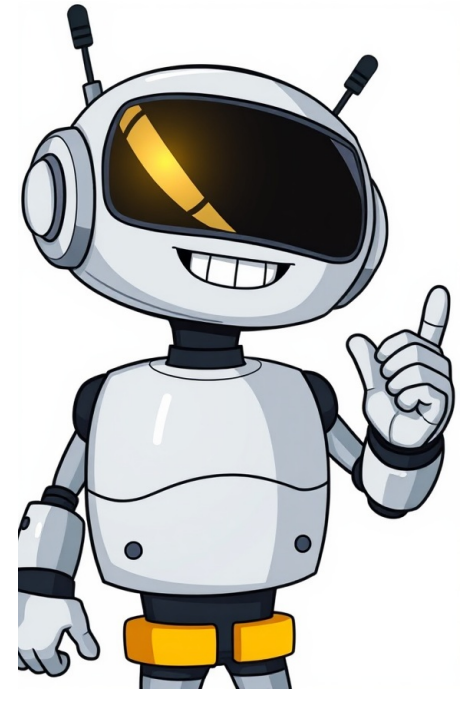


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Brené Brown, Ph.D., LMSW, is a research professor at the University of Houston where she holds the Huffington Foundation–Brené Brown Endowed Chair at The Graduate College of Social Work. She has spent the past two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy and is the author of five #1 New York Times bestsellers: The Gifts of Imperfection, Daring Greatly, Rising Strong, Braving the Wilderness, and her latest book, Dare to Lead, which is the culmination of a seven-year study on courage and leadership. Brené’s TED talk—The Power of Vulnerability—is one of the top five most viewed TED talks in the world with over 35 million views. Brené lives in Houston, Texas with her husband, Steve, and their children, Ellen and Charlie. If you want to form meaningful relationships and live a happier life, stop trying to fit in, says bestselling author and vulnerability researcher Brené Brown. Forcing yourself to act like or adopt the beliefs of those around you won't actually help you feel connected to a person or a group, Brown said on a Nov. 3 episode of "The Diary of a CEO" podcast. Instead, if you want to feel like you belong, be honest about how you feel and what you think — about hobbies, politics or current events — to form genuine relationships with others, she said.The more you regularly feel connected with others, the more social fitness — or, the ability to form and maintain positive relationships — you might develop. Social fitness is the No. 1 most important factor for living a longer and happier life, according to a 87-year ongoing Harvard University study."True belonging requires us to be who we are, not change who we are," Brown said on the podcast, adding, "The problem is that that chameleon skillset means that in order to fit in, the first person you betray is yourself. We've got to be able to stand alone."DON'T MISS: Exclusive Black Friday discounts on courses to help you earn more money and get ahead at workHaving a sense of belonging is particularly important in today's world, Brown noted. Nearly quarter of U.S. adults feel lonely, and a high percentage of that group report feeling like they don't have enough close friends and family and that they are not a part of any meaningful group, according to a 2024 Harvard University study with 1,500 participants."We're neurologically [link] hardwired to be in connection with other people. In the absence of connection, there's always suffering," Brown explained. "To me, connection is the ability to be in a relationship where we can both give and receive, where we feel seen, heard, believed and valued."If you only form relationships based on a desire to fit in and get along, your bonds with other people likely won't feel very secure, said Brown. Friendships that are only based on topics you agree on, rather than a shared set of values or genuine interests, can fall apart if anyone's opinions ever shift, she said."That's counterfeit connection," said Brown.Learning how to genuinely connect with others can also help you form bonds at work, some experts say. If you authentically share what you think — whether about a project or your career interests — and build credibility at work, you're more likely to develop relationships that propel you toward your goals, workplace expert Henna Pryor told CNBC Make It in August."Your own personal map for career success is heavily dependent on the areas that you're enthusiastic about, on the natural strengths that you have," Pryor said.Earn more and get ahead with CNBC's online courses. Black Friday starts now! Get 25% off select courses and 30% off exclusive bundles with coupon code GETSMART. Offer valid November 17 through December 5, 2025.Plus, sign up for CNBC Make It's newsletter to get tips and tricks for success at work, with money and in life, and request to join our exclusive community on LinkedIn to connect with experts and peers. Reading Lists → Brene Brown Brene Brown has published 10 books. The first book was I Thought It Was Just Me (but It Isn't) in 2007. Here is a complete list of Brene Brown books in order. Last update: December 01, 2025 TED is supported by ads and partners

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