

Think back to the last time you experienced one or more of the scenarios below. How did you respond (or how do you think you might respond)?

- Someone you had a massive argument with comes to tell you in person how sorry they are.
- A telephone operative who took your order for a delivery, but subsequently messed it up, accepts personal responsibility and makes sure they put it right for you.
- Someone who you perceive to be a confident and accomplished presenter confides in you that they are unable to sleep the night before important meetings because they are so worried
- That special person you've been dating for a while now tells you they love you.
- Your independent teenager away travelling on their gap year telephones you to tell you how lonely they are.

At times it can be hard when we are in the wrong to let go of the need to be right and admit it, or simply accept that we're not as infallible as we would like to think we are. There are times too when we are unable to say what is truly on our mind because we fear rejection or ridicule. Yet, what I discover when I talk to people about this topic is that our attitude towards others is almost guaranteed to change when they show vulnerability. We soften towards them, because they become more human to us. We feel closer to them and are able to connect at a deeper level. It works the other way round too – when we are able to truly and honestly reveal our own flaws and imperfections, we are far more likely to form deeper connections with others.

I doubt if any of this comes as a surprise to you, because I suspect it's something we all know intellectually. The trouble is that the need to protect ourselves can be very strong at times, and so we put on the 'mask' we have created – that one that tells everyone we are on top of things and coping. And in doing do, we keep others, often those who are the most important to us, at arms' length.

So, what can we do?

I don't claim to have all the answers by any means, but here are some things I'm trying out and I share them only in case you want to give them a go too.

- Ask yourself the question in times of interactions with others, how true was I to myself in the contribution I made?
- Start to notice when others are showing vulnerability. How do you find yourself responding? How do you feel?
- Consider someone you would like to be closer to and ask yourself this: In what ways have I created a mask for myself, and how can I show this person how I really feel?