

Book Review

Atlas of the Heart by Brené Brown from **Radical HR**

“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”

— Ludwig Wittgenstein

Atlas of the Heart is essential reading for anyone who works with people or is simply trying to live and lead with more clarity and intention. It's currently living in pride of place on my bookshelf and it honestly is my atlas for myself as I travel to unexpected places.

At its core, this book is about expanding our language. Not for the sake of vocabulary, but for the sake of connection. Because as Brené Brown reminds us, *“language shows us that naming an experience doesn't give the experience more power, it gives us the power of understanding and meaning.”*

Brené unpacks 87 emotions and human experiences, some familiar, others less obvious (I had never heard of Freudenfreude before!), and gives us a way to name them, understand them, and talk about them with others. It's a book that invites reflection, not just on how we feel, but on how we show up, communicate, and navigate the complexity of being human.

One term that stood out for me, and I'm talking about a lot right now is **stealth expectations**—those unspoken, often unconscious expectations we place on others. The ones we don't voice, but still feel let down when they're not met. I see this all the time in leadership and teams. We think we're being easy going, but really, we're setting invisible tripwires. *Atlas of the Heart* invites us to notice, name, and own those expectations, because clarity is kind, and connection starts with being understood.

Understanding the differences between emotions like **guilt** and **shame**, and between **envy** and **jealousy**, has been incredibly helpful in both leadership and life. It's allowed me to name what I'm feeling with more accuracy, respond rather than react, and have deeper, more honest conversations with others and myself.

There's also a practical piece I've carried into my own work - I often ask people to pause and name the actual emotion they're feeling. Not just “good,” “stressed,” or “fine”, but the deeper emotion beneath it. It's hard work. And at first, people squirm. But when we can move beyond just “happy, sad or mad,” something opens up. Conversations deepen. Teams shift. We understand each other (and ourselves) a little more clearly.

Because, as Brené says, “As human beings, we can only experience life emotionally.”

And if we want to lead well, live well, and build relationships that truly work, then we need the language to make sense of that emotional life, together.

Atlas of the Heart doesn't give easy answers, but it does offer something even more powerful: a shared vocabulary for being human.

PS – And for those of you who are wondering – Freudenfreude is the enjoyment of another's success – the opposite of schadenfreude.

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Every day, sometimes every hour, we are consciously and unconsciously setting expectations of ourselves and the people in our lives-especially those closest to us. The unconscious, unexamined, and unexpressed expectations are the most dangerous and often turn into disappointment.

Atlas of the Heart
Brené Brown

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