

Brené Brown's Big Challenge (and Advice) for Every CHRO

HR Executive | Jill Barth | May 26, 2026



(Image: Adobe)



Brené Brown, Photo credit: Wynn Myers

Brené Brown has a challenge for every HR leader who starts their morning scrolling email before getting out of bed.

During a recent fireside chat at BambooHR's HR Virtual Summit, Brown suggested opening whatever AI tool you use and building an agent. Tell it your role, your company and your function. Then ask it for a two-page brief every morning covering geopolitics affecting your business and what the market is saying about your organization.

"That tool exists today for all of us," said Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston and executive chair of the Center for Daring Leadership at BetterUp. "We can literally do it." Her most recent book, *Strong Ground: The Lessons of Daring Leadership, the Tenacity of Paradox, and the Wisdom of the Human Spirit*, is out now.

The CHRO's role in the C-suite

After more than 30 years researching courage, leadership and organizational culture, Brown says HR leaders are facing a convergence of AI disruption, workforce instability and eroding trust. Together, those forces have created what may be the most consequential opening the function has ever had.

Brown said organizations are best positioned for a transformation when there is a CEO who understands the connection between culture and performance and a chief human resources officer or chief people officer who is equally invested in business strategy.

"I want a CHRO that does not miss an investment call," she said. "I want a CHRO that can read financials as well as a CEO." If the CHRO has been relegated to managing hard people situations, hiring and building talent packages without those efforts being anchored to business strategy, she said the transformation won't hold.

"The job in human resources is a partnership as close to the CEO, if not closer than the CFO or the CTO," she said. "HR folks are the most important business partners globally right now, hard stop."

Brené Brown's advice for HR leaders

BambooHR CEO Brad Rencher



BambooHR CEO Brad Rencher described that his own informal measure of that alignment is who he calls during a 15-minute drive home at the end of the day. "If I'm calling my head of people, I know I'm in the right zone," he said. "Because then we can talk about the business strategy and the people."

Brown believes that, in any room, even one filled with top-tier subject matter experts, about 40% of the answers already exist. The other 60% require everyone around the table to have a learning and curiosity mindset. This can only happen when people feel safe enough to challenge, question and say what they think. And that, she said, is where many organizations are failing.

"I'll go into a company and run a pre-mortem on a \$1.5 billion investment in something," she said. "And I'll know that 50% of the people in the room don't believe it's going to work, but will not speak up."

Brown connects a curiosity mindset to the presence or absence of trust and psychological safety, the conditions HR leaders are positioned to build. She also says that AI won't cut it here. "AI is more sycophantic than productive challenge," she said. "Even with the right prompts, AI is still a little bit afraid to challenge. It's just not built that way."

When asked what is underrated in leadership advice, Brown cited self-awareness. "It requires real introspection and metacognition. It's just hard." For HR leaders, she said the growth that matters most right now is internal. The leaders who model it create the conditions for others to do the same.

"Recognizing the humanity in ourselves and each other, and being able to name what's happening so it doesn't get in the way of big decisions," she said, "is probably the most courageous level of leadership we can see today."