

Three Ways to Build Psychological Safety on Your Team

1. **Start with you.** Weave it into day-to-day conversations.

As the leader of your team, building a psychologically safe environment starts with you. Take every opportunity to talk to your team members (one-on-one or as a group) when you're having a bad day or if you've made a mistake. Tell them specifically about what went wrong and how it made you feel. Do this as part of your daily informal conversations with team members, or whenever it feels most authentic.

This isn't about letting your standards drop. Instead, the focus is to send a signal that there is nothing to fear when things go wrong in pursuit of your goals. Once your team understands that, you'll probably find that their performance will improve—bringing standards up, rather than the other way around.

It might feel uncomfortable at first, because we've all been taught to show up to the workplace with confidence, pride, and robot-like infallibility. But that's not realistic day in, day out. This is all about acknowledging that and eliminating the fear that comes with those unrealistic expectations.

2. **Team check-ins.** Make it a habit to check in with one another, on a human level.

Spend just a few minutes at the beginning of your regular team meeting finding out how everyone is really doing. You can ask people to give just one word, or maybe a sentence that sums up how their day or week has been so far. This can sometimes spark humor. But it also gives space to people who might be having a bad day. Signal to your team that it's OK to bring whatever is on their mind to the room (real life or virtual) by being honest yourself. If it helps, you can kick it off. But you'll soon find that it will start to become a natural part of your team meeting, even habitual. And as everyone starts to feel the psychological safety that comes with that habit, they won't need to be convinced to share what's on their mind.

3. **Deeper dive check-in.** Take time out to really check in.

Sometimes it's worth checking in with people on a level that goes one step deeper. Understanding our colleagues' core motivators can really help with this. So, once a quarter take a little more time out with your team. Ask them to take turns in answering two questions:

1. What woke you up this morning?
2. What got you out of bed?

The first question usually brings out all sorts of responses, from "the cat licked me" to "the sound of classic rock on my alarm clock." This does a lovely job of reminding everyone that we're all human and we all go through the same experience of waking up every morning to face the day—some of us in more unconventional ways than others. But it's in the answers to the second question

when you'll hear what really motivates people. Why do they really get out of bed every day? Is it to pay the mortgage? To see people they work with? To bring a great experience to the customers they serve? Or to be part of the exciting journey you're on as a team and organization?

Hearing these insights about people you work with every day—they too are human, fallible, and even quirky; there is more to them than the spreadsheets they bring to your meetings; and they have a deep-rooted motivation in what they do and how they behave—can be a powerful exercise in building collective psychological safety.

If you'd like to learn more about psychological safety, I highly recommend these resources:

- Coyle, D. (2018). *The culture code: The secrets of highly successful groups*. New York: Bantam.
- Duhigg, C. (2016). What Google learned from its quest to build the perfect team. *The New York Times*.
- Edmondson, A. C. (2018). *The fearless organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*. New York: Wiley.