Four Ways to Build Psychological Safety in Your Team

What is Psychological Safety?

Psychological safety is a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.

~ Amy Edmondson in *"The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth"* (2019), p.xvi.

Consider these strategies to build Psychological Safety in your team.

1) Change Blame-Based Language

Blame-Based	Psychologically Safer
We'll *investigate*	We'll debrief (or do an After Action Review)
There was a *violation*	I saw something unexpected
He *failed* to…	What he did was…let's ask why
What they *should* have done was…	What I expected them to do was…
You need to minimize errors like me	I may miss something too, and want you to help check me
Why didn't you tell me this before now?!	What can I do to make it easier for you to tell me things like this sooner?

2) Ask Questions That Make It Easy for Others to Share Errors and Problems

1. How do we actually get this job (X) done correctly 99% of the time?
2. If you were in my job, what's one change would you make?
3. What do I do that creates, sustains, or deepens the problem?
4. May I have permission to give you feedback?

3) Ask a Trusted Peer to be On-Call to Help You Apply Psychological Safety in a Crisis

Imagine the colleague you trust the most at work. In some ways, they may know you even better then you know yourself. Talk with them about Psychological Safety. Consider asking them to be your "Go To" person in a crisis. Ask,

"Hey, if an incident or crisis happens, and I think I'm about to get punitive and blame-based with my team, may I call you? Can you remind me why Psychological Safety is so important, especially during crises, and perhaps give me some input on how to create and maintain it when I talk with my team in a few hours?"

To learn more, visit:
www.reliableorg.com

4) Write and Use an Assurance Statement

Telling your team how you plan to handle incidents, errors, and other unpleasant surprises can be a powerful way to build Psychological Safety with your team. When an incident happens, employees naturally get nervous, and look to their leaders for guidance. If your aim is to build Psychological Safety with your team, then here's a sample "Assurance" statement that can help you.

Please don't use this statement directly as authenticity is paramount. Your team will respond best to your own thoughts in your own words, especially if you craft them out well before you deliver them.

So, consider drawing ideas from the sample below. Then when ready, draft your own Assurance Statement. Then ask a trusted peer or advisor to help you refine it before your deliver it.

_____

Hi Folks.. Now that everyone's safe and we've stabilized things, I figure you all are may be unsure or anxious about what happens next, and about how all this will play out in the end. I think most any reasonable person might feel that way. I know I would.

I want to let you know something, so just hear me out for a couple minutes. I do NOT need you to respond. Just listen, OK? (ok, little response there).

Everyone makes mistakes. Everyone. Nobel Prize winners, surgeons, pilots, astronauts, the person you most look up to in the world. I make mistakes. You make mistakes. Your CEO makes mistakes. Everyone does.

It's human nature to jump to conclusions and to look for someone to blame anytime something goes wrong. It's a common, natural response...and it's nearly always the wrong response….

I'm here today to tell you we're not going to do that for this incident. Everything we've seen so far about this incident tells us that it was an error. Preventable? Probably. Worth some process improvements? Definitely. Blameworthy? No. So unless we start seeing evidence of recklessness (like coming into work under the influence, etc.) we're going to treat this incident as a chance to learn from each other, to adjust some of our policies and practices, to make some process improvements and to set us all up for better success going forward.

No one knows these systems better than you all. You work with them every day. And if you've had ideas on improving the systems related to this error, I hope you'll share them in this Event Debriefing. You're safe here. And we're all in this together. I'll do my best to stay focused fixing problems (not fixing blame) and will do my best to ensure that all other leaders involved do too. If for any reason that doesn't happen, please come speak with me directly and we'll work it out together.

You all are experts. You all are professionals. And you all are human. I just wanted you to know what my intentions are on this incident. Now, I hope you know. Please work with Chris and the other Event Debriefers and come talk with me anytime you need to. Thanks and good luck.

To learn more, visit:
www.reliableorg.com