

NBSIA Member Services Safety Bulletin

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PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Every day, occupational safety professionals deal with the perception of risk – or lack thereof – and its consequences for human behavior and safety outcomes. But they might not consider some of the risk's workers fear most: humiliation, loss of status and rejection.

When safety pros ask workers to speak up about unsafe conditions or to step in when a co-worker is engaging in risky behaviors, they might not understand the emotional stakes involved.

In psychologically safe groups, team members feel accepted and respected.



The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety

Stage 1: Inclusion Safety

Inclusion safety satisfies the basic human need to connect and belong. In this stage, you feel safe to be yourself and are accepted for who you are, including your unique attributes and defining characteristics.

Stage 2: Learner Safety

Learner safety satisfies the need to learn and grow. In this stage, you feel safe to exchange in the learning process, by asking questions, giving, and receiving feedback, experimenting, and making mistakes.

Stage 3: Contributor Safety

Contributor safety satisfies the need to make a difference. You feel safe to use your skills and abilities to make a meaningful contribution.

Stage 4: Challenger Safety

Challenger safety satisfies the need to make things better. You feel safe to speak up and challenge the status quo when you think there is an opportunity to change or improve.

5 Ways Leaders Can Help to Create Psychological Safety at Work

1. Make it an explicit priority.

Talk about the importance of creating psychological safety at work, connecting it to a higher purpose of promoting greater organizational innovation, team engagement, and a sense of inclusion. Model the behavior you want to see and set the stage by showing empathy in the workplace.

2. Facilitate everyone speaking up.

Show genuine curiosity and honor candor and truth-telling. Be open-minded, compassionate, and empathetic when someone is brave enough to say something challenging the status quo. Organizations with a coaching culture will more likely have team members with the courage to speak the truth.

3. Establish norms for how failure is handled.

Don't punish experimentation and (reasonable) risk-taking. Encourage team members to learn from failure and disappointment, and openly share your hard-won lessons learned. Doing so will help encourage innovation, instead of sabotaging it.

4. Create space for new ideas (even wild ones).

When challenging an idea, still provide the challenge in the context of support. Learn how to embrace new ideas to foster more innovative mindsets on your team.

5. Embrace productive conflict.

Promote dialogue and productive debate and work to resolve conflicts productively. Leaders can set the stage for incremental change by establishing team expectations for factors that contribute to psychological safety.

Sources:

<https://hbr.org/2021/04/what-psychological-safety-looks-like-in-a-hybrid-workplace>

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