



Here are seven simple ways to create psychological safety in your workplace. If you can't implement all of them, start with one. You may be surprised how one small change and its ripple effects will impact your people and support high performing teams.

1. Break the “Golden Rule”

You've heard it before—treat others as you'd like to be treated. When it comes to feeling psychologically safe, the opposite is true. Treat others as they'd like to be treated and create an environment for them. Take the time to ask your team members and direct reports what they'd prefer regarding things like frequency of check-ins, style of communication, type of feedback, etc.

“If you're a great manager or leader, you shouldn't be operating from the point-of-view of what you want, you should be operating from the point-of-view of what others want.” [\[Source\]](#) Interpersonal risk taking becomes far less risky if you know what others want and how they prefer to be treated.

2. Welcome curiosity

G Adventures is an example of a company actively [building a culture that embraces curiosity](#). “We want to nurture a curiosity culture because it makes us more present to the journey, more creative, better at communicating alignment with each other, and more agile and adaptive to what's happening when we arrive at an obstacle on the road. Not to mention more engaged.”

Being curious promotes a culture of learning and inquiry, despite the risks of uncertainty, vulnerability, and discord.

3. Promote healthy conflict

Conflict might be considered one of the riskiest interpersonal endeavors. It follows that we should strive to create conditions for the healthiest form of conflict.

[According to Henry Evans and Colm Foster](#), asking questions in a certain way “allows others to feel that you respect them and are debating their ideas rather than judging them because of their ideas. Doing so promotes healthy conflict, and others will not hesitate to bring you even those seemingly whacky ideas that prove to be invaluable.”

Alternatively, you can try an exercise called “[Just Like Me](#)” to put yourself in someone else’s shoes as a way to resolve conflict more productively.

4. Give employees a voice

Draconian restrictions discourage employees from freely speaking their minds, especially rules or infrastructure that limit communication. To overcome this, create liberal pathways to leadership, provide channels for feedback, and encourage conversation.

“Upward communication can be a vital force in helping contemporary organizations learn and succeed; by speaking up to those who occupy positions to authorize actions, employees can help challenge the status quo, identify problems or opportunities for improvement, and offer ideas to improve their organizations’ well-being.” [\[Source\]](#)

5. Earn and extend trust

Edmondson’s definitive research also [connects trust to psychological safety](#): “It describes a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves.”

Interestingly, trust is identified in [Google’s Project Aristotle](#) as a key requirement for the perfect team. But it’s not enough to acknowledge that trust is critical—you need to build it, keep it, and be an example for others. Here are some [practical tips to build trust in the workplace](#).

6. Promote effectiveness not efficiency

In his book, [Leaders Eat Last](#), Simon Sinek emphasizes the important role that leaders play in creating a safe and secure working environment. Leaders shouldn’t view people as a means to an

end to achieve financial outcomes or other measures of efficiency. Sinek proposes an alternate way of thinking.

“By creating a Circle of Safety around the people in the organization,” Sinek says, “leadership reduces the threats people feel inside the group, which frees them up to focus more time and energy to protect the organization from the constant dangers outside and seize the big opportunities.”

If you’re not convinced, a study published by the International Journal of Stress Management found that emotionally secure employees are [more engaged, productive, and innovative](#).

7. Think differently about creativity

[Ed Catmull and the team at Pixar](#) use an unconventional approach to creativity to solidify the trust in their organization. Counter to instinct, they’ve built a culture around taking risks, where all ideas are encouraged and unpredictable paths are embraced.

The essence of this approach is having everyone feel comfortable sharing incomplete work, and then learning and becoming inspired through further development together. This creative process is one of trust and openness, where team members can be vulnerable without penalty.

Organizational psychologist Dr. Marla Gottschalk [isolates a few of Pixar’s specific strategies](#) in support of their approach. “The ideas Catmull proposes may initially make us a bit uncomfortable—and go against the grain of how we might usually work. But, the dynamic has undeniably been proven to be a winner.”

Building psychological safety at work is a long-term game

Ultimately, psychological safety in the workplace is about providing a safe space for employees to be their full selves. This extract from the New York Times Magazine article on [Google’s perfect team quest](#), sums it up perfectly (and is more relevant now than ever before as we attempt to build hybrid workplaces):

“No one wants to leave part of their personality and inner life at home. But to be fully present at work, to feel “psychologically safe,” we must know that we can be free enough, sometimes, to share the things that scare us without fear of recriminations. We must be able to talk about what is messy or sad, to have hard conversations with colleagues who are driving us crazy. We can’t be focused just on efficiency.”

Furthermore, it's important not to assume that once the conditions for an emotionally secure workplace are present, that employee engagement and positive workplace culture will follow. These are also important aspects of a healthy organization, and require focused effort.