

Tips for Promoting Psychological Safety

Extensive research demonstrates that most employees cover to some degree at work and that covering has a negative impact at both the individual and organizational level. By promoting psychological safety, we can create a workplace where employees are more comfortable bringing their whole selves to work, are happier, more fulfilled and engaged and are more committed to organizational outcomes.



This model explores the concept of building psychological safety from four different, yet interconnecting approaches:

- 1) Promoting psychological safety by pursuing a deeper sense of self-awareness
- 2) Connecting with others on an interpersonal level
- 3) Fostering belonging within our teams
- 4) Serving as a change agent through allyship and advocacy

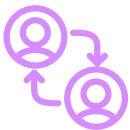


Self – Promoting a psychologically safe environment where employees no longer feel compelled to hide or cover a part of themselves in order to fit in or succeed starts with self-awareness.

- **Practice Vulnerability** – Admitting your own insecurities and sharing parts of yourself that you might want to cover helps create an environment where others will feel safe doing the same. Acknowledge your limitations with your team and ask for help when you need it.
- **Recognize and Manage your Assumptions and Biases** - Be aware of personal assumptions, blind spots and biases that influence the way you react or behave, and in turn interact with your employees and coworkers.
- **Acknowledge your Impact on Others** - A key element of fostering psychological safety is examining how your words and actions affect other people. Pay attention to others’ reactions to what you do and say and the emotions they are experiencing at the time. Work to develop a deeper sense of empathy so you can build trust and promote an environment where all employees feel safe and supported.

→ *Start your team meetings by sharing your thoughts and asking for help where you need input. “After reviewing the customer feedback, I have some thoughts on how we can improve their experience but I’m not as strong on the technology side. I could really use your input in this area.”*

→ *Open up and share something about yourself. “I need to leave the office today at 4:30 because I’m coaching my daughter’s basketball team. I felt a bit nervous telling you this because I don’t want anyone to think I’m not committed enough to the team or my job. Does anyone else ever feel that way?”*



Others: We can promote psychological safety by supporting and connecting with others in a way that is respectful, welcoming and meaningful so people can be themselves and feel accepted for all of who they are.

- **Say Hello** - Greeting someone every time you see them can be a very powerful first step in creating an individual sense of belonging. Acknowledging a person with a simple hello creates a pathway into their world and invites them to come into yours.
- **Make a Friend** - Having even just one friend at work in whom we can confide and be ourselves can go a long way in cultivating a personal sense of psychological safety. Take the time to connect with people in a genuine, present manner. Making a friend starts by being a friend – putting your trust in someone and being vulnerable and welcoming.
- **Find Points of Connection** - One of the best ways to create a culture of belonging is to start with commonalities – the interests, experiences or values we share. Our points of connection can serve as a jumping off point for building stronger more trusting relationships where people feel more comfortable sharing more of themselves.

→ *Important, transitional or personally relevant moments make great opportunities to provide a sense of belonging on an individual basis. Schedule a one-on-one meeting with a new employee on their first day and make the conversation about getting to know each other, not about the job.*

→ *Learn more about your employees or coworkers and their hobbies and ask them about it and talk to them about your own interests and hobbies. It will be easier to connect with employees who share a common interest so be sure to put in extra effort to build those connections where your common interests are not as apparent.*



Team: Creating team environments where employees are encouraged to share new ideas and are empowered to challenge the status quo will help foster an environment where employees feel comfortable bringing all their skills, talents and unique perspectives to the table.

- **Set the Tone for Your Team** - Make sure everyone on your team understands the value of inclusion and bringing your authentic self to work. Set clear expectations and create an environment where all employees feel safe and empowered to share their real feelings and honest opinions. Enabling your employees to be human can help build trust and lasting bonds.
- **Embrace People for Their Individuality** - The goal is to create a welcoming environment that embraces people's individuality rather than expecting them to conform to organizational norms to fit in.
- **Involve Team Members in the Planning Process** - To develop a deeper sense of connection and comradery, take advantage of opportunities to involve people in the planning and decision-making process. Make sure everyone on your team is invited to the table, encouraged to share their ideas, and acknowledged for their contributions to the team.

→ *Create opportunities such as team meetings, internal blogs or formalized storytelling campaigns that provide a platform for people to share stories about their own struggles to fit in. This can be a powerful tool for creating shared experiences and inspiring kindness, especially when managers and leaders are willing to share stories about their own challenges associated with being their authentic selves at work.*

→ *Send meeting agendas in advance and pose one question or challenge and ask all employees to come prepared to share their thoughts, ideas or questions at the upcoming meeting.*



Organization: To truly create psychologically safe workplaces requires culture change. Through advocacy and allyship you can help shift organizational and behavioral norms.

- **Role Model Inclusion** – Role modeling inclusive behavior can help create a new standard, and others will follow suit. Make sure inclusion is evident in your actions as well as your words.
- **Get Involved** – You can help promote psychological safety by refusing to tolerate disrespectful behavior and by stepping up and getting involved when you witness it. You can respond to negative behavior in a number of different ways ranging from simply raising awareness, defusing the situation more subtly, or addressing the source more directly and explaining why the behavior was problematic and what they might do to make amends.
- **Drive Systemic Change** - Look for patterns associated with organizational norms that may minimize differences, limit the success of marginalized employee and reenforce a need to cover. Acknowledge these patterns with yourself, with your peers and with leaders in the organization. And finally, work with leaders throughout the organization to change these patterns and create a more equitable and inclusive workplace.

→ *Employees will often stay quiet if they hear coworkers making insensitive jokes about the community in which they identify. As an ally you could intervene. Explain that you don't think the joke was funny and would appreciate it if they didn't repeat those kinds of jokes in front of you. You can also let the person know that kind of behavior is disrespectful, hurtful and in violation of company policy.*

→ *Early morning or late evening meetings may make it difficult for working parents, particularly working mothers, to attend or be fully present. These types of norms can cause working parents to cover the fact that they have children. To support working parents, advocate for policies that discourage meetings before 8:00am or after 5:00pm.*