# Psychological Safety Is Crucial to Your Team's Success — Here are 4 Ways to Create It



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The ability to ask questions, own mistakes and positively contribute to a team is invaluable — especially for a team leader. If you're guiding a group of individuals toward a goal, you want them plugged in and contributing to the best of their abilities.

One of the most effective ways to do this is by cultivating psychological safety within your team.

# What is psychological safety?

Psychological safety is the concept of being able to speak your mind without suffering negative consequences. It applies to everything from ideation to confession.

The Center for Creative Leadership takes things a step further by defining psychological safety in the workplace as follows: “At work, it’s a shared expectation held by members of a team that teammates will not embarrass, reject, or punish them for sharing ideas, taking risks, or soliciting feedback.

Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson sums up the concept with the simple phrase, “It’s felt permission for candor.”

Psychological safety is important because it opens the doors for better workplace experiences. Employees are more loyal and engage better. Teams brainstorm with greater creativity. Overall team performance improves, as well.

Despite being a key factor to success, psychological safety is consistently under-prioritized in the workplace. Leaders are particularly at fault.

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# How to create psychological safety for your team

Okay, so psychological safety is crucial to your team’s success. But how do you cultivate it within your organization? Here are a few suggestions to help you get started.

## 1. Set the tone from the get-go

You want to build a sense of psychological safety from the jump. One of the best ways to do this is to start your

relationship with each team member with a Keystone Conversation.

*How to Work With Anyone* by Michael Bungay Stanier discusses this critical leadership tool as a way to prepare a professional relationship to bear stress and stay healthy over time. It uses simple yet calculating questions to set an open and trusting relationship with each employee.

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## 2. Actively empower others

Empowering your team is a great way to encourage them to step forward and contribute to a psychologically safe team culture. When you delegate responsibilities and set expectations, your team members must choose how they will respond.

If you encourage a culture of psychological safety, they will have the option to speak their mind, own their mistakes and so on. This will reinforce the group's safety and help build trust between peers.

One of the biggest areas where empowered employees thrive, as far as psychological safety is concerned, is asking questions. When employees feel that their coworkers and boss won't criticize or punish them, they will feel empowered to ask follow-up questions. This enhances communication and minimizes mistakes.

## 3. Don't blame, build trust

In marketing, customer trust stems from communication, consistency and credibility. The first two come from highlighting genuine solutions and delivering on those solutions over time. When third-party sources and brands reference a company, it boosts its credibility.

The same concept applies to internal team interactions. For team members to trust their leader and one another, they must establish solid forms of communication. This starts with avoiding blame and negative comments.

This is different from constructive feedback, which positively critiques rather than destructively tearing down. In fact, Champlain College Online lists “establish trust” as the first step in providing constructive feedback.

If a team is going to operate well, it must abolish negativity. Only then can its members build credibility and embrace trust with one another through positive reinforcement and constructive feedback.

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## 4. Lead through demonstration

Psychological safety is one of the hardest things to demonstrate as a team leader. You must be humble, confident and self-aware. You also need to apply the concept in multiple scenarios.

For example, leaders should be willing to be open with their communication. If you have an idea, share it with the group and seek honest feedback. Even harder – if you make a mistake, be transparent about it.

At the same time, you must be able to treat others with the same standards. If someone has an idea, encourage them to share. If they make a mistake, take their confession in stride. Leading through demonstration is *the* most effective way to promote a work culture and team environment that values psychological safety.

**Related: This Question Is the Foundation of Psychological Safety**

# Psychological safety: the key to team success

Accountability is important but can’t get you far without psychological safety. These two aspects are critical to team success.

The thing is, everyone is aware of accountability. Whether they’re encouraging it or shirking it, they know that people and teams must be held responsible for their actions.

Psychological safety is more nebulous. It takes a thoughtful, deliberate and consistent effort from a leader to cultivate it within their team. When that happens, it empowers team members to step out boldly as they learn to overcome problems and create solutions together.

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