

This Question Is the Foundation of Psychological Safety

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In your gut, down your spinal column and in the deepest recesses of your mind lingers the most fundamental question of humanity. It's the question the entire human body is asking every second of every day.

If leaders answer this one question, they'll win the head, heart and hands of employees, resulting in better engagement, performance and retention.

This question is the root of the most common questions that workers ask themselves every day, such as...

- Do I have what it takes to do my job?
- Do I have the knowledge to speak up during a meeting?
- Do I have enough money to provide for my family?
- Do I have the confidence to ask for a promotion?
- Do I have the wisdom to lead my team effectively?

The question behind the above questions – and most other questions we ask ourselves – is the much simpler question that drives human behavior...

Am I safe?

No matter age, role or status, every human is unconsciously and repeatedly asking themselves this one question.

“Am I safe” is the cornerstone of each of the three primary human needs: survive, belong and become.

For the survive need, humans ask, “Do I have food, water and shelter?” Satisfying these primary human needs leads directly to safety.

For the belong need, humans ask, “Am I contributing and is that contribution valued?” When the early humans who roamed the plains were excluded from their tribe (likely due to lack of valued contribution to the community), they became instantly vulnerable. Today humans still avoid exclusion in order to remain safe. Belonging equates to safety.

For the become need, humans ask, “Am I living my full potential?” By striving towards full potential, humans are seeking safety from regret. Regret for not living life fully and doing what they were called to do. Safety also comes in the form of security in one’s ability to perform well and sustain a fruitful career.

How can leaders move team members beyond safety-seeking?

Create psychological safety.

Psychological safety is a place “where one feels that one’s voice is welcome with bad news, questions, concerns, half-baked ideas and even mistakes,” says Amy Edmondson, author of *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation and Growth*.

Much like hunger or thirst, when you fulfill the human need of psychological safety, the mind and body are freed to focus on loftier goals.

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When psychological safety is created, people are freed to ask questions, raise concerns and pitch ideas without unnecessary repercussions. Amid the increased importance of

equality and allyship at work and growing loneliness among virtual teams, psychological safety is invaluable for today's organizations.

Leaders who create psychological safety among a team reap...

Psychological safety increases the confidence, creativity and trust among a team and is the single most important quality that determines a team's success. Additionally, one of the most important benefits of psychological safety is innovation.

In a world where black swans lurk around every corner, it's critical a team feels safe enough to show up without a playbook and challenge the status quo. Psychological safety then allows a team to take action, freely admit mistakes and talk through errors allowing for fast learning and quick iteration.

The absence of psychological safety represses innovation, stunts engagement, slows performance and decreases loyalty among a team.

Psychological safety is the wellspring of innovation, engagement, performance, and loyalty.

One of the most integral aspects of leadership is the ability to satisfy a team's deep desire to feel...safe.

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