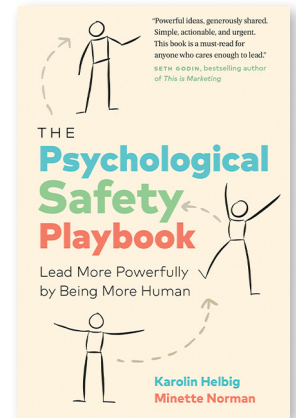


The Psychological Safety Playbook

Lead More Powerfully by Being More Human

by **Karolin Helbig and Minette Norman**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Teams that have high degrees of psychological safety also have the greatest levels of performance and innovative power. They're teams that people want to be a part of because they make people feel safe and included. Psychological safety is the "belief that one will not be punished for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes." *The Psychological Safety Playbook* is your guide to creating psychological safety within your team and taking them to the highest levels of performance.

Karolin Helbig and Minette Norman will guide you through twenty-five specific actions that you can take to create psychological safety in your workplace. These 25 skills are organized into 5 "plays," each containing a set of skills to learn and practice. These actions can be taken by any leader, whether you're a high-level executive or a small team leader. Each action constitutes a self-contained chapter within the book, so you can start anywhere and apply them in any order.

When applied, the skills outlined in this book will help you create a high-performing work environment built on a foundation of respect. Psychological safety creates unprecedented team performance.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Practical, real-life skills you can use in your workplace.
- How to intentionally create psychological safety within your workplace teams.
- How to be a leader in any position within your organization.
- Skills to leverage the strengths of your colleagues to reach their highest potential.

Introduction

Psychological safety is defined as “a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.” This idea was first developed by Amy C. Edmondson, Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at Harvard Business School. Teams with high levels of psychological safety are the most inclusive and perform at the highest levels in the workplace. As a leader, you should think of psychological safety as the essential nutrient to build a healthy team.

Communicate Courageously

Courageous communication is a fundamental skill for developing psychological safety. It requires getting out of your comfort zone and trying new things, which means you might not feel comfortable practicing these skills immediately. This journey requires embracing discomfort. In other words, if you want to foster psychological safety, you need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Communicating with courage is about being honest, allowing others to contribute to the conversation, and letting go of perfection. While many of us have been trained to think that we should have all the answers, it's time to let go of these beliefs. Showing up authentically in front of our colleagues requires vulnerability.

Welcome Other Viewpoints

By asking this simple question, you open yourself up to see things from a viewpoint other than your own. This allows your personal views to be challenged and acknowledges that you don't know everything. Welcoming other viewpoints avoids conformity bias, or feeling pressured to agree with everyone else.

Leaders should be aware that team members tend to agree with their leader's viewpoints to avoid creating dissent within the workplace. It's important to encourage open discussion, including different perspectives from your own. This fosters an environment where everyone feels their views are valid.

Solicit Diverse Perspectives

In any group, there are naturally some people who are more dominant than others. This is often due to personality differences, but people from underrepresented groups often feel they have less right to speak up and share than people in more dominant groups. Your job as a leader is to make

sure that everyone's voice is equal, with no one viewpoint holding more weight than another.

Open Up

Leaders are often trained that being professional requires a lack of emotion. The irony of this is that it fails to show humanity. All humans have emotions, it's part of what makes us human. Recognizing our emotions allows us to harness and control them. When emotions are suppressed, we lose control of our reactions and our behavior. When you share your emotions with others, you create a sense of trust with your colleagues.

Take Off the Mask of Perfection

Leaders are frequently portrayed as driven, results-oriented individuals who know how to solve every problem and how to get results in every situation. But this couldn't be further from the truth. Truly successful leaders never stop learning and seek out opportunities to learn. Admitting that you don't have all the answers may put you in a vulnerable position, but it creates an environment that promotes teamwork and the pursuit of new information.

Nurture a Sense of Humor at Work

One of the most admired qualities of an effective leader is a sense of humor. The ability to laugh together with your co-workers creates bonds and brings a lightness to an environment that is often stressful and heavy-feeling. Research shows that laughter boosts team performance, well-being, and measurably impacts your bottom line. When you lead your team with a sense of humor, you create motivation and make it possible for everyone to contribute their very best.

Master The Art Of Listening

Listening well is an art form, and one of the most underdeveloped leadership skills. Most of the time, we are so focused on presenting our opinion that we don't take the time to listen. When we are “listening,” we listen intending to formulate a response instead of listening with the intent to understand. Artful listening requires a change in our perspective. It requires being genuinely interested in others' opinions, even when we disagree with what they have to say.

Listen to Understand

Mastering this skill is difficult for many of us. It means allowing yourself to listen to what others have to say and focusing on understanding their perspective. It also means

not spending that time formulating a rebuttal, interrupting with comments, or waiting to jump into a conversation. Listening to understand involves an attitude shift. It means acknowledging perspectives that are different from your own and being aware of your blind spots.

Be Fully Present

Quite often we think we are listening to someone, but we aren't. We're allowing someone else to talk, making eye contact, and hearing what the person says, but our mind is somewhere else. We're mentally managing our to-do list in our heads instead of being present in the conversation. Mind-wandering is normal, but we can train ourselves to refocus our attention by practicing mindful listening. By making a conscious choice to refocus on the person talking, you become present in the conversation.

Clarify Your Understanding

Paraphrasing what someone else has said allows you to ensure you have heard them correctly and that you understand the meaning of what they said. By repeating back a summary of what you heard in the form of, "So, what I'm hearing is..." or "Just to make sure I'm understanding you correctly..." you let the other person know that you are interested in what they have to say. They will feel heard and be more willing to share with you in the future.

Listen for Emotions

Whether we like it or not, everything we do evokes an emotional response of some sort. While we've been taught that business should be emotion-free, as human beings, we inherently make decisions based on emotion. Research has shown that emotion is necessary for making decisions. Identifying and acknowledging the emotions behind what people are saying can help you address issues and resolve conflicts at the source.

Commit to Curiosity

Curiosity fuels learning and connection. If you want to bring people to their full potential, ask them to tell you more and elaborate on their perspective. Avoid jumping in with your ideas and allow others time to think and speak. When you are genuinely interested in hearing more you will elicit more complete thoughts from your team members and create a deeper connection. "Tell me more" is all you need to say.

Manage Your Reactions

Reacting emotionally or defensively can take away from

psychological safety in the workplace. If you respond harshly to someone, they may feel embarrassed or humiliated, making them feel that it is no longer safe to open up at work. To create a psychologically safe space you must be self-aware and learn to manage your reactions. This doesn't mean you shouldn't acknowledge your emotions, only that you must learn to choose a response that is productive and non-reactive.

Model Non-defensive Reactions

Criticism automatically causes us to become defensive. It's our natural reaction, but we can become self-aware enough to stop it before we say something we shouldn't. Pausing and reflecting before we respond will help prevent us from lashing out and hurting others.

Respond Productively

Self-awareness is a fundamental leadership skill that will allow you to control your responses. One of the best ways to do this is to label what we are feeling in real-time. Research shows that by giving our emotions a name, we can take control and decrease our emotional response. It's important to acknowledge your feelings, but don't judge yourself for them.

Watch Out for Your Blind Spots

Our brain is masterful at creating stories, whether they are true or not. This characteristic creates blind spots and biases that we may be unaware of. However, we can become more aware of these blind spots and be more suspicious about the conclusions we draw from limited information. Don't let your brain go on "auto-pilot" and make assumptions about what others are thinking or feeling. Once you recognize your blind spots, you will be more open to the perspectives and experiences of others.

Appreciate Being Challenged

Being challenged often feels like we're being attacked. Our brain can't distinguish the difference between us being chased down by a predator and a team member questioning our strategy. When our brain goes into fight-or-flight mode, we become defensive and reactive. But we don't need to be. Stepping back from our automatic reactions will allow us to provide a more productive response. Even when you fundamentally disagree with someone else's perspective, you can still take the time to appreciate their response and their courage for sharing their opinion.

Build On Others' Ideas

Using a simple change of phrasing when responding to new

ideas can shift the entire conversation. Instead of hearing a team member's idea and saying "No, but..." try saying "Yes, and..." Our brains tend to focus on the negative aspects of what someone is saying. To cultivate an attitude of sharing and openness, we need to shift to focusing on the positive. Resist the urge to instantly shut down new ideas and make room for innovation and creativity.

Embrace Risk And Failure

How you deal with risk and failure will have a giant impact on the psychological safety of your team. Do you encourage risk-taking? Do you encourage learning and trying new things? Or do you point out people's failures and shortcomings? Changing patterns of behavior is challenging, but learning and taking risks are a necessary part of success.

Normalize Failure

Accept the fact that there is no success without failure. If you want to succeed, you must embrace failure as part of the process. Thinking success is a straight line from start to finish is unrealistic. Developing a culture where you share and learn from failures will encourage learning and improvement. High-performance teams don't "fail," they learn from the things that don't work and improve upon them.

Reframe Failures as Learning Opportunities

While most companies promote continuous learning, the real learning comes from failure and making mistakes. Given this, it's a leader's responsibility to remove the fear of failure. Promote the idea of examining failures to find the lesson. This will also prevent people from hiding their mistakes and encourage them to try new things.

Get Comfortable with Discomfort

Our brains are naturally designed to stick to what we know. Unfortunately, this doesn't make us more productive. If we want to be more successful or productive, we must step outside our comfort zones. To create psychological safety in the workplace, we can't run away from things because they are hard. We must learn to deal with difficult emotions and let go of pre-existing judgments. This gives us the freedom to provide psychological safety for others.

Model Learner Behavior

It's important for leaders to be humble and shows others that we make mistakes. Modeling the behavior of owning your mistakes and learning from them will encourage others to do the same.

Celebrate Continuous Learning

Examining mistakes as a team, figuring out what went wrong, and discussing the lessons to be learned create a non-judgemental environment. It openly shifts failures to be a positive experience for everyone.

Design Inclusive Rituals

Everyone has an innate need to feel like they belong. Ensuring that everyone is accepted as an individual within your organization, is offered the same opportunities, and feels free to participate is key to creating psychological safety.

Upgrade Meetings

Most workplace meetings involve a few people speaking up regularly while others sit back and listen. Appointing an "Inclusion Booster" during your meetings facilitates discussion among all team members and allows everyone to speak. In the name of inclusion, this role should be rotated regularly.

Respect All Voices

Establish a no-interruption rule in all meetings so that people speaking feel respected and heard. This will allow you to create a safe, inclusive work culture.

Take Turns

Allowing everyone a chance to speak allows everyone to be heard. Along with a "no-interruption" rule in meetings, establish a "no one speaks twice until everyone speaks once" rule. You can also try using an online collaboration tool where everyone can put their ideas.

Gather Feedback and Express Gratitude

Check-in with your team regularly regarding their psychological safety. This will give you real-time information on how everyone is feeling and allow you to know where improvement is needed. Expressing gratitude to your team members for both successes and failures will let them know they are valued and that you see them.

Conclusion

Creating psychological safety in the workplace is a continuous process. It takes time and continuous learning. Implementing the strategies outlined in this book will help you build a safe and inclusive workplace where everyone feels valued.



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