The Fearless Organization

January 24, 2023 & February 3, 2023
On at least one occasion, at this organization, I have felt unable to raise a concern with my supervisor even though I believed it was an important concern.
85% of respondents reported at least one occasion when they felt unable to raise a concern with their supervisor even though they believed it was important.
My opinions count at work

3 in 10 respondents agree
3 in 10 agree their opinions count at work

Moving that to 6 in 10, would result in:

• 27% reduction in turnover
• 40% reduction in safety incidents, and
• 12% increase in productivity
Benefits

• Quality Improvement/Performance Improvement
• Process Improvement/Efficiency
• Avoiding Preventable Failures
• Inclusion & Belonging
• Problem Solving
• Engagement
• Productivity
• Retention
• Creativity
• Learning
Figure 2.1  Mentions of Psychological Safety in Popular Media.⁴
Psychological Safety
• Is lacking
• Improves Learning
• Increases Performance
• Enhances Employee Engagement
• Acts as a Moderator
A workplace climate where people feel safe to take the inherent interpersonal risks of candor by speaking up to contribute ideas, share information, ask questions, raise concerns, and report mistakes.
**Psychological Danger**

- Fear of admitting mistakes.
- Allowing group dynamics to affect decision making.
- Team members are less likely to share different views.

**Psychological Safety**

- Comfortable admitting mistakes.
- Better innovation and decision making.
- Everyone openly shares ideas.
- Learning from failure.
A workplace climate where people feel **safe to take the inherent interpersonal risks of candor** by speaking up to contribute ideas, share information, ask questions, raise concerns, and report mistakes.
Common Misconceptions

Psychological Safety is Not...
- Niceness, ease, or comfort
- A personality factor
- Low standards
- A guarantee that you’ll get your way
- A synonym for trust
- Oversharing
- An excuse to be rude
- An exclusive responsibility of supervisors
- Just a perk
- The only requirement for success
Essential in today’s world

• If the work involves novelty, uncertainty, interdependence, and/or high stakes, then success depends on Psychological Safety
  - Without speaking up about problems and errors – quality can’t improve
  - Without willingness to ask for help – employees underperform
  - Without asking questions and raising concerns about decisions – the organization is at risk of preventable failure

• It’s not enough to hire smart, motivated, talented people if they can’t contribute their knowledge and experience at the critical moment

• Psychological Safety unleashes talent, takes the foot off the brake making it possible for other drivers of success (talent, ingenuity, diversity, purpose, clear expectations) to be expressed in ways that influence how work is done
Unconscious Calculation

- Constantly managing interpersonal risk
  - Don’t ask questions to avoid being seen as ignorant
  - Don’t admit mistakes to avoid being seen as incompetent
  - Don’t offer ideas to avoid being seen as intrusive
  - Don’t offer critique to avoid being seen as negative

- Tend to over weigh the costs and under weigh the benefits of speaking up due to a number of factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Who benefits</th>
<th>When benefit occurs</th>
<th>Certainty of Benefit</th>
<th>Effort Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voice</strong></td>
<td>Organization/ customers</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Effortful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Silence</strong></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Passive</td>
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</table>
Learned Behavior & Unwritten Rules

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rules Governing When to Speak</th>
<th>Interview Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t criticize something the boss may have helped create</td>
<td>“The boss may have created these processes and may be offended because he’s attached to them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t speak unless you have the data</td>
<td>“You’re questioning their ideas and had better have proof to back up your statements.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t speak up if the boss’s boss is present</td>
<td>“It’s risky because your direct boss would feel as if you were going over their head.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t speak up in a large group</td>
<td>“Managers hate to be put on the spot in front of others . . . You should pass it by the boss in private, so you don’t cut their legs out from under them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking up has career consequences</td>
<td>“The long-term consequences are bad because [higher ups] will resent being put on the spot.”</td>
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</table>
Silence

when voice was possible, rarely
announces itself

not offering
an idea is
invisible
Psychological Safety Survey

1. If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you
2. Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues
3. People on this team sometimes reject others for being different
4. It is safe to take a risk on this team
5. It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help
6. No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts
7. Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized
Creating a Fearless Organization

SET THE STAGE

INVITE PARTICIPATION

RESPOND PRODUCTIVELY
Setting the stage

To create shared expectation and meaning

Frame the work

- Frame failure
- Frame the environment
- Frame the role of a supervisor

Emphasize Purpose

- What’s at stake
- Why it matters
- For whom
Setting the stage

To create shared expectation and meaning

• Frame the work
  • Frame failure*
  • Frame the environment
  • Frame the role of a supervisor

• Emphasize Purpose
  • What’s at stake
  • Why it matters
  • For whom

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Failure Concept: Failure is not acceptable</th>
<th>Failure is a natural byproduct of experimentation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Beliefs: Effective performers don’t fail</td>
<td>Effective performers produce, learn from, and share lessons from failures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal: Prevent failure</td>
<td>Promote fast growth &amp; learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact: Hiding failures out of fear</td>
<td>Open discussion, fast learning, and innovation</td>
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Setting the stage

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  - **Frame the environment***
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V.U.C.A. – Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity

- reminds people to be curious and alert to pick up early signs of change

Interdependence

- reminds people of the need for communication and for understanding how their work impacts others

Stakes

- helps put interpersonal risk into perspective
Setting the stage
To create shared expectation and meaning

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<th>Supervisors</th>
<th>Direct Reports</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have the answers</td>
<td>Quietly do what they’re told</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Set direction</td>
<td>→ Contribute crucial knowledge &amp; insights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give orders</td>
<td>Judge performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Invite input to clarify &amp; improve</td>
<td>→ Create conditions for continued learning to achieve excellence</td>
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*Note: The role of a supervisor is crucial in setting the stage for shared expectations and meaning.
Setting the stage

To create shared expectation and meaning

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*Purpose is the energy that carries us through challenging moments & helps us overcome interpersonal risks

What is the purpose that motivates you?

What makes the organization’s work meaningful to the broader community?

Supervisors:
How often and vigorously are you conveying this compelling rationale for the work to others?

Have you asked your direct reports how they would answer questions one and two?
Setting the stage

To create shared expectation and meaning

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<tr>
<td>To instill confidence that voice is wanted</td>
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<th>Situational Humility</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Acknowledge gaps</td>
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<tr>
<th>Proactive Inquiry</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ask good questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Listen well</td>
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<th>Structures for Input</th>
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Inviting participation
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• Structures for Input
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Acknowledging Gaps

- I don’t know
- I need help
- I made a mistake
- I’m sorry
- That did not go how I planned
- I may miss something
Inviting participation

To instill confidence that voice is wanted

- Situational Humility
  - Acknowledge gaps

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  - Ask questions

- Structures for Input
  - Lower the activation energy

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**Attributes of Powerful Questions**

- Rooted in genuine curiosity and interest
- Stimulates reflective conversation
- Invites new possibilities
- Generates energy and forward movement
- Channels attention and focuses inquiry
- Evokes more questions
Inviting participation

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**To Broaden Understanding**
- What's missing?
- Who has a different perspective?
- What did the dissenters say?

**To Deepen Understanding**
- What leads you to think that?
- Can you give me an example?

**To Express Interest & Availability**
- What can I do to help?
- What are your concerns?
- What barriers are you facing?
Inviting participation

To instill confidence that voice is wanted

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Anonymous Feedback

Focus Groups

Ombuds Program
Inviting participation

To instill confidence that voice is wanted

- Situational Humility
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- Proactive Inquiry
  - Ask good questions
  - Listen well

- Structures for Input
  - Lower the activation energy for providing input
Responding Productively

To orient the team toward continuous growth

Express Appreciation for Input
• Listen
• Thank

Destigmatize Failure
• Seek to better understand the failure
• Look forward
• Offer help

Maintain Standards
• Determine appropriate consequence for repeated deviations of known process or standard
Responding Productively

To orient the team toward continuous growth

• **Express Appreciation for Input***
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• **Maintain Standards**

---

### Unwanted

• Highly emotional responses
• Defensiveness
• Engaging in retaliatory behaviors

### Invalid

• Telling or implying the person is out of line, off base, or flat out wrong

### Irrelevant

• Nothing changes as a result of the feedback
• No follow-up or follow through
Responding Productively

To orient the team toward continuous growth

- **Express Appreciation for Input**
  - Listen
  - Thank
- **Destigmatize Failure**
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  - Offer help
- **Maintain Standards**

---

**Wanted**
- Express appreciation

**Valid**
- Ask questions to facilitate your understanding
- Look for portions of the feedback you can agree with

**Relevant**
- Communicate what was done with the input
Responding Productively

To orient the team toward continuous growth

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  - Listen
  - Thank

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intelligent</th>
<th>Complex</th>
<th>Preventable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novel foray into new territory</td>
<td>Unique and novel combination of events</td>
<td>Deviation from known process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty, experimentation, risk taking</td>
<td>Complexity, variability, new factors</td>
<td>Behavior, skill, or attention deficiency</td>
</tr>
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</table>

- Unsuccessful trial
- System breakdown
- Process deviation

- **Bottom Line**
- **Productive responses**
  - Brainstorm new hypothesis
  - Design additional experiment
  - Celebrate
  - Failure analysis
  - Identify risk factors
  - System improvement
  - Train/retrain
  - Process improvement
  - Disciplinary action
Responding Productively

To orient the team toward continuous growth

Express Appreciation for Input

• Listen
• Thank

Destigmatize Failure

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Maintain Standards

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## Building Psychological Safety

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Setting the Stage</th>
<th>Inviting Participation</th>
<th>Responding Productively</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td><strong>Frame the Work</strong></td>
<td><strong>Demonstrate Situational Humility</strong></td>
<td><strong>Express Appreciation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>tasks</td>
<td>■ Set expectations about</td>
<td>■ Acknowledge gaps</td>
<td>■ Listen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>failure, uncertainty, and</td>
<td>■ Practice Inquiry</td>
<td>■ Acknowledge and thank</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interdependence to clarify</td>
<td>■ Ask good questions</td>
<td>■ Destigmatize Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the need for voice</td>
<td>■ Model intense listening</td>
<td>■ Look forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Emphasize Purpose</strong></td>
<td><strong>Set up Structures and Processes</strong></td>
<td>■ Offer help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Identify what’s at stake,</td>
<td>■ Create forums for input</td>
<td>■ Discuss, consider, and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>why it matters, and for</td>
<td>■ Provide guidelines for discussion</td>
<td>brainstorm next steps</td>
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<td></td>
<td>whom</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sanction Clear Violations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accomplishes</td>
<td><strong>Shared expectations and</strong></td>
<td><strong>Confidence that voice is</strong></td>
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<td>meaning</td>
<td>welcome</td>
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<td><strong>Orientation toward continuous</strong></td>
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<td>learning</td>
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Upcoming Sessions

**Hiring Series Part II: Screening, Interviewing & Making Offers**
Thursday, January 26, from 3 – 3:45pm CT

**Information Security Updates and Improvements**
- Friday, January 27, 10:30am – 11:30pm CT

**Question of the Month Series | January Debrief/February Kick-Off Session Details:**
- Thursday, February 2, 3 – 3:30pm CT

**The Fearless Organization**
- Friday, February 3, from 3 – 4pm CT

**Navigating Pregnancy on Campus**
- Monday, February 6, from 10 – 11am CT