

Psychological Safety Guideposts



In the workplace, psychological safety means “the belief that one can speak up without risk of punishment or humiliation” (Edmondson, A.C., & Mortenson, M. 2021). Key strategies for fostering psychological safety include:

✓ **COMMUNICATE AND OVER COMMUNICATE:**
Prioritize check-ins and do not cancel them. Follow through. Be honest but kind. And send a weekly email with updates, reviews or reminders regarding any plans, and an expression of gratitude.

✓ **BE TRANSPARENT:**
Share why staff are asked to do something. Share the organization’s strategy. Share meeting agendas in advance.

✓ **RESOLVE CONFLICTS QUICKLY:**
Listen actively and repeat what you hear. This will ensure that you understand them and that they feel what was said is important. Find something about the person’s position with which you can agree. Responses can include:

- > With the truth: “Yes, it’s been a long day for you.”
- > In principle: “Yes, everyone needs a break from time to time.”
- > With the experience: “Yes, there are probably others who feel this way.”

Agreeing can help the other person feel heard and more open to resolution.

✓ **CONSIDER WHERE EACH OF YOU IS COMING FROM (POSITIONALITY):**
Positionality is the social and political context that forms one’s identity (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, ability). Where we come from shapes how we see the world and how we interact with others. Understanding our positionality can help us confront our biases. By acknowledging the limit of our perspective, we help create space for different perspectives and experiences.

✓ **ADDRESS MICROAGGRESSIONS:**
A microaggression is an expression of bias. These acts are the subtle, sometimes intentional, but often unintentional interactions or behaviors that communicate bias. People who commit microaggressions are often unaware that what they say or do may be offensive. Examples include making comments about how well an Asian American person speaks English or turning away or crossing the street to avoid a Black man. Recognize how microaggressions affect your employees and address challenges to foster a psychologically safe workplace. Help staff use “I” statements such as “I feel...” or “That comment made me feel....” If you make a hurtful comment, apologize.

References

Edmondson, A.C. & Mortenson, M., & (2021, April). What Psychological Safety Looks Like in a Hybrid Workplace. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2021/04/what-psychological-safety-looks-like-in-a-hybrid-workplace>