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Cc: Will Hewson
Subject: Agility: Tactics for Leaders on Psychological Safety

Good morning! Our Executive Director of Institutional Compliance, Marcy Huey, just sent me the great article below on what leaders say to drive the highest performing teams by promoting psychological safety. The information below the "How to Say it" is equally important. Please forward this to your leaders and teams. Ensure they know to send this to their leaders and so on. Often, leaders don't pass information further unless you ask them.

Try role modeling this for your leaders and teams. They may not try it until they see you expect it and lead them to be curious, humble, and empathetic.

Please let me know any questions, comments, difficulties, and successes your organization has with this!

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Continuous Improvement Program

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA*



Marcy Huey



NEWSLETTER ON LINKEDIN

Leadership and Decision Making



By Xinjin Zhao

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Psychological Safety



Psychological safety: How to say it

- This is totally new territory for us, so I'm going to need everyone's input.
- There are many unknowns/things are changing fast/this is complex stuff. So we will make mistakes.
- Okay, that's one side. Let's hear some dissent/who's got something to add/let's have some give-and-take.
- Lucy, you look concerned. Gilles, you haven't said much. Adrian, what are you hearing in the warehouse/on the phones/on the road?
- What assumptions are we making? What else could this be/could we investigate/have we left out?
- What are you up against? What help do you need? What's in your way?
- Did everything go as smoothly as you would have liked? What were the friction points? Are there systems we should retool?
- If you've got something to add, just... (mention a few channels of communication, including ones suitable for difficult conversations).
- Thank you for that clear line of sight.
- I really appreciate your bringing this to me. I'm sure it wasn't easy.

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I came across this mini-script by Prof Amy Edmondson from Harvard Business School about Psychological Safety and thought it had some beautiful advices for all but especially those who are in leadership positions. Psychological safety is the belief that you won't be embarrassed, punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.

It is not surprising that a well publicized study done at Google on team performance revealed that the highest-performing teams have one thing in common: psychological safety. However, all of us have seen or experienced examples that leaders do not always behave in a way to facilitate the development of trust within the team. In most cases, those behavior are not necessarily intentional but company culture or norm tend to create an environment which is not conducive to foster psychological safety. Here are a few thoughts based on my observations.

- If you are in a position of power, how you ask questions is just as important as what questions you ask. A well intentioned question or simple curiosity on a topic could be interpreted very differently by the audience, especially in companies with hierarchical structure and authoritative cultures. I have seen teams went on

wild goose chase for some absurd pursuits simply because they thought senior executive asked for it.

- If you have a team of people with diverse background, be sensitive with the fact that people from different cultures tend to have different behavior norm. Even in the same culture, people with different work or educational backgrounds might have different comfort levels in raising issues or opinions.
- With increasing numbers of employees work remotely, leaders should be cognizant of the fact that the remote workers do not have chance to join the hallway or lunch table informal conversations. As a result, many might not have the context of things happening at the office. Allow them to ask questions or raise issues which are seemingly obvious to the rest of the team.
- Upon hearing opinions that you do not agree, demonstrate curiosity and explore underlining assumptions, rather than focus on defending your position or the official company position. Very often, we come to different conclusions because we mentally made different assumptions. Until you spend time to figure out the assumptions and debate on the merits of the assumptions, auguring about the conclusions rarely come to a satisfactory answer.

In summery, we are living in a fast changing complex world. If you want ensure your organization or team to make the right decisions, you need to first make sure you have a way to hear all the different voices. The way it worked before might not work today. Demonstrating some humility, curiosity and empathy would go a long way to provide the psychological safety for your organization to thrive.

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You are receiving LinkedIn notification emails. The newsletter author can see that you are a subscriber.

This email was intended for Marcy Huey (Executive Director of Institutional Compliance at The University of Alabama). [Learn why we included this.](#)



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