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TOPIC THIS ISSUE: BALANCING CARE AND CANDOR



“OUR LIFE IS WHAT OUR THOUGHTS MAKE IT”

Marcus Aurelius

CARE AND CANDOR: CREATING PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

By: Amy C. Edmondson

“Psychological safety is a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.”

Amy Edmondson



Author of Teaming

Most of us have been exposed to, and internalized, the figure of a villainous boss who rules by fear. Worse, many managers still believe in the power of fear to motivate. They assume that people who are afraid (*of management or of the consequences of underperforming*) will work hard to avoid unpleasant consequences, and good things will happen. But for jobs where learning or collaboration is required for success, **fear is not an effective motivator.**

Research in neuroscience shows that fear consumes physiologic resources, diverting them from parts of the brain that manage working memory and process new information. This impairs analytic thinking, creative insight and problem solving. This is why it’s hard for people to do their best work when they are afraid. **As a result, how psychologically safe a person feels strongly shapes the propensity to engage in learning behaviors, such as information sharing, asking for help or experimenting.**

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Psychological safety is the belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking. The concept refers to the experience of feeling able to speak up with relevant ideas, questions or concerns. Psychological safety is present when colleagues trust and respect each other and feel able — even obligated — to be candid.

In psychologically safe environments, people believe that if they make a mistake or ask for help, others will not react badly. Instead, candor is both allowed and expected. In today's organizations, psychological safety is not a "nice to have." It's not an employee perk, like free lunch or game rooms that you might care about so as to make people happy at work. Psychological safety is **essential** to unleashing talent and creating value.

In any company confronting conditions that might be characterized as **volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA)**, psychological safety is directly tied to the bottom line. This is because employee observations, questions, ideas and concerns can provide vital information about what's going on — in the market and in the organization.

Add to that today's growing emphasis on diversity, inclusion and belonging at work, and it becomes clear that psychological safety is a vital leadership responsibility. It can make or break an employee's ability to contribute, to grow and learn, and to collaborate.

Over the past 20 years, scholars, consultants and company insiders have published dozens of rigorous studies showing effects of psychological safety in a variety of industry settings. **Here are some of the highlights, with groups of studies divided into five categories.**

1. An epidemic of silence. Collecting and analyzing data from interviews with employed adults; studies have investigated when and why people feel unable to speak up in the workplace. This work shows, first and foremost, that people often hold back even when they believe that what they have to say could be important for the organization, for the customers or for themselves.

In one early study of workplace silence, the two most frequently mentioned reasons for remaining silent were fear of being viewed or labeled negatively and fear of damaging work relationships. As later research demonstrated more systematically, people at work are not only failing to speak up with potentially threatening or embarrassing content, they are also withholding ideas for improvement.

2. A work environment that supports learning. A growing number of studies and that psychological safety can exist at work and, when it does, that people do in fact speak up, offer



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ideas, report errors and exhibit a great deal more that can be categorized as “learning behavior.” For example, in a study of nurses in four Belgian hospitals, a team of researchers led by Hannes Leroy explored how head nurses encouraged other nurses to report errors, while also enforcing high standards for safety. *They found that psychologically safe teams made fewer errors and spoke up about them more often.*

3. Why psychological safety matters for performance.

With routine, predictable, modular work on the decline, more and more of the tasks that people do require judgment, coping with uncertainty, suggesting new ideas, and coordinating and communicating with others. This means that voice is mission critical. And so, for anything but the most independent or routine work, psychological safety is intimately tied to freeing people up to pursue excellence.

A multi-year study of teams at Google, code-named Project Aristotle, found that psychological safety was the critical factor explaining why some teams outperformed others, as reported in a detailed feature article by Charles Duhigg in the **New York Times Magazine** in 2016. They discovered that even the extremely smart, high-powered employees at Google needed a psychologically safe work environment to contribute the talents they had to offer.

4. Psychologically safe employees are engaged employees.

A study in a Midwestern insurance company found that psychological safety predicted worker engagement. In turn, psychological safety was fostered by supportive relationships with co-workers. Another study looked at the relationship between employee trust in top management and employee engagement. With survey data from 170 research scientists working in six Irish research centers, the authors showed that trust in top management led to psychological safety, which in turn promoted work engagement.

5. Psychological safety as the extra ingredient.

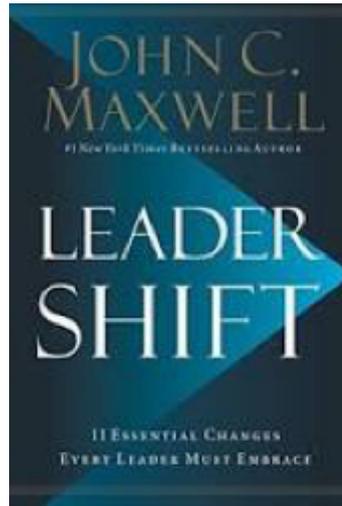
In these studies, psychological safety has been found to help teams overcome the challenges of geographic dispersion, put conflict to good use and leverage diversity. For example, an ambitious study of 14 innovation teams with members dispersed across 18 nations showed that with psychological safety, team members felt less anxious about what others might think of them and were better able to communicate openly.



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PLEASE PEOPLE TO CHALLENGE PEOPLE: THE RELATIONAL SHIFT?

By John C. Maxwell



Pleasing people is not the same as leading people. If you're a leader, you can never make everyone happy. And wanting to do so is a setup for disappointment or failure.

You can never really lead your organization, serve your people, or reach your leadership potential if you're always trying to make others happy. You have to put doing what's right for your people and organization ahead of what feels right for you. To make that shift, you need to do these things:

Change your expectations toward leadership. If your leadership is motivated by pleasing others or receiving approval, you need to change your expectations. Shift your focus from what you gain to how you can help people, improve your organization, and achieve your vision. Otherwise, your leadership will always be limited.

Work to establish expectations up front. As a leader, you can either set expectations on the front end and set up the working relationships for success or leave expectations unstated and deal with disappointment on the back end for both you and the people you're leading. Up-front expectations increase the value of any meeting, and up-front questions are the quickest way for people to understand one another and increase the value of their time together.

Balance care with candor. As a leader, you need to bring both caring and candor into the relationship. Care values the person, establishes the relationship, shores up weakness, offers comfort, and makes the team pleasant. Candor values the person's potential, expands the relationship, brings out strengths, offers a challenge, and makes the team productive.



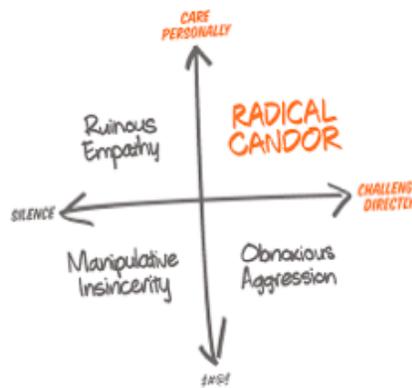
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BUILD RADICALLY CANDID RELATIONSHIPS

By Kim Scott

Bringing Your Whole Self to Work

We undervalue the emotional labor of being the boss. But this emotional labor is not just part of the job, it's the key to being a good boss. Many people feel they aren't as good at management as they are at the "real" part of the job. Often, they fear they are



failing the people who report to them. Ultimately, though, bosses are responsible for results. They achieve these results not by doing all the work themselves but by guiding the people on their teams.

Relationships, Not Power, Drive You Forward.

There is a virtuous cycle between your responsibilities and your relationships. You strengthen your relationships by learning the best ways to get, give and encourage guidance; by putting the right people in the right roles on your team; and by achieving results collectively that you couldn't dream of individually. Of course, there can be a vicious cycle between your responsibilities and your relationships, too.

When you fail to give people the guidance they need to succeed in their work, put people into roles they don't want or aren't well suited for, or push people to achieve results they feel are unrealistic, you erode trust. Your ability to build trusting, human connections with the people who report directly to you will determine the quality of everything that follows.

Radical Candor. There are two dimensions that, when paired, will help you move in a positive direction. The first dimension is "Care Personally." The second dimension is "Challenge Directly." "Radical Candor" is what happens when you put "Care Personally" and "Challenge Directly" together. When Radical Candor is encouraged and supported by the boss, communication flows, resentments that have festered



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come to the surface and get resolved, and people begin to love not just their work but *whom* they work with and *where* they work. When people love their job, the whole team is more successful. The resulting happiness is the success beyond success.

Care Personally. Part of the reason why people fail to care personally is the injunction to “keep it professional.” That phrase denies something essential. We are all human beings with human feelings, and even at work, we need to be seen as such. In addition to the obsessive devotion to “professionalism,” there’s another, less virtuous reason why people fail to care personally. When they become bosses, some people consciously or unconsciously begin to feel they’re better or smarter than the people who work for them. There are few things more damaging to human relationships than a sense of superiority. Of course, if you are a boss, there is some hierarchy involved. Just remember that being a boss is a *job*, not a value judgment. Caring personally is the antidote to both robotic professionalism and managerial arrogance.

Challenging Directly. Challenging others and encouraging them to challenge you helps build trusting relationships because it shows 1) you care enough to point out both the things that aren’t going well and those that are and that 2) you are willing to admit when you’re wrong and that you are committed to fixing mistakes that you or others have made. In the end, caring personally about people even as you challenge them will build the best relationships of your career.



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MAKING CANDOR REAL

By: Amy C. Edmondson



If you were over the age of three in 1995, chances are you were aware — or would soon become aware — of a movie called **Toy Story**, the first computer animated feature film released by a company named Pixar. That year, **Toy Story** would become the highest grossing film and Pixar the largest initial public offering. The

rest, as they say, is history.

Pixar Animation Studios has since produced 19 feature films, all of which have been commercial and critical triumphs. This is a remarkable statement in an industry where hits are prized but rare, and a series of hits without fail from a single company is all but unheard of.

How do they do it?

Through leadership that creates the conditions where both creativity and criticism can flourish. Pixar co-founder Ed Catmull credits the studio’s success, in part, to candor. Catmull encourages candor by looking for ways to institutionalize it in the organization — most notably in what Pixar calls its “Braintrust.” A small group that meets every few months or so to assess a movie in process, provide candid feedback to the director and help solve creative problems, the Braintrust was launched in 1999, when Pixar was rushing to save **Toy Story 2**, which had gone off the rails.

The Braintrust’s recipe is fairly simple: A group of directors and storytellers watches an early run of the movie together, eats lunch together and then provides feedback to the director about what they think worked and what did not. **But the recipe’s key ingredient is candor.** And candor, though simple, is never easy.

As Catmull candidly admits, “... early on, all of our movies suck.” In other words, it would have been easy to make **Toy Story** a movie about the secret life of toys that was sappy and boring. But the creative process, innately iterative, relies on feedback that is truly honest.

Pixar’s Braintrust has rules. First, feedback must be constructive — and about the project, not the person. Similarly, the filmmaker cannot be defensive or take criticism personally and must be ready to hear the truth. Second, the comments are suggestions, not prescriptions.



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There are no mandates, top-down or otherwise; the director is ultimately the one responsible for the movie and can take or leave solutions offered. Third, candid feedback is not a “gotcha” but must come from a place of empathy.

Braintrusts — groups of people with a shared agenda who over candid feedback to their peers — are subject to individual personalities and chemistries. In other words, they can easily go off the rails if the process isn’t well led. To be effective, managers have to monitor dynamics continually over time. It helps enormously if people respect each other’s expertise and trust each other’s opinions.

We don’t have a magic wand to make psychological safety happen overnight, but by committing to the aspiration to build it, one conversation at a time, leaders take the first step of a perpetual journey toward building and nurturing organizations that can innovate and thrive in the knowledge economy.

