

Promoting Psychological Safety in the Workplace

Welcome, everyone, to Promoting Psychological Safety in the Workplace. My name is Melanie Ordonez, and I will be one of your moderators today, along with Allonna Scott and Amy D'Amico. Kim Ellas is a senior wellness coach at Magellan. She started in the early '90s and has an opportunity to work with all walks of life, from the cashier at the local grocery store to the CEO of a major corporation. Her experience is diverse and inclusive of numerous industries and career paths. She's also spent many years as a business owner and has a business development, sales, marketing, and education background. She has experience developing and managing a sales team and performance coaching.

Her education includes a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in mind-body medicine. Kim is a national board-certified health and wellness coach and has certifications in lifestyle medicine, neurolinguistic programming, mindful-based stress reduction, and trauma-informed coaching.

So, I'm pleased to turn the presentation over to Kim!

>> KIM ELIAS: Well, thank you so much, Mel, and good afternoon, everyone. I am so excited to be here. And I just want to say, can we all just give a big shout-out to Mel, Amy, and Allonna and all these people who put these webinars together? There's so much work that goes into this, and I just want to say thank you, ladies, for all you do to put this information out there. It's amazing.

So, I'm excited to be here. I just want to let you all know that the topic of psychological safety is very near and dear to my heart. I'm very passionate about this. And I'm so grateful that I get to be here today with you leaders, and hopefully, add some value to what you do every day in your jobs.

As a coach, I often see issues with psychological safety come up. When I'm coaching employees who are extremely dissatisfied in their jobs; or maybe I'm working with a manager who's challenged with the culture of their work environment. The topic of psychological safety always seems to be at the root cause. And with that said, I just can't really stress enough how important it is that we as leaders really embrace psychological safety as the cornerstone to developing a positive work culture and developing the people that we lead.

So, we're now going to jump into how to define psychological safety. We're going to look at the four stages of psychological safety and its progression. We will take a deep dive into how you as a manager and leader in your organization can promote psychological safety on your team and in your culture. Lastly, we'll sum up what some of your big takeaways. We'll summarize best practices for a positive work culture. And again, if time allows, we will do some Q&As. All right! So, let's go ahead and jump in.

What is psychological safety? In a very simplified definition, one might say that psychological safety is a belief that one can speak up without a risk of being punished or humiliated.

According to Amy Edmondson, who coined the term -- she is also a professor of leadership and management at Harvard Business School -- she defines psychological safety as an environment where employees feel safe and comfortable expressing their thoughts, ideas, and concerns without fear of negative consequences. Amy Edmondson has done many studies on human

interactions that lead to the creation of successful companies. And in her research, she has found the cornerstone of success relies heavily on the workplace culture and psychological safety.

In one of her talks, she tells the story of a nurse. And this story is a great depiction of how psychological safety can play out in the workplace. And I'd like to share that story with you now. I'll refer to this nurse as Amy.

So, Amy was working on a team of health care professionals that were involved in experimental research on a new drug used for treating cancer. Amy loved being a nurse, and she took her job seriously. However, she was struggling in her self-confidence.

There was an incident when she wasn't sure about how to handle a certain treatment procedure. Since the instructions provided by the doctor were not clear. When she asked the doctor, who might I mention was also the medical director and her direct supervisor -- when she asked him about the instructions, the doctor responded to her in a very condescending way and actually made some disparaging remarks to her. He referred to her as incompetent, and this caused Amy to feel embarrassed and really bad about herself.

Other employees had similar experiences, but the collective sentiment was that this doctor was tough, and you know what, don't take it personally because he means well.

Since that moment, Amy became quiet. She often kept to herself, which was out of the norm. She did not talk much in team meetings anymore. And even though she had some ideas on how to improve things, she kept them to herself.

Fast-forward a few months, and Amy encountered a situation where she had to give medication to a patient. The dosage of the medication seemed to be much higher than usual dosages, and this caused Amy to feel concern. And her gut told her to ask the doctor if the dosage was correct, but she remembered the last time she went to this doctor over a concern, and you know what, she really didn't want to repeat that negative experience again. She wanted to avoid any hostility and embarrassment and feeling like she was incompetent. So, instead of trusting her gut, she gave the medication. Within one hour of giving this medication, the patient went into cardiac arrest, had a heart attack, and died.

My question for you is, do you think that if Nurse Amy felt safe with this doctor and felt comfortable sharing her concerns, that this patient would still be alive today? You see, we'll never know the answer to this question, but it certainly seems reasonable to ask. These types of scenarios happen all the time and are very real. We can't ignore the issue of psychological safety in this scenario; nor can we ignore it in any scenario that results in negative outcomes.

I'd like for you to take a moment right now and think of a time when maybe you were embarrassed or marginalized or otherwise rejected in a social setting. Maybe a teacher ignored your question, or a boss criticized your idea, or maybe a coach yelled at you for making an unforced error. I'm referring to those times when you were deprived of psychological safety. And I'd like to just take a poll right now and ask the audience this question: If you ever were in a situation where psychological safety did not exist, how did that impact you? Did it cause you to fear anxiety? Did it cause you to think poorly of yourself? Did it cause you to be fearful? Go ahead and share your answers

now. Oh, yeah. Shut me down. No motivation. Unworthiness. Fear. Fear. Panic attack. It seems like everyone here has had an experience like that.

Well, let me ask you a different question. What would have changed that situation? What would have changed that situation? Go ahead and share your answers now. Empathy. A supportive boss. Coaching, mentoring. A discussion. Validation. Yes. Partnership. Someone said a time machine. That's funny.

Well, thank you all for sharing that. This really speaks to how psychological safety impacts everyone. There are no boundaries when it comes to psychological safety.

All right, so, now that we have a better understanding of what psychological safety is, let's take a closer look at the four stages of progression. So, in stage 1, inclusion safety, people feel safe to be themselves and share all their unique attributes. They are able to be their authentic selves. And because of that, they feel good about themselves while they're at work. They don't have to put on a mask. They don't have to pretend something that they're not. They're just who they are. And that can create a space of enjoyment while we're at work.

In stage 2, which is known as learner safety, people feel safe to ask questions, to experiment, and to learn new things. Moving into this stage may take a little time for certain individuals. And as a leader, it's important to encourage your team member to ask questions. I think we forget to do that sometimes. I'm sure each of you have heard someone say, you know, there's no such thing as a stupid question. Never be afraid to ask a question! But I think it's really important that we get more intentional about that. And so, maybe at your next team meeting, you might remind your staff of that. "Hey, guys, there's no such thing as a stupid question." So, I don't ever want you to ever hesitate when you are unclear about something."

And if one feels safe to ask questions, it's also likely they will feel safe to contribute ideas and engage in collaboration with others. I often find in my coaching, especially with managers who are working remotely and working with teams that are remote, the engagement level is not that great. So, hopefully, you'll learn some things in today's presentation that can also help you with just bringing in some more engagement.

All right, so in stage three, collaborator safety, people feel safe to contribute ideas, engage, and work as a team in this stage. Can you think of a time when you contributed an idea and it resulted in an effective solution? How did that feel? Were you motivated to find more solutions and increase your collaboration efforts? Probably so.

And now when we look at stage 4, which is challenger safety, this stage is where people actually feel safe to speak up, expose ideas, and question the status quo. That's right. You heard me, question the status quo. You know, it's the leader's job to manage the tension and draw out the collective genius of their team and their staff. It's important to remember that brilliance emerges from the collaboration of the team. But the truth is, a lot of organizations are reluctant to grant challenger safety because, one, it threatens the power structure; two, it threatens allocation of resources; and three, it oftentimes threatens the speed of operation. It's much, much easier for leaders and corporations to have the sentiment of, do as I say or take the highway mentality.

Stage 4 is a very strong indicator of how much

psychological safety exists in your organization. So, you can use stage 4 like a measurement tool. For example, if you consistently go into meetings where you can hear a pin drop, especially whenever you or maybe a boss shares a new policy or procedure, and there's no engagement, it may be that psychological safety needs to be strengthened. It doesn't necessarily mean that it doesn't exist; it's just not very strong in stage 4. We want psychological safety to exist in this stage because this is where the highest level of innovation occurs. And as managers, I encourage you to ask yourself this question -- and it's a hard one -- Do I consistently invite others to challenge the status quo in order to make things better, even though I could be personally wrong? That's a hard question.

Let me ask you this question now, and we'll take a poll on this because I'm curious. In examining these four stages, which stage do you think has the highest degree of psychological safety in your work culture currently? Go ahead, share your observations. I'd love to see where we're at. Collaborator. Ooh! Stage 4! I love, love, love inclusion. Yeah. I'm seeing a lot of collaborator safety. That's wonderful. Great, guys. Thank you for that.

Here's my next question for you: What stage of psychological safety needs to be strengthened in your work culture? Stage 3, I see. All of them. Okay. I appreciate that honesty. Learner. Okay. Yeah, yeah. I'm getting a lot of all of them. So, this is great. We're going to get to the how-to here in just a moment. Thank you, guys, for sharing all of that. I appreciate that. We're all in this together, obviously.

Let's look at the benefits now of psychological safety. Now that we understand what it is and that there are stages of progression, I really find it's important to talk about why this is so important. And it's important because the benefits of psychological safety are awesome.

But let me start by saying this. When we take fear out of our work culture and replace it with psychological safety, we are then creating a fearless organization, and fearless organizations that have a high degree of psychological safety score highest in performance. They also have a high level of confidence to take risks; they share new and different ideas; and they are intentional about sharing feedback or concerns, even when it's considered sensitive and threatening.

Work cultures who embrace psychological safety will often see highly engaged teams, an increase in productivity, an increase in creativity and collaboration. More problems will be solved, and employees feel more satisfied and stay with the company, even for decades. Fearless organizations have higher profit margins, increased innovation, and guess what, overall happier and healthier employees. And I love that.

So, I have a question for you again. I invite you right now to share with me one of the benefits of psychological safety that you currently see on your team or in your organization. Trust. Ooh, great! Transparency. Retention! Awesome. Clarity. Support. Problem solving. Yes. Inclusiveness. Integrity. Yes. Thank you, guys, for sharing that.

Now that we've talked about some of the benefits, I do want to share with you the impact of psychological safety that are not so positive, okay? So, one of the first things that we learn about leadership is that the social and cultural context of the work environment has a profound influence on the way people

behave. And you as a manager and leader are responsible for that context.

The other thing you learn about leadership is that fear is the enemy. It freezes initiative; it ties up creativity; it yields compliance instead of commitment; and it represses what otherwise would be an explosion of innovation. When organizations have little to no psychological safety baked into their culture, an array of symptoms become apparent. Some of these include: Low levels of productivity, low levels of creativity, collaboration, and innovation; employees tend to feel undervalued and secretly do not like their jobs; the attrition rate is generally higher, and in turn, company costs increase. Moreover, the well-being of employees is compromised, and this is evidenced by missed days at work, reports of burnout, and high levels of stress.

The lack of psychological safety in the work culture can also bleed into one's personal life and may even cause or contribute to depression, anxiety, and problems in relationships at home and at work. I see this often in my coaching. Psychological safety is so powerful that when it ceases to exist, it can have a host of negative symptoms that can make it very difficult for employees to navigate their jobs and their personal lives. I can tell you that as a coach, I often see clients coming to me feeling incredibly unsatisfied in their jobs. And when we unpack this, it often stems from not feeling safe in their job, not feeling valued, not having a voice, and not being supported in their ideas and concerns.

Have you ever worked for an organization with little to no psychological safety? Let me ask you this question. If so, what were some of the negative impacts that you observed? Share your answers now. What were some of the negative impacts that you observed in an organization with little to no psychological safety? Conflict. Feeling insecurity. No one cared. Low morale, low morale, low morale. Quit. Wow. A lot of employee absences. Toxic culture. People leaving. Yeah. Mistakes. Ooh, I like that one. Yeah, we do! We see a lot of mistakes happening. Closing up. No inputs to discussions. Yeah, people shut down. They get quiet. People lie! You're right. They do. They get scared. They start lying.

So, not having that presence of psychological safety can really create some negative consequences. And unfortunately, people take that home and then their personal lives get impacted by it, too. And I don't know about you, but that's not okay. That's not okay.

All right, guys. Now, let's get into the how-to. How's everyone doing? Are you guys still with me? Raise your hand or give an applause right now if you're still here. I want to make sure everyone's still here. Yeah, all right! Cool, cool, cool. Just want to make sure you're all still engaged, because what I'm getting ready to share with you now is the most important part of today's webinar. This is where we get into the how of things, promoting and increasing psychological safety is where the rubber meets the road, and this is why most of you showed up today.

So, let's take a deep dive into how you as a manager can promote and increase psychological safety in your work culture. All right. Let me turn. Here we go!

So, the first thing that I want to mention is, as leaders, we need to get comfortable with modeling vulnerability. Show me a manager who embraces his or her humanness and is willing to

get vulnerable, and I will show you a manager who is fearless, powerful, and invincible. When you are vulnerable, it gives your employees permission to be vulnerable as well. And remember, the way that we communicate and show up is how people decide to relate to us. Let me say that again. The way we communicate and show up is how people decide to relate to us. We teach people how to treat us. So, getting vulnerable is key.

Second, it's important to invite and welcome all voices. No one should be censured or unwelcome. Everyone on your team or organization should be encouraged to use their voice, share their ideas, their concerns, and their fears. And I mean everyone, from the janitor to all the way up to the CEO. Everyone should be welcome to use their voice and encouraged to do that.

Also, when we look at curiosity, I think it's really important that we learn how to be curious about the people we lead. Curiosity invites more communication and connection. When you are curious about someone without driving a solution -- now, let me stress that -- without driving a solution -- because most of us here like to get into solution very quickly. But I want to tell you that sometimes the communication that you have with the people that you're managing is so much more important than just that solution. You can take the connection with your people to a deeper level that builds rapport and trust and understanding. Ask questions and allow yourself just to be curious without having an agenda. That is actually one of the main coaching strategies that we learned in coaching was, you know, we're not here to drive a solution. Let's just get curious about this person sitting across from us. And as managers, we're often coaching our people. So, curiosity is a fundamental concept and coaching and managing and learning how to connect with people. It really does allow the person on the receiving end to feel validated and like they truly matter.

All right, you saw it! It's there. Yes, I said it, celebrate mistakes and setbacks. Yes, celebrate setbacks and mistakes. You're probably thinking, "What? No way!" But here, I want you to consider this. Consider the idea that there is no such thing as failure and only feedback. You see, when we make mistakes and have setbacks, try to not immediately go into a fear-based thinking and disappointment. Instead, use those mistakes and setbacks as an opportunity to learn more, to grow, and to strengthen capacities.

Yes! Take it a step further! Celebrate these mistakes and setbacks, because in the reality, they are only making you, your team, and your organization stronger. This really does require everyone to adopt that learner mind-set, and everything we do is an opportunity to learn and grow, period.

You know, I just watched an interview with Kobe Bryant, you know, the basketball star. And he talked about that in his interview. They asked him, "What does it feel like when you lose a game? Do you feel like you failed?" And Kobe's response is, "Absolutely not! I go back, I watch the tape, I find out what mistakes I made, and then I learn from them. And as long as I'm learning and getting better, I'm never failing." And I love that so much, especially as a coach. And if you can adopt that same mind-set in your role as a manager and see that mistakes are actually good because they make you grow and allow your employees to see it that way, too, what a game changer that could be for promoting psychological safety.

All right, here's the other one, interesting your

leadership style. So, how about reflecting on what defines you as a leader and how you show that on your team and the people you work with. So, here's a rhetorical question for you: What kind of leader are you? Are you a mindful leader that shows compassion, authenticity, gratitude, and empowerment? Or do you allow your employees to come up with their own ideas and solutions? Or are you a manager that feels like you need to be in control of everything and give solutions to every question or problem? How do you motivate your team?

Getting in touch with your leadership style and consistently working towards developing how you lead is the key to building psychological safety. If you're not self-aware and you're not practicing effective leadership skills, then you are dismantling any opportunity for psychological safety to increase.

And I'm just going to share a quick story with you. I was coaching a gentleman who was in the automotive industry. He had been in the industry for over 20 years, and he had been in management for I think 12. He came to me because he was having issues in his work culture. He's had a few complaints about him that went to HR, and he was really conflicted and wasn't sure how to navigate that.

What we came to understand was that his leadership style was kind of old. It was from 15 years ago. And leadership over time has changed. So, his style was very authoritarian, very controlling, you know, just, "I'll tell you what to do, you just do it" kind of management style. And he was able to, eventually, with coaching, you know, look through that and see that there were some limiting beliefs that were holding him back. He was able to get more vulnerable with me, and that translated into his role. And over time, he was able to completely turn his team around. And it not only helped him at work, on a personal level, he just became softer, and softer in a good way; he was able to communicate better; people were receiving him well; and as a result, productivity went up. And you know what the greatest part of that story was? I just love it so much. Is that his relationship with his wife and his family even got better.

So, I can't really stress enough how important it is that your leadership style needs to kind of be looked at and improved on in whatever area you feel is important to improve on. And if you're having issues with any of these things, please, come to coaching. Call the EAP. Get into coaching. That's what we're here for, okay?

The other beautiful thing about this gentleman that I was working with that was in the automotive business was that he shifted the way that he saw his employees, which was my next point. You know, sometimes we have to shift our perspective. And in his role as a leader, he really was disconnected from his people, you know. He saw them merely as transactional, you know? They were a means to him achieving the results that he needed to get to please his boss. And after we kind of unpacked that little bit, we started to realize that the lens in which he was looking through in leading his people needed to be changed. And so, he started to see his team as a group of individuals, not just a means to an end. And as a result of that, he started to connect with them more; he started to know them more; and this really did increase the respect that these people had for him and also loyalty to the team.

So, the other idea is, do not guard your own ideas. Admit when you are in uncharted territory. And yes, give your team

permission to disagree and challenge the status quo. Okay? All right. So, let's look at some more. There are other ways as well.

I really feel like it's important that with ask our team what they need to feel supported. And when I say that, it's really being intentional that asking them for what support they need goes outside of those team meetings, okay? So, when you see them in the break room or pass them in the hallway, ask them, "Hey, how can I support you today? Do you need anything?" Also, it's really important that we show appreciation towards each other, maybe have appreciation parties and meetings on a regular basis. Emails can end with "I appreciate you." Also, even when your staff comes to you and admits a mistake, tell them "Thank you. I appreciate you being honest with me about that." This can really go a long way and is a difference-maker when increasing psychological safety.

One more here, and I feel like this is a really big one. This is a big one. Acknowledge all ideas and follow through with what you are -- what you say you are going to do. Keep in mind that not responding to a suggestion. Remember that not responding to an email can be worse than rejection because at least rejection is an acknowledgment, right? I can't stress how important this is. People want to be validated and heard, and if you're not replying to their emails in a timely manner or not at all, basically, what you're telling the people that you lead is "I don't care about you." So, and that can be super damaging. So, really, just try to be on top of those emails. And when somebody shares an idea, validate that idea, acknowledgment it. You don't have to agree with it, but just acknowledgment it.

In his book "Coaching Salespeople to Sales Champions," Keith Rosen admits that in a survey by Merit Poll only 12% of employees believe their leadership is trustworthy and only 7% believe their managers are consistent with their words. That's not a lot. I'm sure you guys agree. All right.

So, we also want to make sure we're celebrating diversity and authenticity. That's always fun. There are many ways to do that. There's so much information out there now on ways to celebrate diversity and authenticity. I encourage you to just do a search online. I want you to also understand that psychological safety is a process and it takes time to develop. Educate yourself on psychological safety. It's not something that's going to change overnight. It really does take consistency and intention over time.

And last, you can incorporate psychological safety into your team's mission statement or vision and even take it a step further and get your company to do that as well.

You know, here at Magellan Health, we are big on psychological safety and it is a part of our mission statement. It's a shared belief and a strong part of our culture. And as a coach who supports leadership development and career development, psychological safety is a value that I will not compromise on, and so, I'm grateful that I work for a company who embraces this same value. So, if you need to maybe incorporate that into your mission statement or vision as a team and at an organizational level, take steps to do that.

All right, so, we just have a few minutes left, and I want to make sure we get to this last section, which is, we can build psychological safety through team-building activities. And I'm going to just mention a few. There are also many resources online. If you Google the key terms, psychological safety,

team-building activities, or ways to promote psychological safety on my team, you'll get a lot of information and resources out there. So, for inclusion safety, one way to promote that is you could have teams break up into pairs of two, and you guys share stories, personal stories, and you set the timer for five to ten minutes, okay, and then they switch and the other person shares their story. And once everyone is finished, each person tells the story they heard in the first person as if it was their own. This activity really reinforces belonging. It also deepens empathy as well. And to really get a profound effect, you might ask everyone to share something that's happened to them that they feel proud about but very few people know about, okay?

To develop learner safety, it would be great if you all engaged in an exercise or if you had teams engage in an exercise known as the four Ls. And the four Ls is usually an exercise that occurs after a project has been completed and you want to reflect on that. The four Ls stand for -- tell me what you loved, tell me what you loathed, tell me what you learned, and tell me what you long for in the next project. And it's really not just about reviewing the work yourself; it's also encouraging your team to think about the people, the socializing, even the office space or technology used this activity keeps the meeting focused and encourages a balance of positive and negative discussion points.

For collaborator safety, how do we want to promote that on our teams? Well, there's some fun ways to do that. I really like this one. Take some sticky notes and a pen, set a timer, hand out the sticky notes, and ask everyone to write down their thoughts or questions or ideas about a given topic. And then you stick their notes onto the wall. And this gives everyone a safe way to share their opinions and their ideas and sets the team up for asking clarifying questions. And then for challenger safety, you could do some scripts and role-playing. You could even ask teams -- this is more of a higher-risk exercise, but you could ask teams to talk about how the contributions of each member of the team has impacted the team and also what are some areas that can be improved upon. You could ask the team to share identified weaknesses and then the team works together to support that person.

For example, my team knows that I'm not great with technology, because I got vulnerable and shared that with them. And they support me by not fixing the problems for me, but showing up and helping me with patience by talking me through the tough challenges with technology. And they send me resources and remind me that I'm not alone in this. All right. Then one last idea is to supplement performance reviews with development plans. Asking your staff, what would they like to improve on, and then collaborating with them on ways to do that and creating a self-development plan. This will empower them to find their own solutions, and they will feel supported by you.

All right, guys, we made it to the finish line. I know I threw a lot at you today. I hope you found this information valuable and helpful. And now, I would just like to hand it over to Mel for any last comments, and if we have any further questions.

>> MELANIE ORDONEZ: Thank you. I appreciate you. So, we are at the end of our time. I know Kim gave you a lot of information, and you have some questions. I want to let you know, your program is available to you, whether you have

Embrace, EAP, we are here for you to help. I put a link in the Q&A pod that you can click on. When you go to that link, go ahead and put in your company name, and it should take you to your website for your benefits. Now, you may need to use your parent company. If your company doesn't show up, please go to your leadership or your HR to ask for the information. How do you get in touch with either Embrace or EAP? Depending on your company, they may call it different things, but ask them how to get a hold of your program, because we do want you to call in and speak to someone and get assistance. Kim mentioned, coaching is available. You may have counseling available. All kinds of different free services that are there for you 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

So, I am going to pull up the closing poll question here real quick. Do want to just ask you, if you would, please answer our satisfaction poll. Click the radio button next to your response, that little circle icon. That will give your response. We are not broadcasting them, so just know, when you click on that, it will tell you what you want us to tell us.

Also, we want to hear from you! Do you have any comments about this session today, anything you want to share with us? We'd love to know. We also have something at the top, on the far right-hand side that's asking about the lobby in the beginning. So, just let us know what you think about the lobby. We're just trying some things out, see if you like the music, if you liked, you know, the word cloud and all those things before we got started. So, please feel free to let us know. Also, there's a certificate of completion that's available for you. So, we do thank you for attending today.

Again, we encourage you to please reach out to your program to get your questions answered. You have some great questions and we do want to help you with that, so reach out to us today. Thanks so much, everyone. Kim, thank you. We appreciate you. Great information. Thank you so much.

>> KIM ELIAS: Thank you for having me. Good to be here, everyone. Have a great day.

>> MELANIE ORDONEZ: This does end our presentation. Thank you.