



Psychological Safety

Psychological safety isn't about being nice, it's about the truth reaching you early enough to act on it. None of this needs a big initiative. Pick one thing and use it this week.

Before a difficult conversation

Regulate yourself first. You can't have an honest conversation or take hard feedback while you're flooded and defensive. Get your own reaction in check before you open your mouth. The self-management comes first; the technique comes second.

Agree the rules before you need them. The strongest teams don't avoid conflict, they agree how they'll handle it in advance. Set the permissions early, while things are calm.

Try:

"Tell me straight and I'll tell you straight. Assume good intent and I'll do the same. When we don't agree, we'll sort it privately, not in front of the team."

Name what kind of disagreement it is. Most friction is about the work (the task or the process) not the person. Naming that to yourself keeps it from becoming personal and makes it far easier to resolve.



In the **moment**

Work the dynamic, not the person. You can't change someone by wanting them to be different but you can change the dynamic, because you're part of it. Ask yourself: what's the one pattern-breaking move that's in my control?

Have the meta-conversation. When there's tension, name it without accusation and hand the other person a way in. It's an invitation, not a verdict. Then trust them to hear it.

Try: "I've noticed something between us. I can see how it might be landing for you, and I'm not comfortable with it, I'd like to change that. What suggestions do you have?"

Give feedback on the behaviour, not the person. Keep it specific and non-accusatory: what happened, the effect it had, what you'd like next. Clear is kind, softening it until the point disappears doesn't protect anyone.

Try: "When [what happened], the impact was [effect]. Next time, could we [request]?"

Care personally AND challenge directly. Not one or the other. Challenge with no care is just bluntness; care with no challenge quietly fails the person. You need both in the same breath.

Actively pull in the quiet voices. Silence isn't agreement. If you don't invite people in, you won't hear what you most need to.

Try: "What am I missing here? Who sees this differently?"



When it's **already gone wrong**

Go first. Safety is built from the front. When the most senior or just the most willing person owns a mistake or admits they don't know, everyone else exhales. You earn honesty by showing it.

Try: "I got this one wrong, here's what I'd do differently."

Repair quickly. If a conversation landed badly, don't let it set. A short, honest reset costs little and protects the relationship.

Try: "I've been thinking about our chat, my point came out sharper than I meant. Can we pick it back up?"

Ask what the other person is experiencing. A lot of what plays out between people is about what's being reflected back. Ask for their read, you'll often learn something about your own part in it.



Building it over time

Reframe failure as learning.

“Test, verify, learn”. If getting things wrong is expected or even built in, people will actually try to surface what didn’t work and improve. The fear of failure naturally goes away.

Give people space to do it their way.

Your way is just that - yours. Let people find their own route and their own learning. You’ll be surprised what comes back, and they’ll own the outcome because it’s theirs.

Create a duty to dissent.

Make speaking up an expectation, not a favour, people have a role to challenge a decision they disagree with. (The flip side: challenge should be about the work, not for its own sake.)

Don’t mistake harmony for safety. A team that gets on and delivers can still be a team that’s too scared to speak up. Quiet and agreeable isn’t the same as safe, look under the surface.

Let them see you’re human.

You don’t earn trust by having all the answers. You earn it by admitting when you don’t, and being someone people can be honest around.



A 60-second **check on your team**

Run these before your next meeting or one-to-one.

You're looking for a pattern, not a perfect score; and they work whether you lead the team or you're in it.

- 1** When did someone last openly disagree in a meeting or did you? (Can't remember? That's the answer.)
- 2** When someone makes a mistake, does it get surfaced early or quietly managed?
- 3** Do people ask the awkward question in the room, or only afterwards in the corridor?
- 4** When did a problem last reach you early, before it blew up?

If the honest answers worry you, don't just announce an initiative, people will roll their eyes. Change one thing in your own behaviour first, and let the team notice it's safe before you name it.

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