

LEADING FOR NOW:
CREATING AN
ENVIRONMENT WHERE
EVERYONE CAN THRIVE



About this workbook

At everywoman, we deliver a range of innovative products and resources that unlock the potential and talent of women in business globally. Whether you're just starting out, looking to progress your career, or even to build and develop your own enterprise, the everywomanNetwork provides a wealth of personal development resources, advice and inspiration to address the challenges you face at key stages in business. We produce workbooks on topics that matter most to our members and we're constantly listening to your views to give you the tools you need to propel you through your life's work, at a time and place that suits you.

Welcome to our workbook, *Leading For Now: Creating an environment where everyone can thrive*.

Leadership is being challenged and pushed like never before. There is absolutely no playbook for what happened to the world back in 2020, and there is no new normal. What we know for sure is that in order to be an amazing leader you must keep learning, growing, and developing yourself. Research by *Harvard Business Review* shows that men receive more actionable feedback than women — something that's crucial for leadership development. In this workbook, you'll take a proactive step towards creating an action plan that will help develop the core skills you need to be a leader during these changing times.

What's clear is that leaders need teams who can rise to the challenges of today. Team effectiveness is at the heart of companies who thrive and grow. As a leader you need to create the environment for people to flourish so you can bring them on your journey with you. Businesses need to pull their teams together like never before, engage with them to focus on new challenges, and ensure the balance between wellbeing and productivity is constructive.

We need to remember that everyone has been through their own version of something. And more than ever, the environment needs to be safe for people to open up, push back, and admit vulnerabilities. How you role model psychological safety for your team is an integral part of this workbook.

We're delighted you've accepted this challenge, to lead for now, create the right environment for people to be open, curious and to thrive.

We'd love to know how you get on – email us at karenmax@everywoman.com or tweet us @everywomanuk.

Max & Karen
and the everywoman team

“Who
you are
surrounded
by often
determines
who you
become.”

Vicky Saunders
Founder, SheEO

What is psychological safety and why is it the foundation of effective teams?

Data from Gallup reveals that just three in 10 US workers strongly agree that at work, their opinions seem to count. However, by moving that ratio to six in 10 employees, organisations could realise a 27% reduction in turnover, a 40% reduction in safety incidents, and a 12% increase in productivity.

“PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS A BELIEF THAT ONE WILL NOT BE PUNISHED OR HUMILIATED FOR SPEAKING UP WITH IDEAS, QUESTIONS, CONCERNS OR MISTAKES.” AMY EDMONDSON, HARVARD PROFESSOR

In 2012, Google embarked on Project Aristotle to discover what made teams effective. They wanted to understand why some teams were able to persevere through obstacles and embrace challenges, while others seemed to wither or never feel like a true team. The goal was to answer “What makes a team effective at Google?” The results were not about highest IQ, seniority or experience; they were about how the team worked together. The first and most important factor was creating a psychologically safe environment.

Psychological safety is what allows people to be open and honest with members of their team, while at the same time allowing for accountability and responsibility. It is not about being nice, or not pushing back; it is about a positive environment where people are allowed to be curious, transparent, and want to be accountable to each other.

“I recently ran a virtual workshop for a client organisation, and at one point a participant’s child came into the picture, in a wheelchair. After the workshop, a senior leader asked me to stay on and told me she was mortified — she had no idea this employee had a disabled child. She thought of times she had silently questioned why he needed to accompany his wife on child hospital visits, or why he often requested time off at the last minute. But what stuck out most was her questioning what kind of environment she had created where someone didn’t feel safe enough to open up about something so important, which would have given a wider understanding and context to so much. It was a lightbulb moment about the cost of not having a psychologically safe team environment, and she has been working on it ever since. Awareness is the first step.”

everywoman associate trainer, Sara Parsons



EXERCISE

Think about a recent meeting you attended with your team. Which diagram more closely aligns with the environment in the meeting?





EXERCISE

**Think about that meeting, what did you see or hear that felt like psychological danger?
What did you see or hear that felt psychologically safe?**

These may include:

Psychological danger

- Blaming other people, departments, stakeholders.
- Constant interruptions.
- Inappropriate body language.
- No admittance of being wrong or not knowing something.
- Everyone agreeing with everyone else on everything.
- Only using information that is shared by everyone – the ‘common knowledge effect’.

Psychological safety

- Encouraging conflicting opinions and debate.
- Allowing everyone to speak.
- People admitting when they didn't know the answer.
- Being curious – asking questions.
- People being accountable for their behaviour, views and knowledge.

Psychological safety is about the need to look at the team as a whole, so if several people are sharing views and opinions but two people aren't, then you don't have psychological safety as a team.

For example, as a leader I may feel comfortable and open with everyone in my team, but if my sales manager isn't comfortable challenging my marketing manager, then the team itself is not psychologically safe.

WHAT IS THE COST OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DANGER?

Sadly, most of us can think of a team we were on where we didn't feel safe. There is a cost to us as individuals, as well as a cost to the team as a whole and the wider business. Some side effects of an unsafe team include:

- Good ideas rarely come to fruition and there are usually many side or exclusive meetings to get decisions made.
- Work gets stalled because people are worried about looking back and potentially bounce responsibility rather than looking forward and taking accountability.
- Decisions get made outside of meetings, and therefore people don't feel included or accountable.
- Time is wasted moving in circles and playing politics rather than getting things done.



EXERCISE

What has psychological danger cost your business?

How to build a psychologically safe environment

Start by trying to establish where you are now.

Building a psychologically safe environment means having to be vulnerable and transparent yourself. Too often leaders assume people feel psychologically safe and so therefore choose not to address it. Remember it is about group norms and trust in the group and team as a whole. Even if you know an interaction between yourself and someone else is safe, it may be a very different story between that person and another individual on your team. Input and data from your team is essential so check-in with them, measure where you are (the checklist below is a great starting point for this exercise), and build a plan to increase it.

Find out from your team how they feel.

Amy Edmondson, creator of the term psychological safety, has established a series of questions you can ask your team to gauge psychological safety.



EXERCISE

Why not start with yourself? Think of a team you are part of and consider the below.

- On this team, I understand what is expected of me.
- We value outcomes more than outputs or inputs, and nobody needs to “look busy”.
- If I make a mistake on this team, it is never held against me.
- When something goes wrong, we work as a team to find the systemic cause.
- All members of this team feel able to bring up problems and tough issues.
- Members of this team never reject others for being different and nobody is left out.
- It is safe for me to take a risk on this team.
- It is easy for me to ask other members of this team for help.
- Nobody on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
- My unique skills and talents are valued and utilised in my work as part of this team.

WHAT CAN I DO AS A LEADER?



EXERCISE

Think about your part in role modelling the behaviours you want to see in your team.

What discussions need to happen with your team members?

How can you encourage or even explain psychological safety?

How can you hold each other accountable for creating the environment?

Questions to ask to start the dialogue:

- What is something our team could do more of to feel psychologically safe?
- What is something we need to stop doing?
- How can we hold each other accountable?

“It’s okay to admit what you don’t know. It’s okay to ask for help. And it’s more than okay to listen to the people you lead – in fact, it’s essential.”

Maya Barra
CEO, General Motors

What can I do as a leader to help my team feel psychologically safe?

“When Covid-19 hit and businesses turned to working from home, it was a new world for many people. I ran several workshops supporting businesses to manage themselves working virtually. The first workshop I ran for a large organisation that was open to all people at all levels was an eye opener. We had 80 faces staring at us from across the country and people from graduate trainer level to the CEO. We were talking about how to manage energy levels while working from home and the CEO said something along these lines:

‘I am looking at the sun shining in everyone’s home and some of you are even in your garden, and I am sitting on my balcony. I feel good having the sun on my face. More than good — I feel alive and energised. And I was about to say how important it is to take advantage of your environment when I realised that if it was a sunny day, in our call centres every blind would need to be pulled down, so the sun doesn’t reflect on the screens. And so instead of enjoying the sun we put you in darkness. I want to apologise for having never thought about the impact of this and I promise I will rectify this when we can get back in the office.’

There was a stunned silence. We then went into breakout rooms to discuss ideas on managing energy in smaller groups and in each one the discussion centred around how wonderful it was to hear a leader admit a mistake, admit he didn’t know something, and also to make a promise. I asked them if they felt he would keep the promise and every group said yes. That is a leader building psychological safety!”

everywoman associate trainer, Sara Parsons



REFLECT

Think about a leader you have had. How did she or he make you feel psychologically safe or what did they do to erode it?

What can you learn from this?

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

“PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS NOT NEARLY COMPLICATED AS IT MAY SOUND. AFTER ALL, IT’S REALLY ABOUT TRULY MAKING A TEAM COME TOGETHER AS ONE AND PUTTING FORTH AN ENVIRONMENT THAT SETS UP EVERYONE FOR SUCCESS.” AMY EDMONDSON

Remind people what they have in common

Our starting point is often to make assumptions about other people. So, start with some assumptions that are valid. Try this ‘just like me’ reflection. It can be a great starting point to set the scene and remind your team of common goals. Ask people to consider that everyone else is like them...

- This person has beliefs, perspectives, and opinions, just like me.
- This person has hopes, anxieties, and vulnerabilities, just like me.
- This person has friends, family, and perhaps children who love them, just like me.
- This person wants to feel respected, appreciated, and competent, just like me.
- This person wishes for peace, joy, and happiness, just like me.

Treat people how they want to be treated

This isn’t about you and what you need. Figure out how people like to get feedback, explore ideas, have check-ins, put forward their ideas.

Be curious

Role model curiosity by asking questions. You do not need to have the answer to everything. Involve other people. Seek their opinion and perspective. And remember to watch your non-verbals – matching what you say to how you say it makes a huge difference.

Match intention to impact

Intending to get people’s opinion doesn’t count if you cut them off, interrupt, or shut them down. It doesn’t mean you have to agree. Impact matters!

Promote healthy debate

Disagreeing is important, it is the way it is done that can erode trust or make people quiet. Ask questions and seek opinions and aim for collaboration. Be concerned if everyone agrees with everyone or every idea – group thinking erodes creativity. Status bias could also be at play – people agreeing with the person they deem to have the highest status.

Getting the right balance

Female leaders are known to have a natural inclination to empathy — a skill that can be used for many advantages. There is, however a balance to be struck. We are often well aware of the larger landscape surrounding our team members, and with an increase in virtual meetings and working from home, we have literally and metaphorically been brought into their living rooms and have a first-hand view of what goes on around them. Because of this, we can become too involved. The cost is we can easily overload ourselves, turn to micromanaging, or fall into using a parenting leadership style.

Why storytelling is an essential leadership skill to engage your team

As we have seen, your team needs to feel safe to be effective. Once you have created this strong foundation, the next step is to effectively connect with your team to grow and challenge towards your vision. When you want to see a change, or bring your team on a journey, you don't start with a 10-point plan, you start with your vision and then bring the story to life.

Leadership storytelling is a skill for all and for now. The world is rich with stories. Whether they land or make a difference is in the way they are told, how the picture is built up, and how you connect. Not everyone is good at telling stories; it is a skill that needs attention. Storytelling is not about recanting events; it is about bringing a vision, a change, a call to action to life. When we think about gender bias, most women can give you a story that will evoke an image and spark feelings within seconds.

Why does storytelling matter for your team?

- Stories engages team members beyond facts and figures.
- Business decisions are not solely based on logic.
- Numbers are not memorable.

Let's see how this works in practice

Think back over your last month and various learning, working or socialising opportunities that you've had. Which stories have stuck out for you? This might be a colleague sharing something, a TedTalk you watched, or maybe an everywoman interview you listened to.

- Was it a CEO who showed how they are prioritising the gender pay gap?
- A hospital worker who experienced something life-affirming?
- A 100-year-old man who raised millions for the National Health Service?
- A teacher who managed to engage with a group of young children online, day after day?



REFLECT

What is the reason you recall that story?

What did you learn from that story?

WHY DOES STORYTELLING MATTER?

People love stories. They appeal to the emotional, decision-making bits of our minds in ways facts and figures can't.

Although good business arguments are developed through the use of numbers, they are typically approved on the basis of a story. And more importantly, your team are engaged, empowered, and enthused by stories not numbers! A Nielsen study shows our brains are far more engaged by storytelling than by cold, hard facts. The brain processes images 60x faster in comparison to words. When reading straight data, only the language parts of our brains work to decode the meaning.

If we want people to feel psychologically safe, you need to make an effort to connect with them.



REFLECT

When was the last time you felt engaged and keen to listen further to someone speak?

Think of a time you wanted to (or did) say out loud "And your point is...?"

How to build and develop your storytelling skills

Why might you use a story with your team?

1. To change the mood, state, or energy levels of your team.
2. To reframe a problem as a new opportunity.
3. To see a behaviour or attitude from a different perspective.
4. To challenge unacceptable behaviour.
5. To offer a model of more useful behaviour.
6. To demonstrate that a problem is not new or unique.
7. To enhance creativity.
8. To summarise or review information covered.
9. To encourage debate or discussion.
10. To make a point more memorable.
11. To create powerful associations in listeners' minds.
12. To surprise people.
13. To make the abstract concrete or relatable.
14. To challenge complacency.



EXERCISE

What is something you need to get across or show?

How might a story be useful to you as a leader?

What story could you use right now?

LIVE, LEARN, AND PASS IT ON

Try this exercise for yourself. It may be for a meeting, onboarding a new member, or simply catching up with your team.



EXERCISE

Looking back over the past six months, what did you live (the journey), what did you learn (the obstacles, the 'A-ha!' moment), and why does it matter? Then pass it on.

What did you live?

What did you learn?

Why do you want/need to pass it on?

Types of stories

'Who I am' story

Use this to establish context and show relatability.

Show your leadership in action, bring to life the personal values that drive your leadership philosophy. Use this to create a clear and unforgettable visual for your listeners and help create a promise of how you will lead. Think about what you can say to show them you understand them, that you get what they have been through, are going through, or need to go through.

'Why I'm here' story

Use this to build credibility.

Demonstrate why people need to listen and be led by you. What is your journey (that relates to now), what experience do you have, what obstacles have you overcome or problems have you solved? A new team or business leader should always do this, rather than wait for people to introduce you and tell their version of your story — or, worse, let people make their own assumptions.

'The vision' story

Use this to show the promised land and explain the journey.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "I have a dream..." and brought the dream to life for us. He did not say "I have five key points I need to tell you, let me walk you through some slides." Explain what life will look and feel like once we get there. What will be better, what habits will we be rid of? This needs to be a clear picture in people's heads before they can engage with the journey.

'Teaching' story

Use this to get a clear message across – it can be used to show who your customers are, what you do for them, and how you differ from your competitors.

Share a story that shows the impact you have had on a customer. How getting a passport to them on time meant they could visit an elderly parent, how bettering a product gives parents security that their child is safe. These stories help those at all levels access the purpose of the business, the 'why we do what we do'. Sometimes it is fairly obvious but there are many people who can't relate what they do on a daily basis to how it serves their customers. Use a story that shows how your product and service made a real difference in an actual situation.

'Values-in-action' story

Use this to bring values and ideas to life and to remind people what the business believes in.

Find a story that illustrates how values show up in interactions across the business, with stakeholders, employees and customers. This could include a time where a value was put to test, where a choice had to be made and helped a value come alive. You may need to link the unfamiliar with the familiar to show the benefits of acting on value. For example, if collaboration is a core value, yet every department has their own targets and budgets, use a story to show how collaboration can work across the teams in terms of finance.

This can be particularly useful when illustrating how colleagues should treat each other as most companies have a value that points to this; respect, trust, integrity etc.



EXERCISE

Which type of stories do you normally draw on?

Which ones could you use more of?

“Practice
doesn't make
perfect.
Practice
reduces the
imperfection.”

Toba Beta

Master of Stupidity



FINAL REFLECTIONS

My storytelling strengths are...

Storytelling areas I need to develop are...

Ways I am going to use storytelling more...

How will making my team feel psychologically safe make me more effective as a leader?

What am I doing now to build psychological safety in my team?

What stories can I draw upon or build to show and encourage psychological safety?

What have I reflected on during this workbook that will enable me as a leader to help my team thrive and move forward?

Leading For Now

Further resources

[Amy Edmondson - How to turn a group of strangers into a team](#)

[Nancy Duarte - The secret structure of great talks](#)

[Amy Cuddy - Your body language may shape who you are](#)

The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth - Amy C. Edmondson

The Four Stages of Psychological Safety - Timothy R. Clarke

The Leader's Guide to Storytelling - Stephen Denning

everywomanNetwork Resources

[Leading for now: Set your team up for success](#)

[Leading through influence](#)

[An expert Q&A on storytelling at work](#)

[Rachel Pendered on influencing people](#)

[How psychologically safe are you and your team?](#)

References

[Research: Men Get More Actional Feedback Than Women](#)

[Global Trust in Advertising and Brand Messages](#)

[re:Work - Understand Team Effectiveness](#)

[Connect, Then Lead](#)

[What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team](#)

[Pew Research Center: Social & Demographic Trends](#)

[How to create a Culture of Psychological Safety](#)

EVERYWOMAN WORKBOOK TEAM

Sara Parsons, everywoman Expert

Kate Farrow, Director of Learning

Jo Cardow, Director of Marketing

Any topics you'd like to see on the everywomanNetwork?

We'd love to hear from you: contact@everywoman.com

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