The Mind Tools Expert Voices Podcast – Episode 2

Transcript

Rachel Salaman 00:06
Hello and welcome to the Mind Tools Expert Voices Podcast. I'm Rachel Salaman.

Jonathan Hancock 00:12
And I'm Jonathan Hancock – and we're back together to explore another workplace issue with the help of our expert interviewees.

Rachel Salaman 00:19
For the last 16 years, I've been talking to leading thinkers, researchers and writers about things that affect us all at work. So we've built up an extraordinary archive of expert guests on a wide range of topics.

Jonathan Hancock 00:33
And I'm part of the team behind the Mind Tools Club, where all of those interviews can be found – and the free Mind Tools website, used by millions of people every year to boost their leadership, management and personal-performance skills.

Rachel Salaman 00:46
That's right. And in this podcast series, we come up with an intriguing question. Then we both collect clips from those 16 years of interviews, to help us investigate it from one point of view. And we also gather listeners' ideas and experiences – and we've actually got some great feedback to bring you after our last podcast, which was on asking for more pay.

Jonathan Hancock 01:08
We certainly do. But first, the question before us today is: what is psychological safety? And why does it matter? Psychological safety is a phrase that comes up more and more in our resources, and in the media in general. And it seems to reflect a growing awareness of organizational cultures, diversity and inclusion, problems with intimidation and bullying… but also questions about political correctness, the need for resilience, and how much employers are **really** responsible for how people feel at work.

I'm particularly interested in the role of leaders and managers in this psychological safety agenda. And that's what I've focused on, as I've chosen my expert clips – including some practical tips, and one or two warning notes, too.

Rachel Salaman 01:52

And I focused on it from the point of view of the individual. What's our personal role in creating psychological safety? So, if you think you're working in a toxic environment, are you really, or is it just your state of mind? I wanted to hear what our experts think psychological safety is and isn't – and why any of that actually matters.

Jonathan Hancock 02:14
Fantastic. So let's get started, shall we? Let's see what you came up with from the archive!

Rachel Salaman 02:19
Well, there's probably no better person to start with than Amy Edmondson. She's a professor of leadership at Harvard Business School, and she's one of the global authorities on this topic. Now, she defined psychological safety as – wait for it! – a "… belief that one will not be punished or humiliated, for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes, and that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking."

Jonathan Hancock 02:49
Yes. Doesn't quite trip off the tongue, does it?! But she's certainly getting in some big points there, and telling us that this is a serious message – when she's talking about humiliation and punishment right from the start. It does make your ears prick up!

Rachel Salaman 02:59
But what does it really mean in practice, I wondered – and does it perhaps sound a bit soft and cuddly? Well, I spoke to her about her book "The Fearless Organization," and she actually fleshed out this definition for me with some examples of what psychological safety is **not**.

Amy Edmondson 03:17
It's not being nice, right? It's not sort of only saying nice things. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Because of course, it's about being candid, you know: sometimes we'll have to say things to each other, that, you know, could feel harsh.

So it's not about being nice. It's also not a license to just whine. It's not an invitation to sit back and just start saying everything that doesn't work. It's an invitation to be productive and engaged. It's also not soft or "touchy-feely." And it's most certainly not an invitation to relax, or to sort of lower the performance expectations. So, it's really just trying to recognize and put a name on the fact that if we aren't open and candid and willing to take interpersonal risks, our organizations will face much bigger risks.

Rachel Salaman 04:13
Now she hints at the perils of ignoring this at the end there. And I wanted to know, what are those risks? What are the real-life implications of having a so-called psychologically unsafe workplace?

Amy Edmondson 04:27
Where knowledge is important, that means what's inside my head is important. And if what's inside my head is not coming out, it's wasteful. And it's more important than ever, because it's more and more the case that organizations need creativity, knowledge, ingenuity… you know, sort of a willingness to team

up with other people to create new value. None of those things can happen without a sense of psychological safety that allows us to take these interpersonal risks.

Rachel Salaman 04:56
So that's Amy Edmondson, one of the global authorities on this topic.

Jonathan Hancock 05:00
Yes, she's brilliant. And it won't surprise you at all to hear, Rachel that I've also chosen a clip from Amy! Later on, she'll be telling us who she holds most responsible for creating the right environment for psychological safety in the workplace. So she really popularized that phrase “psychological safety.” Is it a phrase that other of your guests have talked about?

Rachel Salaman 05:19
One or two. I mean, one is the writer and happiness expert Tal Ben Shahar. And I talked to him about his book, “The Pursuit of Perfect.” For him, psychological safety is all about being able to be **less** than perfect in the workplace!

Tal Ben Shahar 05:37
Psychological safety is the feeling that team members in a group have, that they're allowed to take risks; that it's OK falling down; that it's OK making a mistake. And when members of an organization have that psychological safety – again, not having a blank check for failure, but knowing that it's OK to try and it's OK to fall down – they’re much more creative, much more productive, not to mention the fact that they're a lot happier in the workplace. But also, in terms of pure bottom line, in terms of the profit and the growth and the sustainability of the organization, providing psychological safety, providing the permission to be human – part of the permission to be human is the permission to fail – that contributes a great deal to the bottom line of the organization.

Rachel Salaman 06:30
What really jumped out at me there, Jonathan, was the phrase “the permission to be human.” And also, that part of the permission to be human is the permission to fail. Huge ideas we're talking about today.

Jonathan Hancock 06:42
I like that idea. I suppose you have to make sure you are succeeding the majority of the time. You don't want to be in a workplace that's just failing. That's not going to feel very safe for anybody, is it?

Rachel Salaman 06:50
Yes. And I think he is aware of that. He said that earlier in the clip, didn’t he – that we mustn't feel we can fail all the time. That's not what this is about. And he talked about happiness. You'll have noticed a lot of the vocabulary around this topic is closely linked to emotion and mental health. And that's one of the reasons why it matters, I think, because without psychological safety at work, all sorts of negative forces can derail us.

I talked to Pippa Grange: she's a performance psychologist who worked with England's men's football team in the 2018 World Cup. She's written a book called “Fear Less,” and she told me how damaging it can be, especially to teamwork, when you're scared.

Pippa Grange 07:34
So fear does a couple of things. Firstly, it makes us less intelligent! We actually become so narrow in our thinking and less able to use our rationality in some ways, our logic, you know. We can get spilled over into emotion, and that means that we are just swept by that, and we're not focused on the things that make for great team. And it turns our attention **inward**, to thinking about what **we're** doing right or wrong. So teamwork becomes quite a bit strained in those respects, because it's somebody focusing on their own performance rather than on the group's performance, which requires you to think more broadly.

Jonathan Hancock 08:14
You know, that reminds me very strongly of a place I once worked, where – on the surface – everyone was very well behaved; teams seemed to get on OK; rules weren't broken. It didn't **seem** to be an unsafe place. But actually, underneath the surface, we were quite scared. There was a lot of pressure, there was a lot of need for conformity, a lot of that sort of perfectionism that Tal was warning about before. And it meant that people were scared – but they weren't showing it. So it **looked** fine, but you didn't have to dig very far down to realize that it was a scary place to work. It didn't feel safe.

Rachel Salaman 08:45
And it's so detrimental, isn't it? I really related to Pippa's comment that fear makes us stupid. I know exactly what she means because you just feel like you can't do anything if you're scared.

Jonathan Hancock 08:55
And you're focusing on the wrong things, aren't you? Like she said, you're focusing on yourself and what it's going to mean for you and are you getting it wrong personally… rather than maybe making some of those healthy mistakes that Tal talked about, and thinking about the wider team and how we're generally getting on – how we're moving forward.

Rachel Salaman 09:08
Absolutely. So fear is definitely one sign that no psychological safety is there at work. Another is a lack of respect. And I spoke to Rosanne Thomas, who's a business-etiquette expert – but her expertise goes a lot further than what to wear and how to greet people! I talked to her about respect in the workplace, and she was really clear about the damage that can be done when respect is **missing**.

Rosanne Thomas 09:39
With employees, it's really pervasive in that it affects morale, it affects productivity. It might affect mental health, which could affect physical health. It certainly has an impact upon attendance and absenteeism. And it's contagious in that one person's disrespect, one person's incivility toward another in the workplace is contagious to other people. And they tend to think, well, I guess this is OK. Or I guess this is the way we behave. So that's not good for employees at all.

Rachel Salaman 10:09
That idea of contagion is really interesting, isn't it, Jonathan? If you don't show **me** respect, I won't show the next person respect, and so on.

Jonathan Hancock 10:18
Yeah. And especially if new people come into the business as well, what else do they have to go on other than what they see around them?

Rachel Salaman 10:23
And it can really create what has become known as a toxic work environment full of fear, lack of respect.

Jonathan Hancock 10:31
Yeah. And I like the way she mentioned the physical side as well, because I've also been in workplaces where you could tell people were really suffering on a physical level: people were off sick; people just looked like they were lacking energy. And I think a lot of that, in those cases, did come down to it being a toxic, unsafe, unsettling environment.

Rachel Salaman 10:48
Well, I spoke to the therapist and author, Nedra Glover Tawwab about this. And she described what she thinks of as a toxic work environment.

Nedra Glover Tawwab 10:58
There tends to be a lack of support, a lack of diversity in views, a lack of willingness to hear or understand… [to] support workers, as growing in the company or in the business… growing or learning their work. Because sometimes toxic could be you're not well trained. And people refuse to train you and you're having to figure out things on your own without support. And so there are many ways in a work environment that it could just be unhealthy for you.

Rachel Salaman 11:35
So that's toxic work environments, where there's no psychological safety in sight.

Jonathan Hancock 11:40
Yes: we don't want to be there! And I **have**, at times!

Rachel Salaman 11:43
Yes, well, me too! You know, it made me think of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Because this issue really seems to go right back to the basics of human need. Are you familiar with that theory, Jonathan?

Jonathan Hancock 11:56
I am. It's interesting: we went to a festival this summer, and we ended up in our group talking about it, because it was like, OK, we need to get the toilet sorted out, we need to get the drinking water and the food before we can actually enjoy anything bigger than that. So I think it does affect us all, especially in the workplace. You've got to sort out people's basic comforts, their basic physical human needs, before anything else happens. And obviously that has an impact on their work, because how can people have good conversations, think great thoughts, do brilliant work, if those basic needs aren't met?

Rachel Salaman 12:27

Yes, that's right. And people can find an article about this on the Mind Tools site. But, in basic terms, Abraham Maslow was an American psychologist who published this hugely influential theory in 1943. The idea is that we all need – in this order – physical essentials, like food and water, as Jonathan just mentioned; safety; love and belonging; esteem; and self-actualization, which I believe means fulfilling your potential.

Christine Comaford was a really impressive guest. She's a hugely successful businesswoman, a guest lecturer at Harvard Business School, and a consultant and coach to organizations of all shapes and sizes, including the White House under two presidents – and all, Jonathan, without a high school diploma or college degree!

Jonathan Hancock 13:19
So how did she do it?

Rachel Salaman 13:21
[Laughs] Well, read her books! She's the author of several best-selling books. And I talked to her about the one called “Power Your Tribe: Create Resilient Teams in Turbulent Times.” She boils down Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs into just three: safety, belonging, and mattering. And in this clip, she explains how individuals and organizations can benefit by recognizing those needs.

Christine Comaford 13:49
We need to feel certainty, safety, freedom from fear. We need to feel that we belong, we fit in somewhere, we have equal value to others, we're part of something beyond ourselves. We need to matter: to be seen, appreciated, acknowledged for our unique gifts. We're not a cog in a wheel, we're not a replaceable part. And Maslow's research, so long ago, stated this – and we have found that this is absolutely true.

In corporations, we even do an assessment called the Safety/Belonging/Mattering Index, so we can find out if the sales team feels that they don't matter… if the engineers are feeling unsafe… if the operations people are feeling that they don't belong. Then we unpack those results from this assessment. It's only 10 questions; it's very fast. We put in different programs in place to boost agility. We take the assessment maybe six months later… we find that we've gotten increased results. And what does that mean? Thirty-five to 50 percent more productive because they're not being squished, Rachel, by feeling unsafe, not belonging, not mattering. Our emotional state… 90% of our decisions or behaviors are driven or dominated by our emotional state. We've got to start really paying attention to this.

Rachel Salaman 15:04
I really love this idea. It's simple, it's effective. She went on to say in the interview, Jonathan, that if you're in a difficult situation with someone, and it could be at home as well as at work, if you can identify which of those three things are missing – whether that person is missing, in that moment, a feeling of safety or belonging or mattering – then you can boost that particular thing. And the awkwardness or the unhappiness can resolve. So it's a very powerful idea, which I've thought a lot about since talking to Christine. Maybe some of your experts brought up something similar when we get to your clips?

Jonathan Hancock 15:43
Yes: spoiler alert, they do! There are some very practical tips on how you try and diagnose what the issue is. Yeah, that's coming up.

Rachel Salaman 15:50
So what we've heard so far really has been about acknowledging and dealing with emotions. And I wanted to share a great anecdote from Jackie Barretta, who's the founding partner of the consulting firm Nura Group. She's also the author of a book called “Primal Teams: Harnessing the Power of Emotions to Fuel Extraordinary Performance.” Now, Jackie was once working with a company where the web developers in the company had requested a big budget increase. Let's hear Jackie tell the rest of the story.

Jackie Barretta 16:24
So I had to come back and tell this team that they weren't going to get a budget increase. And there was this particular guy on the team, named David… he was just very, very upset, very angry: he just immediately got very angry. And he started really yelling, saying, you know, “I can't believe this company,” you know, “our customers are going to get so frustrated with this, they already are frustrated with this, and now they're going to start going somewhere else!”

Some people might say, “Well, you know, that's totally unacceptable for somebody to have that sort of negative reaction in a team.” And he, you know, he was very upset to the point where his teammates were kind of squirming in their chair; they were feeling kind of uneasy with it. But I let it happen. And I listened to him, I gave him the space to express that negativity.

And really, there's two main reasons that I did that. Number one, people that are highly engaged in their work, people that really care about their work, they have an emotional attachment to it. And if you tell people that they can't express negative emotions, then you essentially ask them to be more disengaged. Then the way they deal with that is they say, “OK, all right, well, I won't care as much then.” And the other thing that's very positive about negative emotions is they sound the alarm. So when David got upset about this website, we're hearing him talk about the impact this is going to have on customers and how it's going to cause them to go elsewhere – and this is a big deal. And if we would have just sat there and said, “OK, yeah, this is not good,” and, you know, just had no emotion about it, it wouldn't have sounded the alarm as strongly.

And so what happened from that was that we had some very good sessions, where we talked about how we were going to take the budget that we **did** have, and do the best with it, and we came up with some pretty good things.

Jonathan Hancock 18:23
Well, this is very interesting, isn't it? Because she's talking about alarms being sounded, about people venting, about people being really emotional, and that being **safe**, not the opposite! Because you might have looked at that from the outside and thought, “That looks like a very toxic place.”

Rachel Salaman 18:35

Right, exactly. That's what I thought too. It seems to be really important to understand the difference between the kind of emotions that make for a toxic environment. So if someone's angry, they're being angry at someone for failing, for example, and the other kinds of emotion that might be flagged for something really important, or just reveal how engaged a person is – like that David.

Jonathan Hancock 18:59
And it reminded me of that place I talked about before where I worked and it looked, on the surface, all very safe, and it was quite emotionl**ess**. And that I think is a big part of **why** it was toxic – because people weren't able to express themselves.

Rachel Salaman 19:10
Yeah, it's such an interesting point she makes there. And here's another fresh angle for you, Jonathan. You'll remember that earlier we heard therapist Nedra Glover Tawwab defining toxic situations. Well, here she is again, with a suggestion that maybe it's not the environment that's causing the issues. It's **us** – and our lack of boundaries.

Nedra Glover Tawwab 19:33
So often, we think that we're in a toxic work environment, and we can be in an environment that lacks boundaries. We could think that our boss is overbearing, or they're constantly calling us, or, you know, asking for things, and it could be based on our boundaries. And I've seen it in the workplace where there are some people who allow certain things, and some people who don't. And those people are treated differently. So people know, like, well, you can go over here and talk to this person, because they will say, “Blank" – they’re setting a boundary. Yeah, they're setting a boundary, and you aren't. And so that's why you're in this situation where you think, “Oh, my gosh, these things are happening to me, and it's this environment.” And it really could be your boundaries.

Rachel Salaman 20:26
How are your boundaries, Jonathan? Could they do with a little maintenance?

Jonathan Hancock 20:30
I'm sure they could. I'm sure most people’s could! It's got me thinking about camping again, actually, and how you do feel safer when you know the space around your tent. It takes me back to that festival I was talking about before, and when you know what's your safe space, and how people are going to come in and come out, and what the line is that kind of protects you. I think that's such an important thing to think about. Also, I used to work in schools, I was a teacher, and we often talked about the need for boundaries, and families who might not have strong boundaries. And often families struggling because the kids didn't really know – and the adults didn't really know – the lines that were or weren't to be crossed at different times.

Rachel Salaman 21:05
I loved that Nedra was gently suggesting that sometimes we can be in charge of our own psychological safety: **we** can make it happen.

Jonathan Hancock 21:13

Yes. And I think when we come to talk about what the employers need to do as well, we should bear that in mind that it's not **just** about employers; there are things that **we** can do. And often it's up to **us** to decide those boundaries. And to maintain those boundaries, we might need help, and we might need other things in place as well here. But I do think there's a role for individuals in that setting of boundaries.

Rachel Salaman 21:33
Well I'll finish my selection with a similar idea from Srikumar Rao. He's a creativity and personal mastery expert, and he's the author of a book called “Happiness at Work: Be Resilient, Motivated, and Successful, No Matter What.” Now, he's a strong believer in what you might call “extreme reframing,” maybe... He believes it's all about our attitude.

Srikumar Rao 22:01
Once you start making changes between your ears, those changes reflect themselves outside, and the situation outside changes. So in other words, if you're in the wrong – quote-unquote – job, perhaps the best thing for you to do would be to start working on your attitude, and that will – believe it or not – actually result in changes happening outside. Because this is the really important point, Rachel: most of us go through life under the impression [that] here I am, a nice person trying to do his or her best, and the universe does things to us. And we feel that things happen **to** us. That's not the way it is. You and the universe are intricately connected; it's as if you were dancing. And if you start leading differently, the universe has no choice but to follow differently.

Rachel Salaman 22:54
And with that lovely image of dancing with the universe, Jonathan, it's over to you!

Jonathan Hancock 23:00
That can be the title of your autobiography! [Laughs] He's such a wise man; I absolutely loved listening to that whole interview. It certainly got me thinking though. I've got to say I was a little bit conflicted on whether you can rely on self-awareness. And how do you know the point at which you need things to really change – and it's not just in your perception, and in your head; there have actually got to be bigger changes to stop people doing serious wrong to you, for example, at work, and rules being broken – laws being broken.

Rachel Salaman 23:28
Yes – it’s something to think about, isn't it? I mean, there's probably more than a grain of truth in what he's saying. But like anything, it's all about the situation.

Jonathan Hancock 23:39
I'd say take that as a recommendation from both of us to listen to the full interview, and grapple with some big ideas! It's there among all the Expert Interviews in our Mind Tools Club, and you can find out about becoming a member at www.mindtools.com.

Right – so my turn now, Rachel. You looked at psychological safety from the individual's point of view, and now I've gone in from the standpoint of managers and leaders. What role do they play in creating and sustaining a psychologically safe workplace? And why does it even matter?

Rob Goffee is a leadership expert and academic, and the co-author of the book “Why Should Anyone Work Here?” He told you that leaders need to let their people be different; in fact, **encourage** them to be different.

Rob Goffee 24:21
I think the first point to make is that organizations create many pressures, we think – for conformity. So I think you've got to sort of work against the grain of that, to nurture individuality, to look for people that are different, and to encourage those different people to actually express those differences. In other words, not just to tolerate difference but to celebrate it.

This idea of “differences” goes beyond conventional notions of diversity – which, of course, are really important: the ambition to get a better mix of genders, races, ethnic minorities, and so on. Very, very important. But what we're really digging down into in the book is differences in terms of mindset: the way people think, different perspectives, different assumptions… Often, you know, to use a colloquial expression, it's the kind of grit in the oyster which creates the pearl. Never forget, creativity increases with diversity, even though diversity is difficult to manage.

Jonathan Hancock 25:23
Rob Goffee. So it sounds like there’s a big challenge here for managers – to nurture difference, but also to manage it well, in the daily life of the organization. And Susan Scott had some great advice about that. She's the best-selling author and the founder of Fierce Inc., a global training and consultancy firm. She told you that to support psychological safety, you can’t always just stand back and let people be themselves and do what they want. Instead, managers sometimes need to have what she calls in her book “fierce conversations.”

Susan Scott 25:55
Honestly, a fierce conversation can be one of the sweetest, most compassionate, compelling conversations we could ever have. And they include meetings, where we're tackling some of our most complex issues, and meetings in which we want to interrogate reality around a topic, and we want to provoke learning and resolve our issues – and, in the process, enrich relationships. And yes, a fierce conversation can also be one in which I confront, or am confronted about, behavior or attitude. And yet even that conversation, when it is skillful and completely candid, can enrich the relationship rather than set it back on its heels.

Rachel Salaman 26:39
She speaks so much sense, doesn't she, Jonathan? I really love that idea that we shouldn't be scared to just bite the bullet and have those fierce conversations. They don't need to be aggressive. They don't need to be offensive. They just need to be strong, authentic and honest. And I have to recommend her book “Fierce Conversations.” It's very enlightening and well worth reading.

Jonathan Hancock 27:02
Yeah, and I really like that word “fierce.” Actually, my daughter uses it quite a bit. She talks about “fierce” in terms of fashion and photography. And it's a really positive word. In fact, there's Beyoncé’s alter ego Sasha Fierce, isn’t there? So it's actually a very positive word; it doesn't have to be a scary thing. It can be a really empowering word. I really like that positivity and that very attractive idea of rich

relationships and exciting leadership from a fierce approach. And that's something that Mark Brouker, I think, would agree with. He's a captain in the U.S. Navy. You spoke to him about a book he wrote called “Lessons from the Navy: How to Earn Trust, Lead Teams, and Achieve Organizational Excellence.” And he's another of the experts who believes that leaders have a very important and very conscious role to play in actively achieving psychological safety.

Mark Brouker 27:48
Every single interaction, whether it's a text or an email, or a passing in the hallway, or a Zoom call, will create either a little bit more trust or create a little bit more fear. And when leaders embrace that, they're more likely to be cognizant of it and push it towards a level of trust.

Jonathan Hancock 28:05
And I have to say, Rachel, some of the best bosses I've worked with have actually been willing to check back in after a tricky conversation, or a moment they weren't sure about. And they wanted to see whether their words had landed well with people or just to kind of gauge how people were feeling. So like Mark says there, leaders are continually turning that safety dial one way or the other. And I think it’s great when they're really aware of that.

Rachel Salaman 28:26
Yes, it's very, very important, isn't it? I love that idea of a leader checking back with you and not just leaving it, not just assuming that what they said landed, as you say, and that all is well. It doesn't hurt, does it, to just have that little check back?

Jonathan Hancock 28:42
And in terms of who those people **are**, with the power to create a climate of safety at work, Amy Edmondson homed in on the role of middle managers. We heard from her earlier: Amy's the person who really popularized the idea of psychological safety. And we've got a brilliant interview that you did with her in the Mind Tools Club about her book “The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation and Growth.” And that title in a nutshell tells you how important she thinks all of this is. And as I say, she highlighted those middle managers that we work with every day.

Amy Edmondson 29:14
I have to admit, I assign a fair amount of responsibility to the group leader. And it's the leaders in the middle that matter, right? It's those folks who lead a branch of a bank or a restaurant in a restaurant chain, or a unit in a hospital ward, if you will – those leaders in the middle matter enormously for creating the climate, the workplace climate. They don't utterly, you know, change the organization's culture. But they do very much shape the “climate of voice,” which means how they show up matters for other contributors. Anyone there – you don't have to be a leader – anyone can exercise leadership in this domain.

Jonathan Hancock 30:00
And I think that's particularly important for us, Rachel, because we know at Mind Tools a big part of our community fits into that bracket of middle managers.

Rachel Salaman 30:06
Yes, well, I suppose it just goes along with that role, doesn't it? I mean, it's more responsibility, it's often more money. And with that comes these other responsibilities about creating psychological safety for your team.

Jonathan Hancock 30:18
And that fits in well with something that Mark Brouker said, actually, about the natural intimidation that comes with leadership. I hadn't really thought about that before. But he said that your boss signs your paycheck and makes decisions about your career, and there's a natural element of fear involved for the employee. But Mark says bosses can be aware of that, and do something about it.

Mark Brouker 30:38
And I think most leaders don't appreciate that level of natural intimidation. So what I talked about in the book is the opposite of intimidation: being approachable. And you have to be proactive to get to that approachable level. Otherwise it's going to default to intimidation. And, you know, intimidation creates fear, and there's either a culture of trust or a culture of fear.

Rachel Salaman 30:59
Yes, it's great insight, isn't it? And I hadn't thought about it either, before I heard Mark say that during the interview. So yeah, it's great for leaders to know that perhaps they have to dial up their approachability, just to counteract the natural intimidation that comes with their role.

Jonathan Hancock 31:18
So where do they start with this kind of process? Because it does feel like they've got to go on a bit of a journey to achieve the things that we're asking of them. Nick Morgan has some ideas. He's a communication coach, and the author of the book “Power Cues: the Subtle Science of Leading Groups, Persuading Others, and Maximizing Your Personal Impact.” So what does he think that leaders have to do as step one?

Nick Morgan 31:39
The first thing is to become self-aware – that’s step one in the book. And that's really where it all starts… start to pay attention and get more aware of what you look like to others. Because people don't care, in a sense, how you're feeling. What they want to know is what does this mean for **me**. And so it's about learning how you show up in a room, just so you know how you're affecting other people. So that's really the first step. And then the second key takeaway is, over time, as you learn to become aware of this unconscious dialogue going on all around you, then you can become a much more effective leader, much more in tune to the emotions of your colleagues and employees, and much more powerful and strong at leading people to where they want to go.

Jonathan Hancock 32:28
He made me think of one of the most toxic workplaces I've ever worked in. You'll notice I'm being quite careful not to say where these particular organizations were! [Laughs] But I've had a few experiences of places that really, especially looking back, were not safe places, and did not feel good places even at the time.

And I think one of the worst places I was in, there was a real lack of self-awareness among the team leaders. They would pick up on tiny mistakes people made, like I remember somebody mispronouncing something, and they were really criticized for it – quite publicly. So manager criticism felt over the top. But there were also things that just didn't get enough praise, like a great event we put on that wasn't celebrated at all by the bosses, or it didn't feel like it was, and we were left feeling quite deflated. And I think a lot of that just came from a lack of self-awareness about how manager behavior was affecting people and creating an unpleasant climate really. We didn't feel free to try new things because of it. We weren't relaxed, and I just don't think we were doing our best work.

Rachel Salaman 33:24
Yes, it makes me think back to Tal Ben Shahar's "permission to be human." I mean, if you can't pronounce something wrong, then honestly what can you… [laughs]… what kind of standards are people holding you to, unnecessarily?!

Jonathan Hancock 33:36
You got into an interesting conversation with Francis Frei about self-awareness and self-control. Francis is the multimillion-view TED Talk presenter, and author of "Unleashed: the Unapologetic Leader's Guide to Empowering Those Around You." And I loved this point about whether leaders sometimes need to pull back a bit on their authenticity, and know when to rein it in at work.

Frances Frei 33:58
I think it's totally fine. In fact, it's probably good to trim the amount of authenticity that you bring to the table. And this is for people who are already authentic. This isn't for people that are just trying to become authentic. I don't want them to start trimming; I want them to experience being "all in." But if you're, like… your whole authenticity isn't a problem for your showing up but, "Wow, we just don't need to see that final 20 percent"… I think it's a totally reasonable thing to do to keep that 20 percent at home! It won't be inauthentic. I don't want you to pretend you're not the middle 80 percent. But you don't have to give us **all** of it, if that makes sense?

Rachel Salaman 34:37
Yes. It was a great answer. I think my question was about what do you do if your authentic self isn't really who you want that person to be? And yes, she came up with this idea of trimming, and it was brilliant.

Jonathan Hancock 34:51
And another word of warning from Francis Frei. She said watch out for what seem to be positive values becoming weaponized and actually causing damage at work.

Frances Frei 35:01
You know, a very common cultural value is "default to trust," right? It's like, who is going to argue against that? Like, "Give people the benefit of the doubt"… "If we all give each other the benefit of the doubt, everyone is going to do better." It's beautiful. But in some organizations, that "default to trust" value, if you go in there, when you hear the phrase "default to trust," it won't be as a way to give everyone the benefit of the doubt; it will be a senior person saying to a junior person, "I'd like you to stop asking questions now." So, "default to trust" – it's like they misused it, they misappropriated for

their own personal gain. So if there are weaponized cultural values, that's another sign that the culture has to change.

Jonathan Hancock 35:49
And on that specific point about shutting down questioning, Amy Edmondson was very clear that that's the opposite of what bosses should be doing. She told you that psychological safety thrives when managers ask good questions.

Amy Edmondson 36:01
And a good question is one that you don't already know the answer to, right? So that you're all ears, you really are listening. It's also a question that gives someone a little bit of room to respond – you know, “How are you thinking about this project right now?” Or, “What's on your plate?” Or, “What are you worried about?” All of those are good questions, because they are an invitation to another person to share what they're thinking. That invitation is such a precious gift.

And it's a small thing, of course, but it's really quite large as well, because if someone asks me, and then appears to be interested in listening to me as I answer, they have for that moment created a small space for me to respond. And in that small space, I am almost, by definition, psychologically safe. You've got my attention. You have expressed an interest in what I'm thinking. So, doing that once is a good idea. Doing that kind of routinely helps draw your colleagues out – helps make your team, your workplace, just that much better, that much more engaged.

Rachel Salaman 37:10
Yeah, that's great. I love it. It reminds me actually a little bit of what Christine Comaford was saying earlier, in my clips, with her pared-down Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: the safety, the mattering, the belonging. And asking the questions you need to ask in order to find out if any of those are missing in your team members.

Jonathan Hancock 37:32
And it is a really positive view of what workplace cultures could be like. But Amy says it doesn't mean blinding yourself to wrongdoings. And she says they'll still be times when people's behavior needs to be called out.

Amy Edmondson 37:44
When people engage in what I sometimes called “blameworthy acts” – the things that we really do know to be outside the bounds of appropriate behavior. It is absolutely crucial, if you want to continue to have psychological safety, for there to be sanctions for those.

Because, you know, it's almost paradoxical: if people behave in ways that bully; if they yell at a colleague; if they belittle; if they harass… any of those things that are truly unacceptable behaviors at work… if those go unpunished or unacknowledged, ironically, you've made the workplace less safe, not more. So people need to know... If you know where the boundaries are, you're more comfortable operating within the boundaries.

Jonathan Hancock 38:35

So that loops us right back to that talk about boundaries we had before, and the safety that boundaries can bring. And also the idea that a workplace may **look** safe, on the surface. You may think, actually, nobody is being told off, there are no sanctions here, nobody's doing the wrong thing… That doesn't necessarily mean it's a safe place. Possibly the opposite!

Rachel Salaman 38:52
Yes. And managers need to keep checking in with their team, don't they – to ask those crucial questions, and find out how psychologically safe people are feeling.

Jonathan Hancock 39:02
They've got their work cut out! [Laughs]

Rachel Salaman 39:03
If you don't ask you don't know! [Laughs]

Jonathan Hancock 39:04
Yeah, absolutely! I do feel like we've given them quite a lot of challenges. But it's going be good for them: they get paid the money for this! So, leaders and managers – we've set you a challenge here. There's a lot for you to do. But, as we've heard from both sides, I think, it's so important to aim for psychological safety, to give it the time and the commitment it needs, and to work **with** your employees to make it real and to keep it going.

Well, it would be great to get some feedback on what our experts have said today. And we'd love to hear **stories** about psychologically safe and unsafe workplaces. We'll tell you how to get in touch in a couple of minutes.

Now, some feedback on our first episode, which looked at those tricky conversations about pay and promotion.

Rachel Salaman 39:50
Yes – we had a really nice email from Yolande from our coaching team, Jonathan, who had a listen to our first episode. She says, "What a great podcast! Thanks for sharing so many expert voices." She particularly liked what Kurt Mortensen said, and she quotes: "There's a one-to-one relationship between your personal development and your income." Great point Yolande says: "You can't overemphasize the importance of continually learning. Learning isn't only about reading books, or watching video clips. It's also about putting a new skill into practice. And it's amazing how you can transfer knowledge and skill from one area of life to another. It's a special kind of creativity, and it makes you a more valuable and interesting person." So that's from Yolande.

Jonathan Hancock 40:35
And I suppose that's the point, isn't it, on that podcast? It's about creating that extra value that you can then get rewarded for, and you've got more evidence of the things that you've put into practice from your learning.

Yes, thanks very much, Yolande. And a couple I can bring you… One's from Ali who got in touch. Thank you, Ali. She says, "Hi guys, loved your first episode. And the bit about managers not being

telepathic is spot-on. I once left a company because I'd been passed over twice for promotion. Then I met my manager about a year later through my new role, and found out she'd always assumed I was happy with what I was doing and didn't want any more responsibility. Part of me says she should have guessed," Ali says. "I'm sure I gave some pretty big clues. But I never actually said, or put myself forward." And that is exactly what one of I guests – I think it was Robert Kaplan – was saying about not assuming your boss is telepathic. Real-life experience from Ali, who definitely learned from meeting the boss later on!

And Danny got in touch as well. He said, "We're experimenting with an internal mentoring program in our company, which is already proving its worth." And he says that they help people to find mentors in the company, "… usually colleagues who are a little more senior than them." And he says, "We give them time to meet and talk. And some of the strongest feedback we've had so far is about the ideas that it's generating for career progression. People get to talk to colleagues, people who've already found ways to move up in the organization; they get ideas and inspiration. At the next line manager meeting or performance review, they've got ideas about how they'd like to push their career forward and their earnings forward." And Danny says, "… they may even have evidence of things they've already done in that direction as part of the mentoring relationship." So again, it fits in with what Yolande was saying, as well – about doing something that then helps you create that extra value… that gets you that extra money, and maybe a promotion, and pushes you further on in your career.

Rachel Salaman 42:20
Absolutely – great point!

Jonathan Hancock 42:28
So that's some of your feedback on the last episode. But now, what do you think about the experts you've heard today on psychological safety?

Rachel Salaman 42:36
Yes. Who got it right, do you think? And were there any ideas here that you took issue with? What do you think psychological safety means? How important is it really? And what's your experience of it been – wherever you work?

Jonathan Hancock 42:50
Email is the best way to get in touch. We're at expertvoicespodcast@mindtools.com. Anyone can leave a voice note there, too, which we might even include in a future episode!

Rachel Salaman 43:01
Which would be fantastic. And you can subscribe to our podcasts, too, so that you never miss one. And please give us a rating where you can – and spread the word about us. So, to get in touch, it's expertvoicespodcast@mindtools.com.

Jonathan Hancock 43:15
And why not check out everything else that Mind Tools has to offer? There's a wealth of free stuff on the website, plus details about joining our Club for the full range of articles, videos, infographics, workbooks, quizzes, and the entire Expert Interviews collection. Start improving every aspect of your

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Rachel Salaman 43:38
For now, thanks for listening – and see you next time, Jonathan, for the Mind Tools Expert Voices Podcast.

Jonathan Hancock 43:44
Thank you, Rachel. See you soon!