

Togethershhip Tips #3

By Motivators@Work

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Vulnerability-Based Trust: The key for unstoppable teams

In this Newsletter and following on from 'connect on a human level', we are focussing on the importance of vulnerability-based trust for successful teamwork.

Reliability based, whilst helpful, is transactional and not enough to guarantee successful collaboration.

In comes vulnerability-based trust. It is deeper and is fundamental for an open and honest, psychologically safe environment. It's the type of trust where, because you know you've got each other's backs, individuals can admit, "I don't know the answer", "I need help" or "something went wrong".

Companies like Google, with its famous "Project Aristotle" research, have shown that psychological safety is critical for high-performing teams.

As a result, leaders are increasingly expected to model vulnerability, openness and transparency. Younger generations increasingly expect it from their leaders.

What happens when team members have vulnerability-based trust?

- **Higher engagement.** People are more likely to share insights, ask questions, and voice concerns - leading to better decision-making and problem-solving.
- **Fewer ugly surprises.** People more easily admit when they've made or seen mistakes/ issues. So, you can solve them before they become a major issue.
- **More innovation.** You have created an environment where it's okay to experiment, take risks, and potentially fail. Crucial for creativity and innovation.
- **Constructive conflict.** People are more likely to collaborate without ego. They're comfortable to disagree with each other and listen to other perspectives (as they know they have each other's backs). This diversity of opinions leads to better problem solving.
- **Better Resilience/ lower turnover.** They build deeper relationships, which leads to stronger emotional bonds and mutual respect. This deep level of trust increases resilience, which can withstand stress and conflict.

Without this vulnerability-based trust and psychological safety – you can expect the opposite of the above.

So how can you as a leader cultivate Vulnerability-Based Trust?

- **Role model.** Drop the mask of 'I've got it all under control'. When leaders are open about their own challenges, mistakes, or areas of growth, it sets the tone for the rest of the team to follow suit.
- **Ask for feedback.** "How did I do?", "What could I have done better?" are not things leaders often ask. But it starts a trusting and open culture.
- **'Celebrate' failures.** Or at least praise those that admit to issues they see. Celebrate the lessons learned from well-intended failures. Including your own.
- **Create space for sharing.** Be intentional to make space for this topic. Examples below ...

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Tips to really kick-start this type of trust

A teambuilding workshop is not a bad place to start. Here are some ideas if you do:

1. Set the tone early

- As the facilitator or leader, demonstrate vulnerability by sharing your own experiences, including challenges or mistakes. This sets a powerful example and encourages others to do the same.

2. Icebreakers and personal sharing activities

- Start with an icebreaker that encourages participants to share something personal but not overly intimate, like a challenge they overcame, what their biggest concern is for the coming year. Gradually, you can introduce deeper sharing exercises.
- Ask participants to share both their strengths and areas where they struggle. This promotes self-awareness and shows it's okay to admit imperfections.

3. Acknowledge and Celebrate Vulnerability

- When participants show vulnerability, acknowledge their courage. Recognising these moments reinforces the safety of the environment. Remind them that vulnerability is a strength and that perfection is not the goal.

4. Get REALLY vulnerable

- A question like 'what do you have on your plate outside of work right now, that's playing on your heart and mind?' can be very powerful. Walls are broken down that create intense bonds, safety & trust in the team. Don't forget to role model.

5. Create Reflection Opportunities

- Have participants reflect on their feelings, what they've learned about themselves throughout the workshop. This helps deepen the sense of trust and vulnerability.

6. Follow Up with continued trust-building

- A one-time workshop can set the stage for long-term trust but only if reinforced over time. Create regular forums for sharing 'where I need help', or 'learning from failure'. And NEVER forget to role model first.

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Case study: Get your team moving forwards again

A team had to deal with a restructure that meant less resources (friends let go) plus a new structure and roles (uncertainty). There was huge inertia.

The team had two days together to process what had happened to be able to getting moving again – and fast. Significant time was invested on Day 1 in connection and vulnerability-based trust exercises.

When the time came to have the tough conversations on 'how do we move forward, what will we do to be successful again?', team members had the courage to actively disagree, bring in different perspectives and – most importantly – had an intense desire to solve the problems together. The motivation, solutions and sustainable ongoing collaboration that was created ensured that the team had a hugely successful year.

This really is THE key that unlocks so many doors and yet is missing in most teams. So, what are you waiting for? Get vulnerable, get successful.

Would you like the expert support? Don't hesitate to contact us.

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