



Rethinking Risk: Building Safer Workplaces Through Psychological Safety

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National Recognitions – May 2026

Mental Health Awareness Month
May 1st – 31st

Learning At Work Week
May 18th – 24th

National Be A Millionaire Day
May 20th

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OVERVIEW

- **First**
 - What **Psychological Safety** Is/Not
- **Second**
 - **Psychological Safety** & Psychosocial Hazards
- **Third**
 - Ownership
- **Fourth**
 - Practical Steps

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Why Is HR Talking to Safety?

"Your incident reports depend on people willing to report."

"Our engagement surveys depend on people willing to be honest."

Same problem. Same root cause. Different data sets.

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Psychological Safety Means...

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The Environment IS the Hazard

Before We Can Fix It, We Have to Name It

SILENT HAZARDS

- The Ones Your JHA Doesn't List and Your Safety Audit Won't Flad

INVISIBLE PRESSURE

- The Crew Culture That Tells Workers: Keep Your Head Down and Your Mouth Shut

ACCUMULATED EXPOSURE

- Daily Doses of Toxicity Add Up - Just Like Chemical Exposure On The Body

You Can't PPE Your Way Out Of A Toxic Culture!



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Psychological Safety: The Missing Link in Modern Safety Programs

- Strengthening physical safety through trust, inclusion, and well-being
- Moving beyond compliance toward a culture of care



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Why This Matters for Today's Safety Leaders

- Physical hazards ↓
- Psychosocial risks ↑
- **Silence and fear** remain hidden contributors to incidents

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What Is Psychological Safety?

The shared belief that you can speak up, take interpersonal risks, and raise concerns — without fear of blame, embarrassment, or retaliation.

— Amy Edmondson, Harvard Business School

It is NOT about being nice

Psychologically safe teams have harder conversations, not softer ones.

It is NOT about avoiding conflict

It is about making conflict productive instead of dangerous.

It IS about candor in service of safety

The condition that determines whether your crew uses the systems you built.

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What It Looks Like on the Jobsite



SPEAK UP

Report hazards and concerns without fear of blame or pushback.



ASK QUESTIONS

Clarify tasks, challenge unsafe plans, and request help when needed.



PREVENT HARM

Stop work if something feels wrong — no retaliation, no consequences.

When the crew feels safe to speak, everyone goes home safe.

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Traditional Risk Tools *Don't Catch Everything*

• What We've Built

- JHA & Pre-Task Planning
- Safety Inspections
- PPE Compliance
- OSHA Standards
- Physical Hazards Controls

• What Still Slips Through

- Culture of Silence On The Job Site
- Fear of Speaking Up To Foreman
- Bullying, Hazing, & Harassment
- Chronic Stress & Workforce Fatigue
- Leadership Behaviors That Suppress Near-Miss Reporting

The Hazard You Cannot See Is Often The One That Gets You!

What Are Psychosocial Hazards?

ISO 45003 — Three Domains of Psychosocial Risk



How Work Is Organized

- Workload & pace
- Job control & autonomy
- Role clarity
- Work schedule
- Remote or isolated work



Social Factors at Work

- Leadership quality
- Interpersonal conflict
- Bullying & harassment
- Support & recognition
- Organizational culture



Work Environment

- Inadequate resources
- Poor physical conditions
- Exposure to trauma
- Environmental stressors

ISO 45003:2021 — First international standard for managing psychosocial risk in the workplace.

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What A Toxic Site Culture Actually Looks Like



Silence As The Default

- Workers stay quiet about unsafe conditions because speaking up has cost them before



Corners Get Cut

- Crews skip steps to avoid confrontation with a foreman who does not want to hear problems



Mockery Over Mentorship

- Workers who raise concerns get ridiculed in front of the crew instead of recognized



Help Is Weakness

- Asking for assistance is seen as a lack of toughness, so workers struggle alone



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Hazards Are the Risk. Psychological Safety Is the Shield

Unmanaged hazards erode **psychological safety**



Without **psychological safety**, hazards stay hidden

The relationship is circular: neglect one, and you lose the other. You cannot manage psychosocial hazards without **psychological safety** — because hazards only become visible when people feel safe enough to name them.

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How Psychological Safety Improves Physical Safety

- More near-miss reporting
- Earlier hazard detection
- Better team learning
- Fewer repeat errors

This is the chain:

Detoxifying → **Psychological Safety** → **Safer Behaviors** → **Fewer Incidents.**

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Mechanisms That Reduce Physical Risk

- Willingness to stop work
- Asking for clarification
- Reporting concerns quickly
- Sharing mental or emotional strain

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The Data Is Getting Harder to Ignore

NIOSH, April 2024 — Psychosocial Hazards Report

+23%

Increase in coronary heart disease from job strain

+30%

Increase in stroke risk from psychosocial exposure

#1 Threat

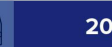
Psychosocial hazards surpassing many traditional occupational hazards

6 Actions

Societal-level actions called for by NIOSH to address the crisis

A subsequent letter in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine recommended OSHA develop a consensus standard for psychosocial hazards.

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Where Compliance Meets Culture

OSHA Framework

- Employee participation in hazard identification is referenced in OSHA standards
- Safety committees require active worker involvement
- Incident investigations depend on honest reporting
- All require willingness to speak up

Seyfarth Shaw, LLP (2025)

- **Psychological safety** framed as a compliance risk mitigator
- When workers don't feel safe to report, near-miss data evaporates
- Organizations lose the early-warning system that prevents recordables
- General Duty Clause may already provide enforcement capability

Psychological safety is not a program. It is whether your compliance systems actually function.

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Think About This...

- “Where do people hesitate to speak up in your environment?”



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Tools for Identifying Psychosocial Risks

- Short pulse checks
- Leading indicators that include well-being
- Inclusive safety conversations
- Supervisor response behaviors

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Small-Group Activity

- Identify one psychosocial risk in your operation
- Map its potential physical consequences

Timer: 04 03 02 01

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Who Owns What?

A Shared Responsibility Map

	What It Is	Who Owns It	How It's Measured
Psychosocial Hazards	Risk factors in the work environment	The organization — design, policy, systems	Risk assessments, incident data, surveys
Psychological Safety	Team-level belief that speaking up is safe	Leaders and teams — daily behavior	Engagement surveys, climate assessments, reporting rates
Psychosocial Harm	Adverse outcomes when hazards are uncontrolled	Nobody wants to own it — which is the problem	Absenteeism, turnover, workers' comp claims, health outcomes

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Why Safety and HR Must Work Together

- Shared responsibility for well-being
- Unified reporting pathways
- Consistent messaging about dignity and fairness
- HR data as early warning signals

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How HR & Safety Starts The **Detox**

Go To The Field

- Conduct Listening Sessions on the Jobsite
- Hear the Culture Firsthand

Train The Foreman

- **Psychological Safety** Skills Belong in Foreman Development – not Just OSHA Compliance Training

Protect The Messenger

- Build Reporting Systems and Response Norms That Shield Workers Who Speak Up

Partner on Data

- Review Injury Reports & Turnover Patterns – Look for the Culture Signals Hiding in the Numbers



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Practical Collaboration Strategies

- Joint supervisor training
- Shared protocols for sensitive reports
- Integrated wellness resources
- Cross-functional trend reviews

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Moving Toward a Culture of Care

- Compliance → participation → trust → care
- Embed **Psychological Safety** into:
 - Safety meetings
 - Near-miss reviews
 - Onboarding
 - Leadership walk-arounds

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What You Can Do Monday Morning

- 1 Low near-miss numbers are not good news. They may mean your people do not feel safe to report.
- 2 Ask what is hard about today's work. Listen to what people are not saying.
- 3 How a foreman reacts to the first report determines whether there is a second one.
- 4 Share your safety data with HR. Ask for their engagement data. Find the overlap.
- 5 Add one question to your next safety survey: Do you feel safe to report a concern without consequences?

NONE OF THESE REQUIRE A BUDGET. ALL OF THEM REQUIRE INTENTION.

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Closing Message

You cannot manage psychosocial hazards without **Psychological Safety** — because hazards only become visible when people feel safe enough to name them.

And you cannot sustain **psychological safety** if you ignore the psychosocial hazards that destroy it.

Are we measuring our actual safety performance — or just measuring what people feel safe enough to tell us?

Questions & Discussion

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Due to the complexity of various federal and state employment-related laws, participants may need to discuss individual situations with their legal counsel.

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