tru tips

Strategic People Reminders for the Busy Executive

The Question

How can I create an environment and culture in which my people feel safe sharing and dialoguing in an open and honest manner? How do I measure the degree to which my people feel safe?

A Perspective

Organizations bring me in to coach and consult because I create a *safe* environment through my presence — being an outside expert — and through my methods, which focus on listening and on fostering individual success. I never use the word "safety" in my initial conversations, but I think it and practice building it with three simple rules:

1. Begin every process by sharing (a) who I am, (b) why we're sitting down to talk, and (c) what the client can expect in our first meeting.
2. Share boundaries and expectations at the outset, and then see them through.
3. Start with the easy stuff, and invite your team members to help with the hard stuff.
4. Show agape love when possible and where appropriate.

Your Action Plan

A big part of creating safety for your people is shifting your perspective on the essence of what true leadership looks like. Here's a great Simon Sinek TED video that explicates this point: Why good leaders make you feel safe

While most leaders agree on the importance of creating a culture of safety, only effective people-centered leaders are able to do so. The first step is to assess the current state of your safety culture. Answering these four questions will help you gauge how effectively you create a safe environment for your team. For one week, track (a) in what circumstances and (b) how often each of the following instances occurs with your team:

1. Someone else's idea or solution wins over your idea in a problem-solving discussion.
2. Someone openly criticizes you in a professional and adult way.
3. Someone admits fault and fixes something without being asked.
4. Someone shares some personal information or status when they didn't have to.

In a robust safety culture, I would expect one to three instances of each of the four types of occurrence, with 75% of your team involved in the occurrences.

The process for creating a safety culture cannot be adequately addressed in 600 words, but here are three basic steps for creating safety as a leader:

1. Establish a one-on-one with each team member (or 5-5-5™ if you are an EOS® company). For some tips on how to make this meeting a rich space for creating safety, watch my 5-minute video on the JoHari Window.
2. Make a habit of recognizing people who admit a problem and fix it without being asked.
3. At each meeting, share a personal and a professional accomplishment for the week.

Great conversations start with a question. Asking the following four questions regularly will provide a gauge of how safe people are feeling:

- What are some recent successes and failures to celebrate?
- What is energizing you right now?
- What is frustrating you right now?
- How have I made your job harder in the last 30 days?

Safety-building conversations always end with "thanks for being open and honest," and a commitment from you, as leader, to reinforce the safety culture through an action. People-centered leaders create safety by (1) intentionally being the first to share and (2) demonstrating an unshakeable commitment to asking questions that create space for critical feedback and then acting on it. Listen. Lead. Repeat often!

Are you a committed people-centered leader? Are you interested in learning about more ways to create and monitor the safety culture in your business? Contact me. Scott@thetrugroup.com