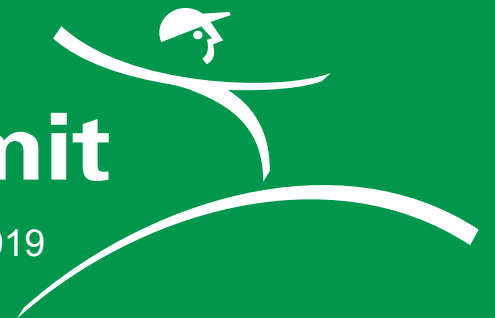


# Psychological Safety

Amy C. Edmondson, PhD

**Lean Summit**

Houston | March 27 – 28, 2019



*March 27, 2019—Houston, TX*

# THE FEARLESS ORGANIZATION

CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY FOR IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION



**Amy C. Edmondson, PhD**  
Harvard Business School

**Lean Summit 2019**



# FEARLESS?



# THE SUBTLE NATURE OF INTERPERSONAL FEAR AT WORK

No One Wants To Look	It's Easy To Manage!
Ignorant	Don't Ask Questions
Incompetent	Don't Admit Weakness or Mistakes
Intrusive	Don't Offer Ideas
Negative	Don't Critique the Status Quo

**IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IS SECOND NATURE**

# IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IS SECOND NATURE

Human instincts that get in the way of productive work in a dynamic environment

- Tendency to agree with the boss
- Reluctance to ask for help
- Tendency to share successes & hide problems
- The instinct to point fingers & divert blame
- Fear of failing
- Risk avoidance
- Complacency  
(to name a few...)

*To thrive in today's dynamic business environment, leaders must drive fear out of the organization...*

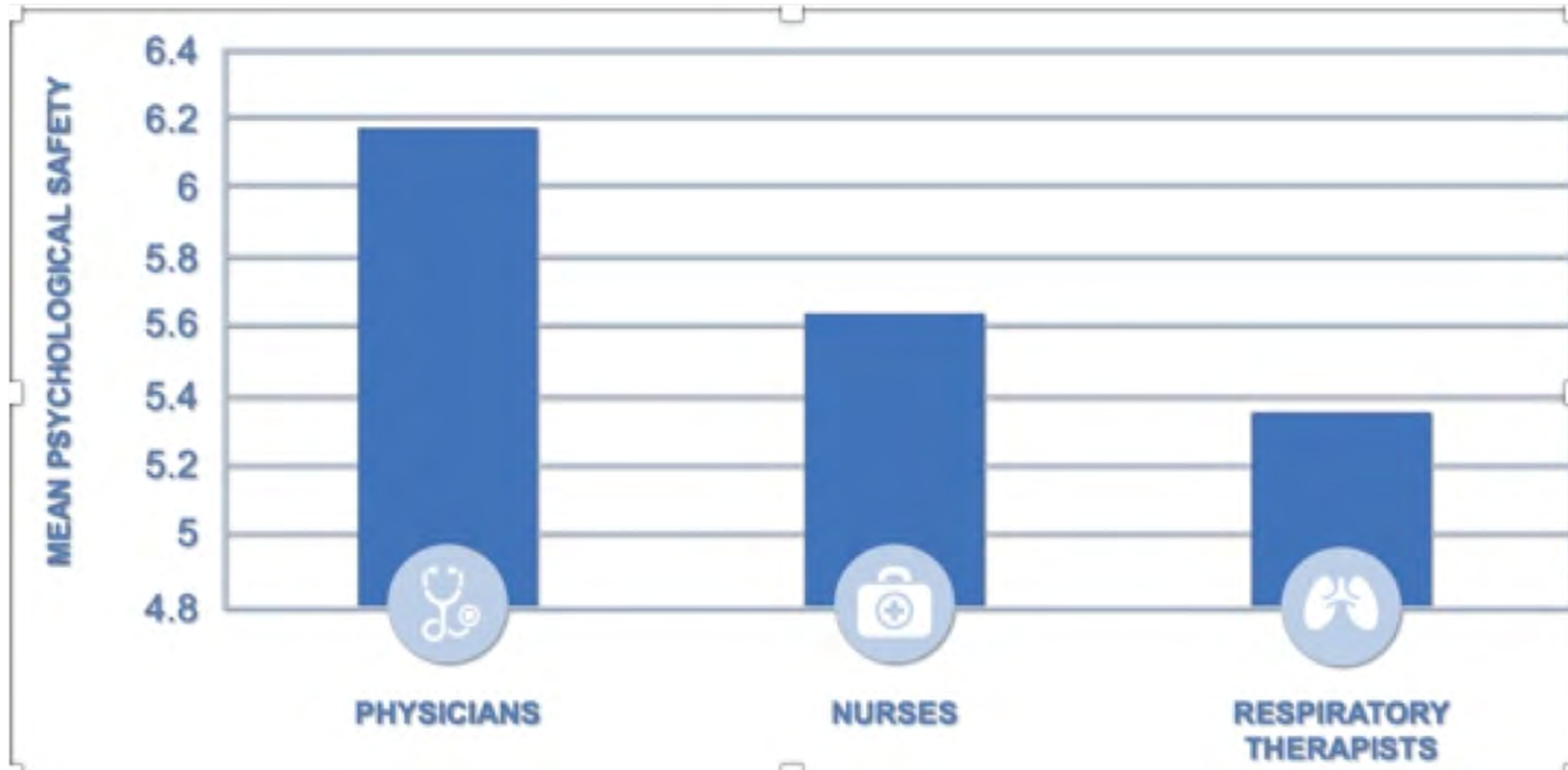
# WHEN IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT TAKES A BACK SEAT: PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



A belief that the context is safe for interpersonal risk taking – speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes will be welcomed and valued.

THINK OF IT AS FELT PERMISSION FOR CANDOR.

# PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND HIERARCHY



N=1100 clinicians

Nembhard, I. and Edmondson A.C. (2006). Making it safe: The effects of leader inclusiveness and professional status on psychological safety and improvement efforts in healthcare teams, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*.



## NOT JUST THE FRONT LINES

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"All those in favor say 'Aye.'"

"Aye."

"Aye."

"Aye."

"Aye."

"Aye."



## What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team

New research reveals surprising truths about why some work groups thrive and others falter.

By CHARLES DUHIGG Illustrations by JAMES GRAHAM



When Rozovsky and her Google colleagues encountered the concept of psychological safety in academic papers, it was as if **everything suddenly fell into place...**

**The New York Times**

February 28, 2016

**BUT WAIT!**



Doesn't fear motivate  
people to work hard?

# FEAR MOTIVATES... BUT WHAT DOES IT MOTIVATE?

**The World's  
Largest  
Automaker**

**Green Car of  
the Year  
2008**



**Volkswagen**



# THE ILLUSION OF HIGH PERFORMANCE IS REVEALED

## **The Study That Brought Down Volkswagen**

ERIC JAFFE SEP 24, 2015

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**A closer look at the West Virginia report at the center of the VW emissions scandal.**

*Volkswagen C.E.O. Martin Winterkorn  
Resigns Amid Emissions Scandal*

*Volkswagen Agrees to \$1.2 Billion German  
Fine in Emissions-Cheating Scheme*

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## CEO MARTIN WINTERKORN



There was always a distance, a fear and a respect. . . If [Winterkorn] would come and visit or you had to go to him, your pulse would go up. If you presented bad news, those were the moments that it could become quite unpleasant and loud and quite demeaning.”

Source: Reuters (2015)

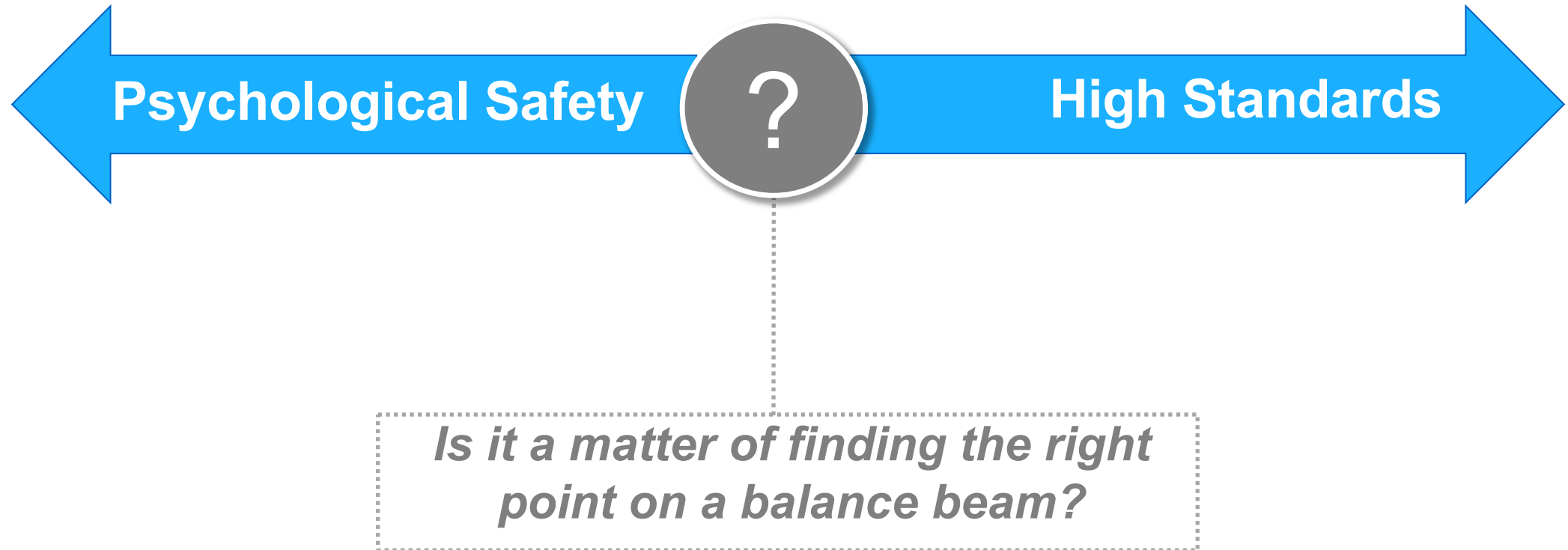
# A Recipe for Failure: Stretch Goals + Closed Ears

# WHY FEAR IS NOT A GOOD MOTIVATOR

- Research in neuroscience shows that fear diverts cognitive resources from parts of the brain that manage working memory and process new information.
  - *This impairs analytic thinking, creative insight, and problem solving.*
- Interpersonal fear reduces learning behavior.
  - *If information sharing, asking for help, discussing mistakes, or experimenting matters, then reducing interpersonal fear is important.*
- In short, people cannot do their best work when they are afraid.



# SACRIFICING PERFORMANCE STANDARDS?



# NO TRADEOFF BETWEEN HIGH STANDARDS & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



# MARK COSTA, CEO, EASTMAN CHEMICAL



**“Your greatest fear as a CEO is that people aren’t telling you the truth.”**

**Mark Costa**

**A Recipe for Success: Stretch Goals + Open Ears**

**Do you know who finds you scary?**

# HOW TO BUILD PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT WORK



# HOW TO BUILD PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT WORK



Set  
the Stage

# SET THE STAGE BY (RE)FRAMING THE WORK

## COGNITIVE FRAMES

Implicit beliefs that shape how people make sense of a situation and influence how they act and respond.

## FRAMING (RE-FRAMING)

Behaviors that shape others' frames in productive ways.





*Most organizations encompass work in all three domains  
...but identify with one over the other two*

# SET THE STAGE BY (RE)FRAMING THE WORK

from BLUEPRINT



REPEATING

to BRAINSTORM



CUSTOMIZED



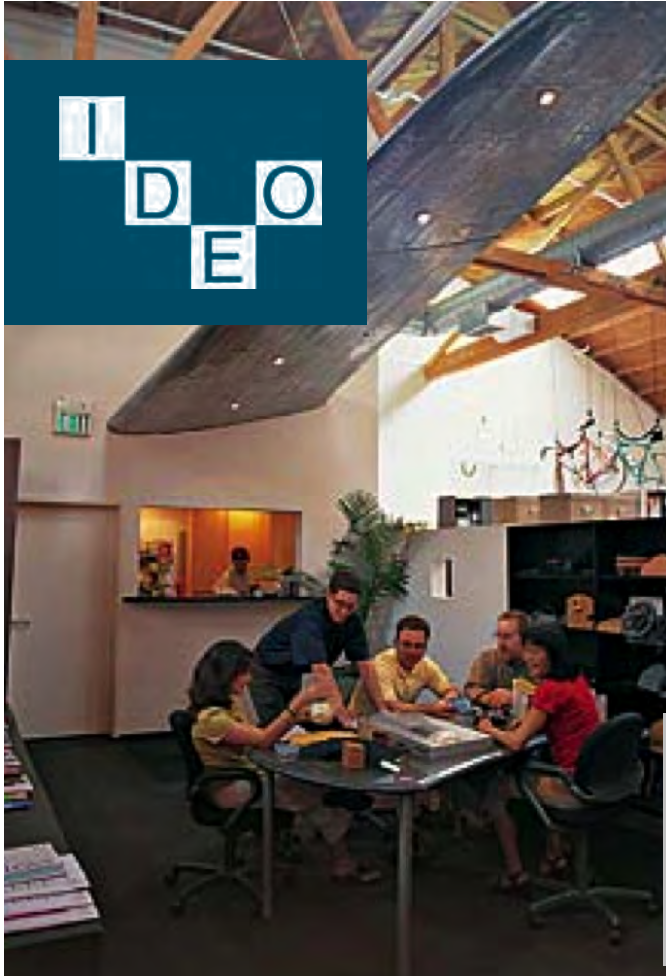
CREATIVE

*Uncertainty*

*Failure Rates*

**Ask yourself: What instincts need to be overridden do *this* kind of work well?**

# FRAMING THE WORK: INNOVATION REQUIRES FAILURE



“Fail often in order to succeed sooner...”

**Instinct(s) addressed:**

- Fear of failure
- Hesitancy to take risks



# FRAMING THE WORK: SUCCESS THROUGH COURSE-CORRECTION



Source: New York Times, Corner Office, August 12, 2016

*I said, "Early, often, ugly. It's O.K. It doesn't have to be perfect because then I can course-correct much, much faster."*

No amount of ugly truth scares me. It's just information to make a decision.

**Instinct(s) addressed:**

- **Tendency to wait until it's perfect before sharing**

## FRAMING THE WORK: DISSENT AS DEPTH



**“ Gentlemen, I take it we are all in complete agreement on the decision...**

Then I propose we postpone further discussion of this matter until our next meeting to give ourselves time to develop disagreement and perhaps gain some understanding of what the decision is all about. **”**

— Alfred P. Sloan (1946). *My Years with General Motors*.

**Instinct(s) addressed:**

- **Tendency to agree with the boss**

# FRAMING THE WORK IN ROUTINE PRODUCTION

“James Wiseman remembers the moment he realized that Toyota wasn’t just another workplace but **a different way of *thinking about work*...**”

\* Source: Charles Fishman (2006). No Satisfaction at Toyota. *Fast Company*, 111: p.82.



# FRAMING THE WORK: PROBLEMS AS A TEAM SPORT

## IT'S ALWAYS POSSIBLE TO DO BETTER!

“I started out going in there and reporting some of my little successes... One Friday, I gave a report of an activity we'd be doing...and I spoke very positively about it, I bragged a little. After two to three minutes, I sat down...



And Mr. Cho kind of looked at me. **I could see he was puzzled.**

He said, ‘Jim-san. We all *know* you are a good manager, otherwise we would not have hired you. But please talk to us about your problems so we can work on them together.’ ”

**Instinct(s) addressed:**

- **Boast to superiors**
- **Hide problems**
- **Complacency**



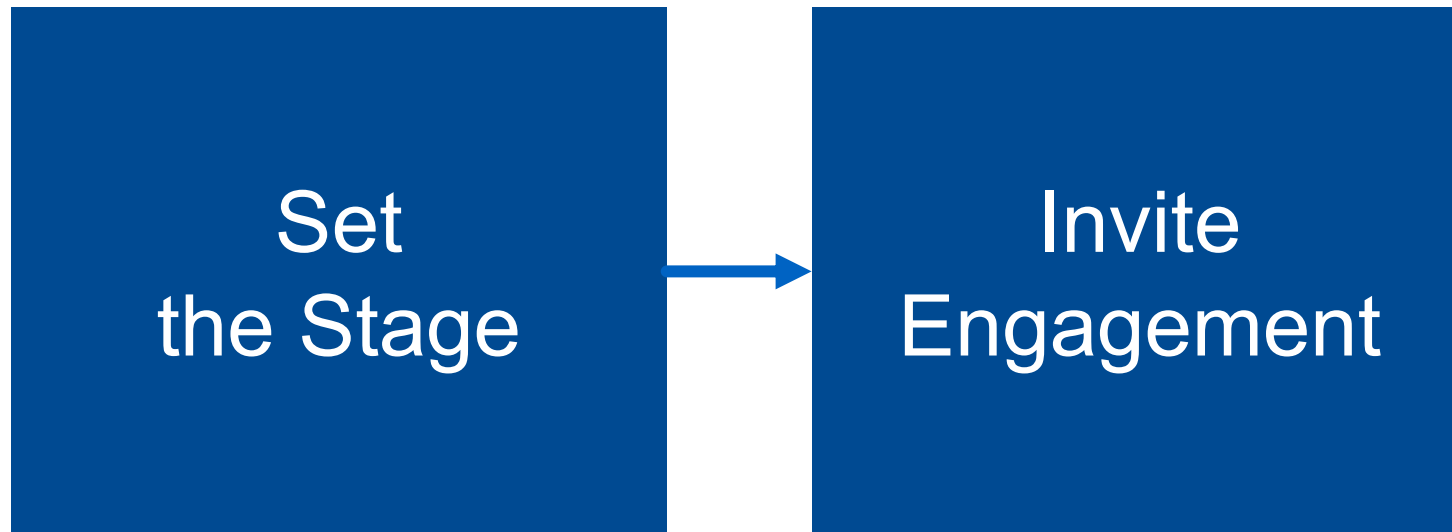
# FRAMING IS CONTEXT DEPENDENT: DIFFERENT INSTINCTS TO OVERRIDE

	Implicit message	Instincts designed to override
Kelley (innovation)	Innovation work requires failure for success	Fear of failure; desire to get it right the first time
Quarles (entrepreneurship)	The way to succeed is to start quickly with a good-enough version that will be improved with data and experience	The desire to delay until it's perfect
Sloan (strategy making)	High quality strategic decision making requires input and dissent	Tendency to agree with the boss
Cho (routine production)	Problem solving is a team sport. We can be even better tomorrow than we are today	Tendency to share successes and hide problems Complacency

# FRAMING STATEMENTS: FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- **How would you characterize the work that you lead? (Where does it fall on the spectrum from routine to novel?)**
- **What are the implications of that level of uncertainty? What counterproductive instincts must be over-ridden?**
- **Think of a framing statement that would help create the right performance climate.**

# HOW TO BUILD PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT WORK



# INVITE ENGAGEMENT: ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

- To broaden the discussion
  - What do others think?
  - What are we missing?
  - What other options could we consider?
  - **Who has a different perspective?**
- To deepen the discussion
  - What leads you to think so?
  - What's the concern that you have about that?
  - Can you give us an example?
  - Can you explain that further?
  - What do you think might happen if we did X?

***Good questions focus on what matters, invite careful thought, and give people room to respond.***

# ENSURING ENGAGEMENT: FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- In what situations, or with what groups, could you ask more questions, and ask better questions?

# HOW TO BUILD PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT WORK





## ALAN MULALLY AT FORD

*“That’s great visibility. Thank you for that clear line of sight. What can we do to help you out”*

*“The next week, the charts looked like a rainbow.”*



**RESPOND APPRECIATIVELY**

## EMBRACE MESSENGERS

**You have to make honest feedback a positive experience. It has to be that the red is a gem. I had to demonstrate with my behavior that I welcomed it.**

**Alan Mulally, as told to Diane Brady, *Business Week*.**

**April 12, 2012**

**Contrast to Winterkorn at VW:**

**“If you presented bad news... it could become quite unpleasant and loud and quite demeaning.”**

## **RESPONDING PRODUCTIVELY: FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

- **In what situations, or with what groups, could you respond in ways that promote maximum candor and learning?**
- **What might you do to catch yourself – to increase the chances of effective moments of leadership?**

# WHAT LEADERS CAN DO TO CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

What can *you* do to help people throughout your organization do more of these behaviors?.



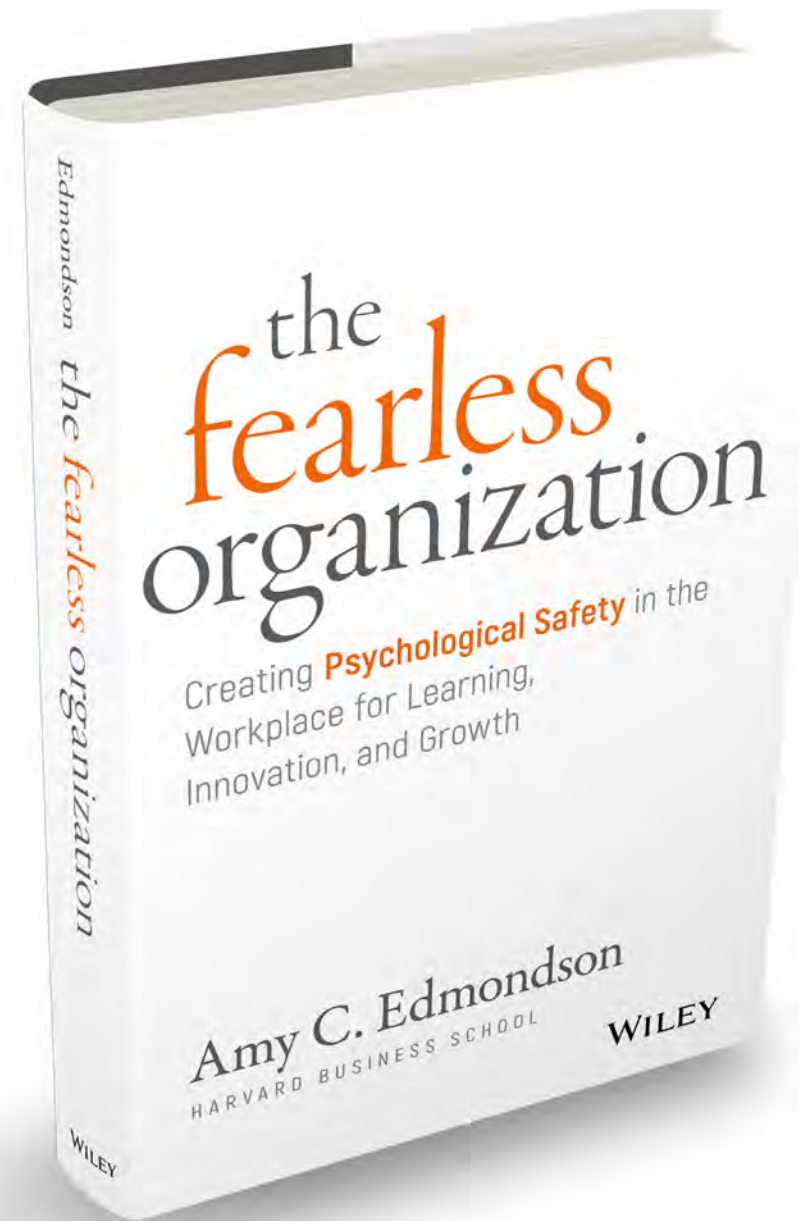
1. **Setting the stage** by framing the work accurately – ensuring shared understanding of the reality of complexity, uncertainty, novelty, and failure;
2. **Inviting engagement** by acknowledging limits and asking good questions;
3. **Responding** in a way that embraces messengers and fosters learning.

## FOR MORE...

**Interpersonal fear puts organizations, their customers, and their employees at risk.**

**Interpersonal fear at work is natural and instinctive.**

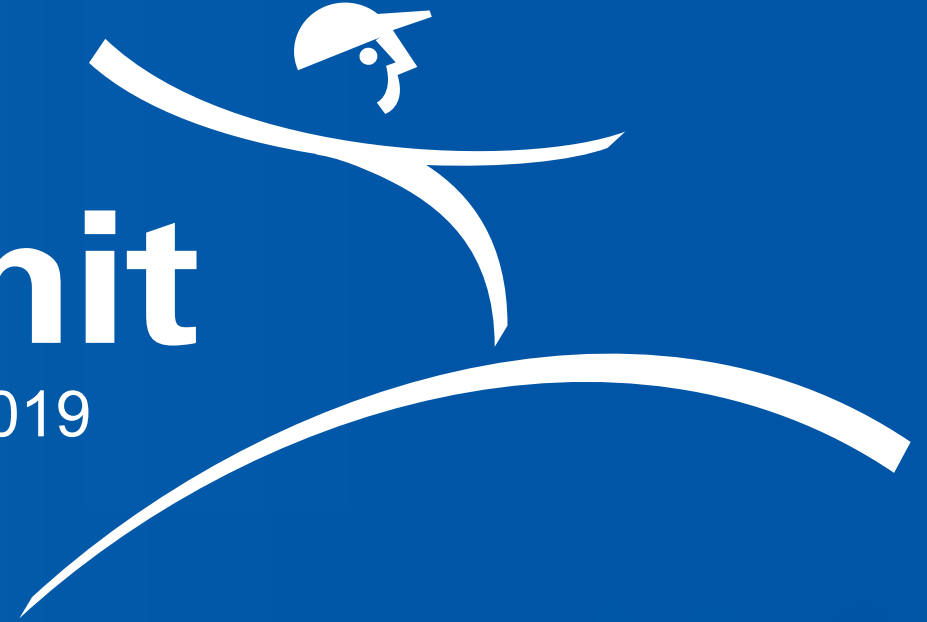
**Leaders can, and must, override the effects of interpersonal fear by building psychological safety.**



**THANK YOU!**

# Lean Summit

Houston | March 27 – 28, 2019



**Next Gen Learning and  
the Challenge of Sustainability**