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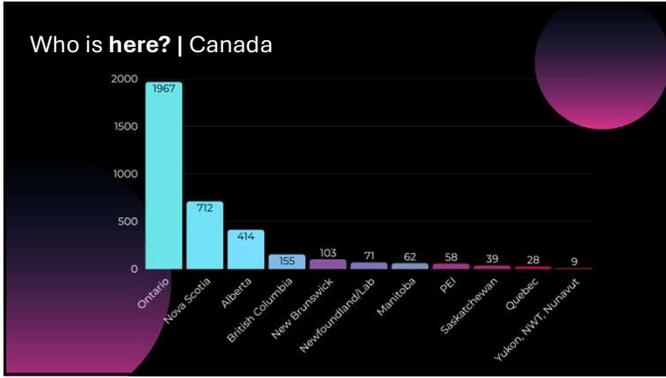
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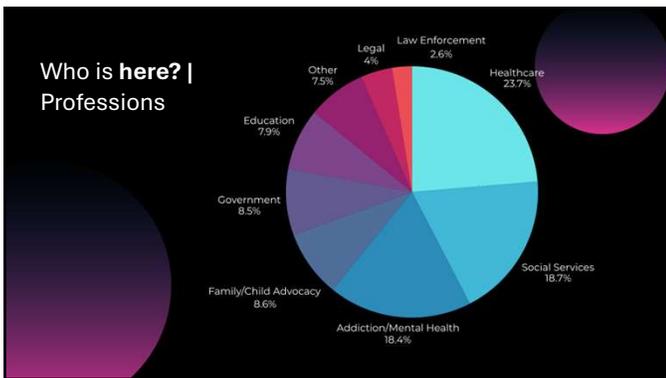
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CARE4YOU 2025 | Opening Keynote

Can I Say Something?

How Psychological Safety Can Transform Our Workplaces

Françoise Mathieu, MEd, RP



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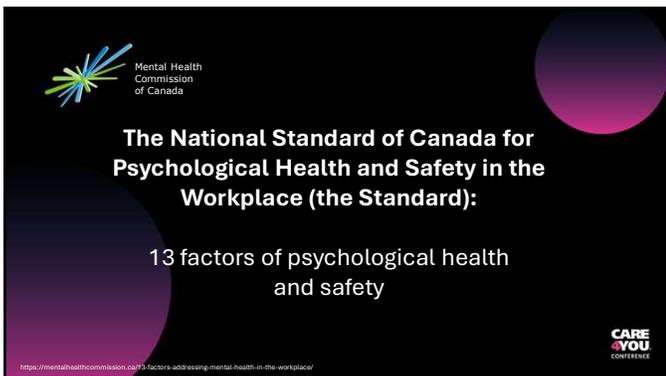
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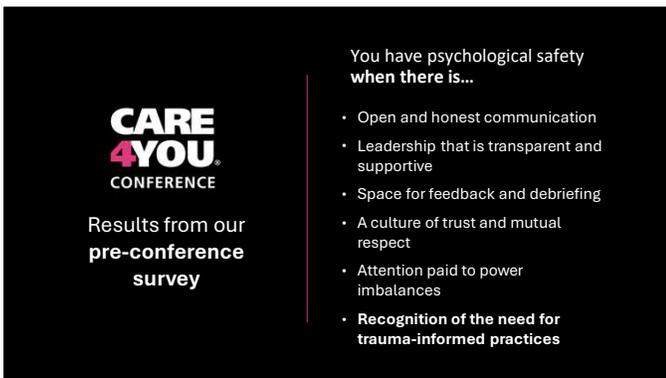
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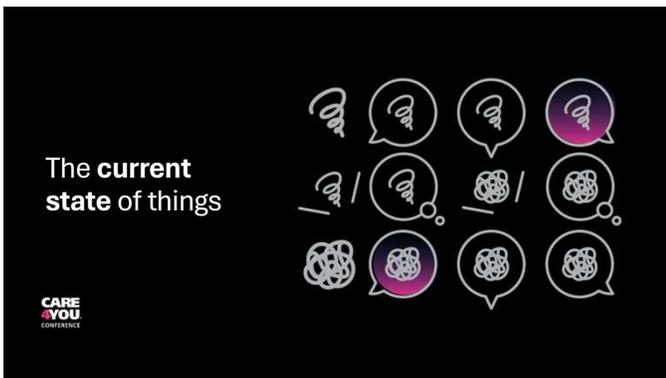
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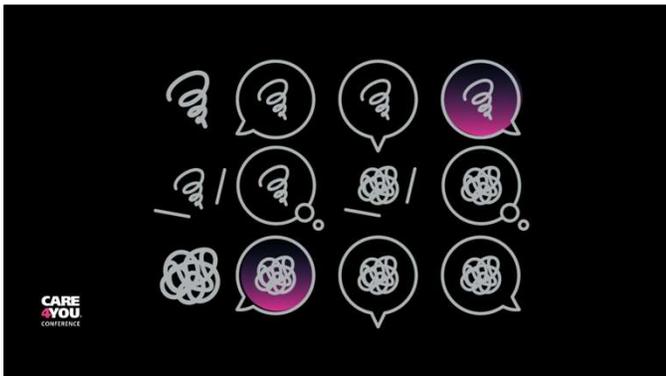
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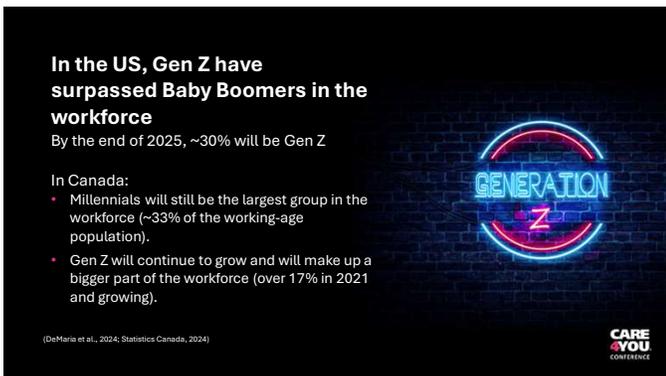
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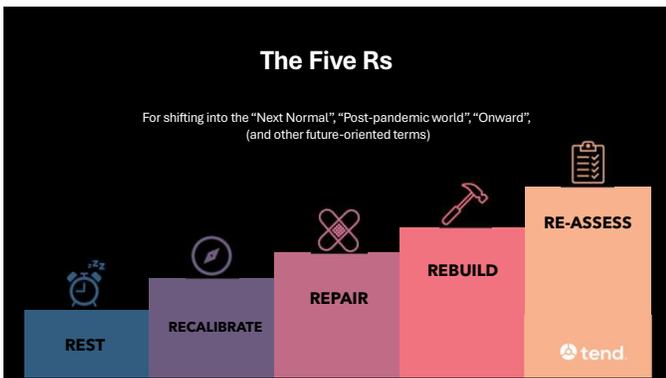
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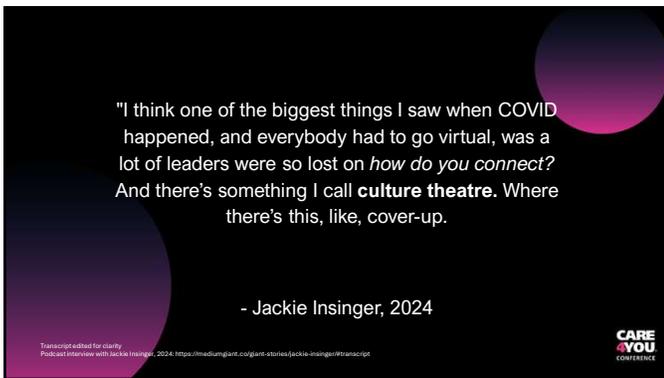
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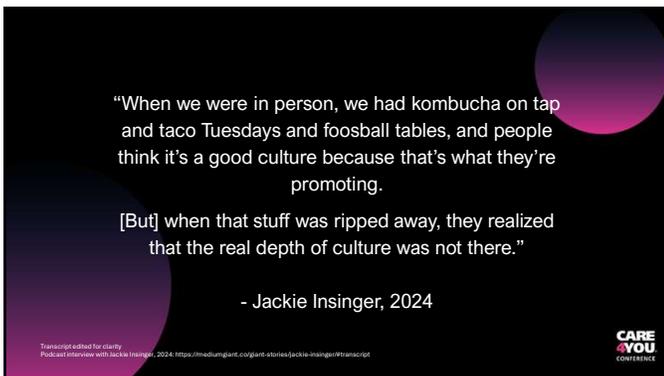
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2:00 PM ET - 3:15 PM ET

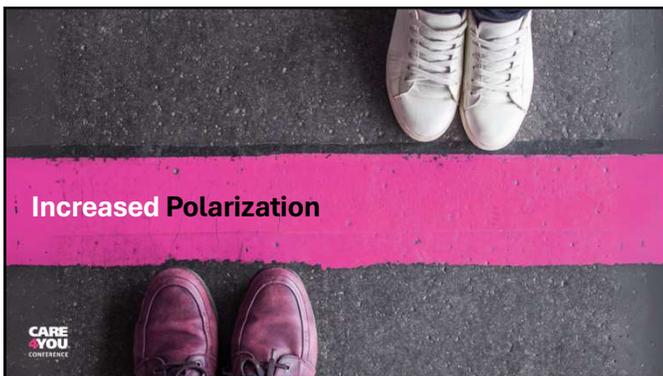
Navigating Perfectionism, Stigma, and Shame

A Lawyer-Therapist's Perspective on Staying Well in Trauma-Exposed Work

Doron Gold, BA, JD, MSW, RSW, CPC



29



Increased Polarization



30

Socio-Cultural Context

- Current crisis or cultural shift.
- Being asked to do things outside of your scope of work due to your culture, race, ethnicity, language, or identity.
- Lack of representation.



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31

SOCIO-CULTURAL
CONTEXT



tend.

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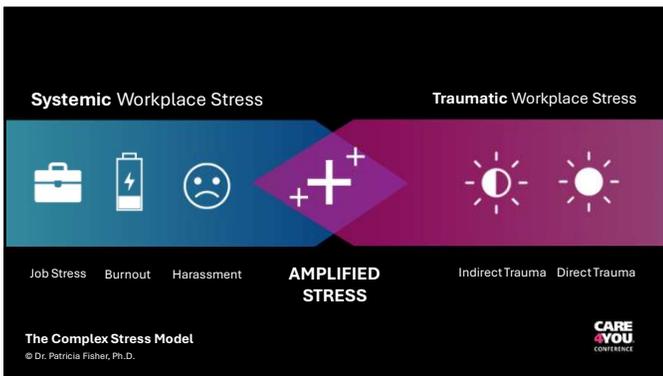
What is a
high-stress, trauma-exposed workplace?

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33



34



35



36

13 Factors of Psychological Health and Safety
+ **2 Factors** Relevant to
the **Healthcare Sector**

Support for Psychological Self-Care

Protection from Moral Distress

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<https://continuingcaresafety.ca/psychological-health-and-safety/>

37

Common Barriers in Helping Roles

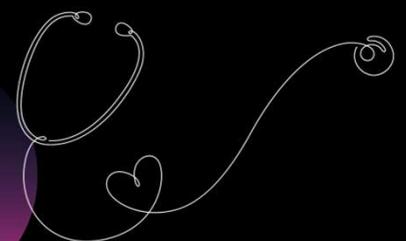
- Fear of **judgment** or “rocking the boat”
- Power **imbalances**
- **Stigma** (impacts of trauma exposure can lead to silence and withdrawal)



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It's 2 AM in the ER. A nurse notices something that doesn't seem right about a doctor's order
but hesitates to speak up

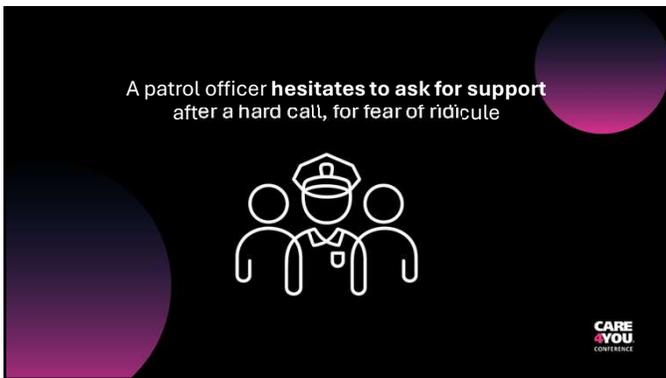


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39



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41



42

A junior associate notices a mistake in a legal brief **but doesn't feel safe raising it to the senior partner**



43

What happens next in each scenario could prevent harm - or allow it to continue.
The difference?
Psychological safety.

44

Benefits of a psychologically safe work environment

- Decreased errors
- Enhanced creativity
- Diversity of voices and ideas
- Increased retention

Edmondson, A. (2018). *The fearless organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth*. Wiley.



45

What are the **costs** of not having a **psychologically safe workplace?**

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46

 When you **have it**:

- Mistakes are opportunities to learn.
- I can take risks and fail.
- I can speak my mind.
- I can share my struggles.
- I trust my teammates and supervisors.

Grant, A. (2021). Think again: The power of knowing what you don't know. Viking.

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You have psychological safety when people can...

- Engage in generous interpretations

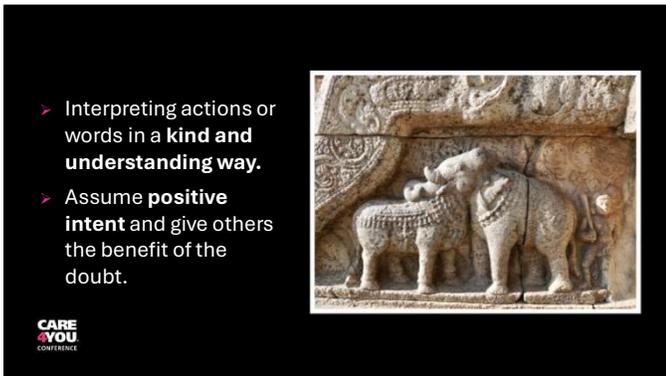


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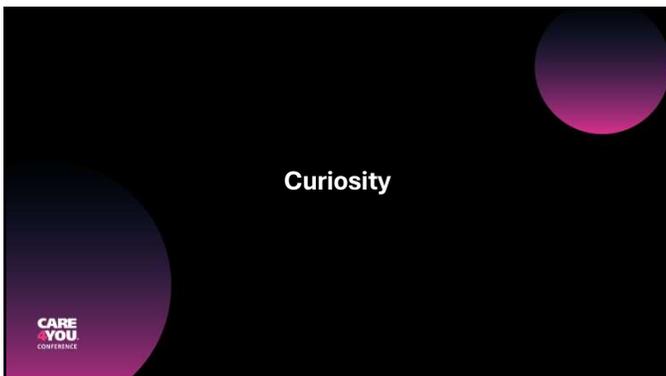
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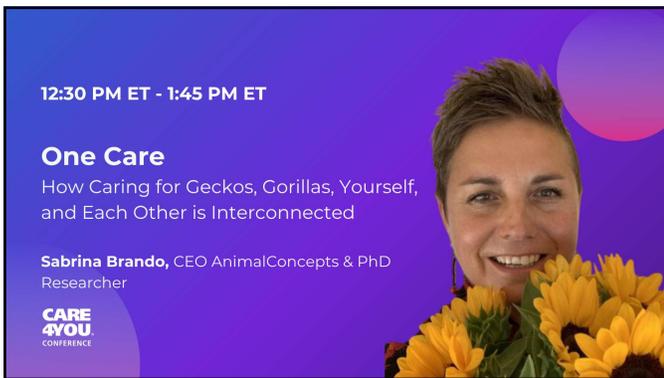
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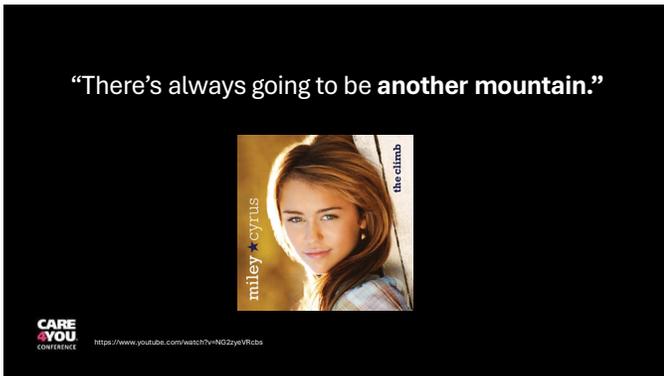
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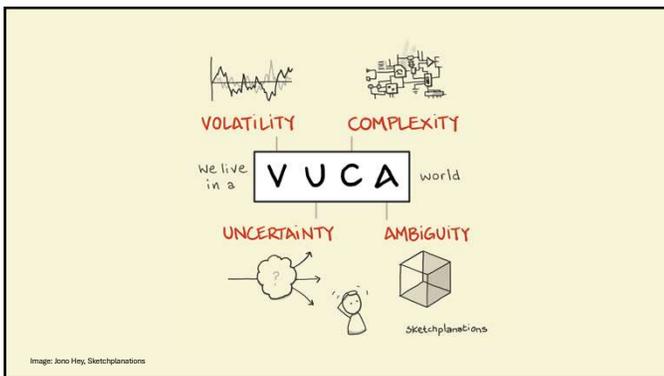
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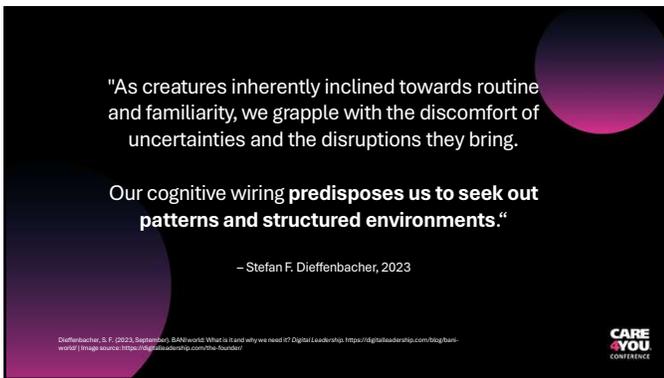
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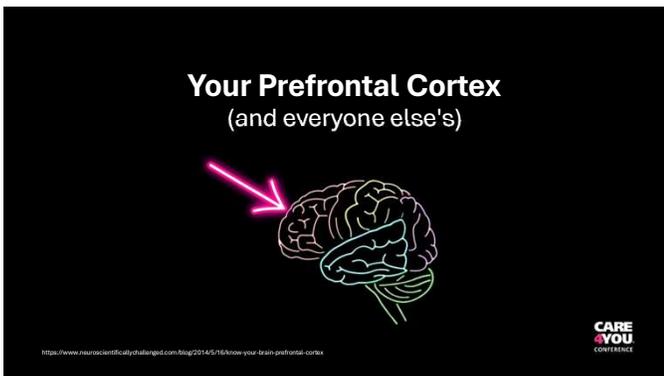
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59



60

- Reflexive behaviors
- Planning, decision-making, problem-solving, self-control
- Controls our ability to experience empathy for others



https://www.neuroscientificallychallenged.com/blog/2014/5/16/how-your-brain-prefrontal-cortex

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"Under extreme uncertainty, people tend to develop **threat rigidity** and a **degraded ability to interact and make decisions.**

They also **catastrophize**, filling a communications void with negative chatter, distorted interpretations, dire predictions, and fatalistic scenarios. [...]"

Timothy R. Clark, HBR, 2024

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VOLATILITY

Sudden changes or spikes in demand can be destabilizing

- Rapid caseload increases after a crisis
- Community emergencies (e.g., wildfires)

Image: Jono Hey, Sketchplanations

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UNCERTAINTY



Lack of predictability due to shifting policies and unknown future. Basic cause & effect is known, **but not the outcome or timeline.**

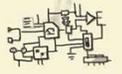
- **Funding cuts**
- **Rapid policy changes** or community needs

Image: Jono Hey, Sketchplanations

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COMPLEXITY



Many parts and variables interact. We have some information, but it can feel **overwhelming to manage.**

- **Multiple sectors involved** (justice, health, social services).
- **Competing priorities and ethical tensions.**

Image: Jono Hey, Sketchplanations

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AMBIGUITY



No clear cause-effect or roadmap. **Truly unknown situations.**

- **Moral distress** due to unclear expectations.
- **Confusion around responsibilities**
- **e.g.: Impact of AI** in health & social services.

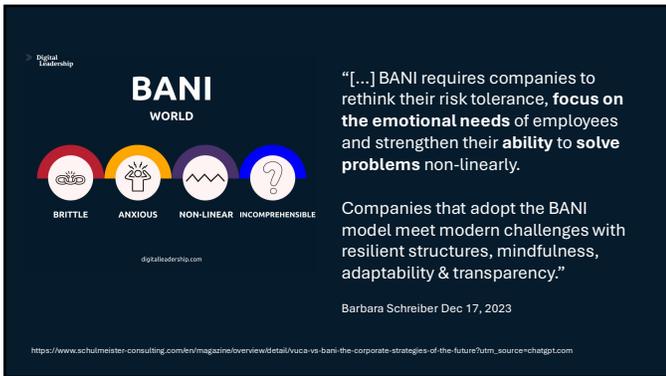
Image: Jono Hey, Sketchplanations

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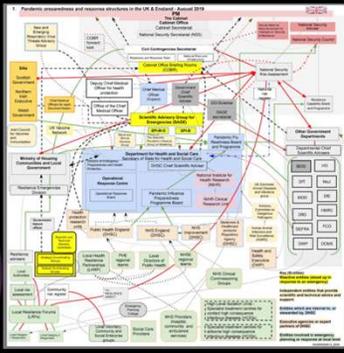
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“Think of the stressed-out brain as a plate of spaghetti. **The noodles are a tangled mess.** One twists around another. You can’t easily identify where one begins and another ends. They are jumbled, disorderly and difficult to shape.”

Eber, K. (2018, January). Make waffles, not spaghetti. Chief Learning Officer. <https://www.chieflearningofficer.com/2018/01/25/make-waffles-not-spaghetti/>

70



Source: Extract from INQ00020414 | <https://covid19-public-inquiry.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/22/158048/INQ00020414.pdf>

71



“A waffle has many squares. It is orderly. Each square is compartmentalized. You can focus on one square at a time. You know the other squares are there, but you don’t have to pay attention to them.”

➤ “The goal as a leader is to focus employees on what is known.”

Eber, K. (2018, January). Make waffles, not spaghetti. Chief Learning Officer. <https://www.chieflearningofficer.com/2018/01/25/make-waffles-not-spaghetti/>

72

The Role of Emotional Intelligence and Adaptability

"To address brittleness, organizations must prioritize factors like **emotional intelligence** and **empathy**.

These qualities can help build better employee relations, foster a more supportive work environment, and enhance adaptability."

Stefan F. Dieffenbacher, 2023

73

Misconceptions, over-simplifications, and misapplications of psychological safety

74

[...] It's important to express confidence in your ability to meet the future - just make sure you **don't give unfounded assurances**, which is simply dangerous."

Timothy R. Clark, HBR, 2024

75



Psychological safety is not:

- Avoiding accountability or lowering standards.
- Synonymous with job security or a permanent state.
- Solely about mental health or diversity initiatives.
- A shield for underperformance or a substitute for genuine leadership.

<https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/listening-to-understand-for-leaders>



76

Cautions and Misapplications

Superficial Implementation

Simply stating that an organization values psychological safety **without tangible actions** can be detrimental.

Such declarations, especially in toxic environments, can be perceived as insincere and may exacerbate existing issues.



<https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/listening-to-understand-for-leaders>



77



**Fostering Psychological Safety
Strategies for Leaders**



78

From Judgment to Curiosity

Replace “*Why did you do that?*”
with “*Can you tell me more?*”

<https://hbr.org/2018/04/leaders-stop-avoiding-hard-decisions>

79

From Perfection to Authenticity

- Normalize vulnerability: mistakes and tough days happen in helping work.
- Let go of “*I have to be perfect*” to protect colleagues and clients.
- Reframing mistakes as learning moments can reduce moral distress.

Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Quality of Health Care in America, Kohn, L. T., Corrigan, J. M., & Donaldson, M. S. (Eds.). (2000). *To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System*. National Academies Press (US).

80

From Closing Down to Opening Up

- Team check-ins: naming what’s working and what’s hard.
- Modeling vulnerability: “*I don’t have all the answers.*”
- Encouraging small questions rather than big leaps.
- Leaders as role models: how to listen, how to invite questions.
- Checking for hierarchy: are newer or quieter voices being heard?

81

Trauma Exposure & Psychological Safety

- Acknowledging how trauma exposure can erode trust and safety.
- Teams that talk about it can reduce the impacts of secondary traumatic stress.

82

Building a Culture That Lasts

- Embedding safety into daily work: small steps over time.
- Celebrating the small wins - one conversation, one safe moment at a time.

83

Reflection Questions

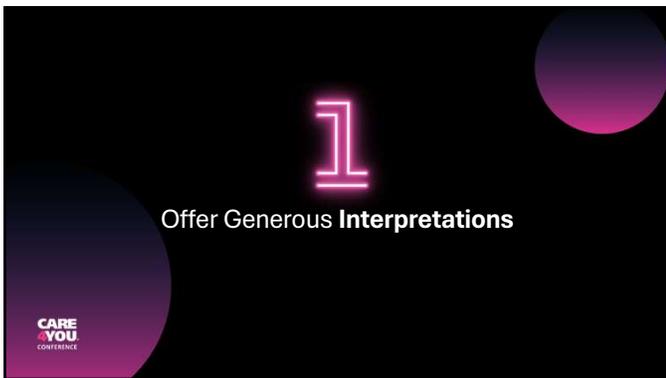


- What are the moments when you wanted to speak **but didn't**?
- What might help you or your team create more space for **authentic conversations**?
- How might you gently **invite others** to speak up?

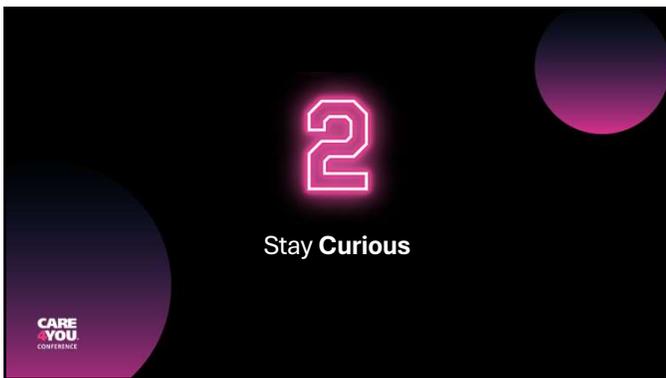
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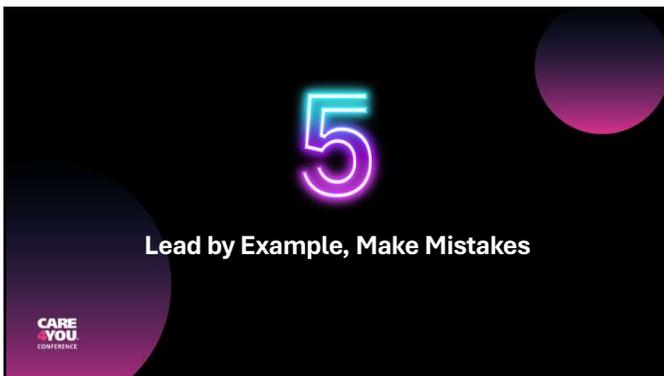
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➤ Normalize vulnerability: mistakes and tough days happen in helping work.

➤ Let go of “I have to be perfect” to protect colleagues and clients

➤ Mistakes reframed as learning moments reduce moral distress

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Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Quality of Health Care in America, Kohn, L. T., Corrigan, J. M., & Donaldson, M. S. (Eds.). (2000). *To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System*. National Academies Press (US).

91

Lead with compassion and kindness.

And don't forget to treat yourself with the same.

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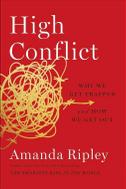
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You Can't Meditate Your Way Out of a Stressful Job

A Conversation on Real Self-Care with Pooja Lakshmin, MD

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93



When you find yourself in high conflict situations, **ask these three questions:**

- > Does it need to be said?
- > Does it need to be said by *me*?
- > Does it need to be said by me *right now*?

(It's surprising how often the answer is NO.)

Ripley, A. (2021). High conflict: Why we get trapped and how we get out. Simon & Schuster.

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W . A . I . T .

Why . Am . I . Talking?

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Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life

- > Workplace Strategies for Mental Health.com | Stratégies en milieu de travail sur la santé mentale.com

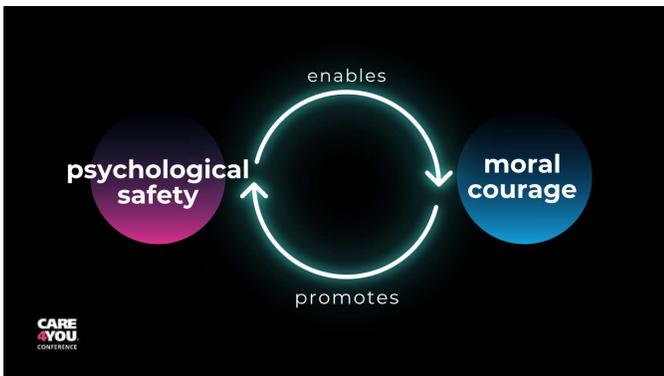
https://www.tendacademy.com/post/mental-health/mental-health-activities-7120787115973507073abun7

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