
Safety Leadership

How Leaders Can Build and Sustain
High-Performance Teams (HPTs)
Across the Enterprise

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April 8, 2021

SOMC Leadership Learning SystemSM

**Southern Ohio
Medical Center**

Very Good things are happening here

Introduction

Everyone wants to be safe. Every patient wants to be in safe hands while receiving healthcare, and every healthcare worker wants to provide safe care while remaining safe and sound in their work environment. And every leader wants to build and sustain a robust organizational safety culture that achieves everyone's goals.

So, if safety is what everyone wants, why is giving and receiving healthcare so dangerous?

There are two big reasons. We accept the status quo, and we reward it. Year after year, we all lament the number of serious safety events and workplace injuries that continue to occur in our healthcare organizations while neglecting to do what we must do to prevent them. And we keep on earning big bucks despite our learned helplessness and our failures.

This SOMC Leadership Blog series will clarify some of the beliefs and behaviors leaders must embrace if they are serious about disrupting the status quo and creating organizational safety cultures that will not tolerate serious safety events and workplace injuries. Those leaders who decide to do what is necessary to achieve this goal will experience significant resistance and discomfort. Determined leaders will need to know what to do, what barriers they will face, why they must do it despite how they feel, and how to do it. Then, they must do it. Knowing what to do is not the most demanding part. Doing it is.

There can never be a comprehensive list of leadership intentions and actions that will guarantee the organizational safety results you want. But the foundational safety leader's playbook that follows can serve as a starting point for you and your team. Every high-performance team (HPT) is custom-built, and every high-reliability organization (HRO) is unique. Both goals are within your reach. But you must reach.

Safety Leadership: Face Reality

Given the complexity of their work, many healthcare leaders believe that creating and sustaining an HRO is an unrealistic goal. These leaders are fond of reminding everyone that "perfection is the enemy of the good" to support their unwillingness to pursue it. They embrace the distorted but comforting reality that they are profitable and doing just as well or better than everyone else. And they have enough stress in their lives already. Complacency is its own reward.

Until you and your colleagues face the reality that your current safety performance is unacceptable, you will continue your comfortable mediocrity. You will continue to assure yourself and others that you are doing the

best you can do. Here's the reality. You and your colleagues are not doing the best you can do; you are only doing the best you are willing to do. Face that reality. Embrace that reality.

Participate in a national database. Explore the [Network of Patient Safety Databases](#) (NPSD) and submit your safety performance data to [TheLeapfrogGroup](#). Go beyond the reporting required by governmental and private payers to persuade your colleagues to confront and improve your organization's inadequate safety performance.

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Publish comparative data. Given our brains' penchant for employing the [confirmation bias](#) at every opportunity, you can find reassuring performance metrics to reassure everyone that you are doing just fine. But when you compare your performance with the best teams, you will realize you are not nearly as good as you thought you were.

Set percentile goals. When you are ready to commit to being the best—and proving it—you will convert all your organizational metrics to percentile rankings. Only when you are consistently performing at the 99th percentile across the board can you legitimately claim to be the best.

Set Zero Harm as the Goal

Like everyone else, leaders prefer to set goals they can easily and quickly achieve. Remember, we all want to do what we feel like doing, and we don't want to do what we don't feel like doing. Reluctant leaders understand that achieving zero harm to patients and team members will be neither easy nor quick. And it will require them to do what they don't feel like doing for the rest of their careers

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Publicly embrace the goal of zero harm. Require every leader in your organization to sign a commitment pledge to achieve this goal with their team. Then give them the training and support they need to achieve it.

Leaders who create and sustain high-reliability organizations (HROs) focus primarily on what could go wrong instead of what has gone wrong.

View every harmful event as a leadership failure. Unless leaders take their responsibility for safety personally, their stated commitment to zero harm is just a bunch of well-intentioned words. Good intentions are never enough.

Focus on near misses and opportunities for failure. When a harmful mistake occurs, it is evidence that we have failed to anticipate and prevent it. Leaders who create and sustain high-reliability organizations (HROs) focus primarily on what could go wrong instead of what has gone wrong. Of course, we will study and learn from our harmful mistakes when they occur, but post-accident root cause analyses (RCAs) are necessary but insufficient if we intend to achieve zero harm.

Field the Best-Possible Safety Leadership Team

Every leader cares about safety, but only a few leaders care enough. Building and sustaining a high-reliability organization (HRO) requires a passionate group of safety leaders who care enough to do what it takes. They must manage net-negative team members appropriately. They must not be afraid to hurt people's feelings. They must not settle for warm bodies, and they must not hesitate to trade up when they can. These safety-obsessed leaders must clarify their expectations and hold everyone accountable for meeting them. Leaders who say they are concerned about safety are easy to find. Leaders who will do what it takes to succeed are much harder to find.

The executives and the Safety Leadership Team set the tone for the enterprise. They are role models. If these leaders are not fully committed to the cause, no one else will be either. Tolerating slackers on these teams will destroy team morale and effectiveness and undermine others' best efforts. Only high-performance teams (HPTs) can create and sustain an HRO.

Make a public commitment. As the team leader, set the tone by putting your job on the line. "I have told my boss that I believe she is obligated to field the best possible team. If she can find a more effective leader for this position, she has my standing offer to resign at any time."

Refuse to settle. It is better to work short than to accept a warm body to fill a vacancy. Unless you can find a candidate with passion and a demonstrated ability to lead others, pass on the current candidates and keep looking.

Manage net-negative team members. Despite your best efforts, you will sometimes hire leaders that, knowing what you now know, you would not hire again. If you tolerate their behavior, they will poison your team. Confront them quickly and clarify your expectations. Treat them fairly. If they refuse to meet your expectations, extrude them from your crew.

Clarify Expectations

Leaders often assume their team members should automatically know what to do and do it. Clarifying expectations for the team demands time, energy, and critical thinking skills. Some leaders have never considered this task a part of their duties. Some don't know how to do it, and some don't feel like it. Then too, this process holds the leader accountable as well. Below-average leaders—that's half of us—avoid holding others accountable, and avoid being held responsible even more. That leaders regularly miss the critical step of clarifying mutual expectations should surprise no one.

Your belief that your team members will read your mind, know what to do, and do it is delusional. People will do what they feel like doing readily. They will do what others are doing grudgingly. They will consistently do what leaders expect them to do only when their leaders have made their expectations clear and hold everyone to the same performance standards.

Clarify your behavioral expectations first thing. When you accept a new leadership position, make this critical task an early priority. Insisting that everyone behave safely is not enough. Be specific about what safe behaviors you expect and what unsafe behaviors you will not tolerate. Provide some examples. Repeat this process every time a new member joins the team.

People are watching. And everyone enjoys outing a hypocritical leader.

Invite your team members to clarify their expectations for you. Expectations go both ways. Make it clear that whatever expectations you have for them, you also have for yourself. People are watching. And everyone enjoys outing a hypocritical leader.

Document your mutual expectations. Make these expectations publicly available and ask everyone to confirm their understanding, that they are reasonable, and that they will hold themselves and each other accountable for meeting them. Update your expectations when necessary.

Find A Better Way (ABW) Every Day

Above all else, the leader's brain longs to feel comfortable. The inertia of the status quo is more potent than the usual ups and downs of organizational life. Not only do most leaders subscribe to the worn nostrum, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," complacent leaders rationalize their laziness by telling themselves, "If it ain't broke too bad, don't fix it."

With apologies to Matthew the Apostle, Seek, and ye shall find; neglect to look, and ye shall overlook.

Every organizational leader is managing and participating in dozens of processes every day. Many of those processes are flawed and could and should be improved. The best leaders are never satisfied with the way things are. They are always looking for the way things could be. With apologies to Matthew the Apostle, Seek, and ye shall find; neglect to look, and ye shall overlook.

Examine your private processes critically. You will discover a lot of opportunities to improve. Seize them. Improve them. Use what you have learned and the progress you have made to tell motivating stories and improve as a zealous role model.

Keep it simple. Many organizations place so much emphasis on the process of process improvement that the initiative collapses under its own weight. This increased cognitive load discourages team members who might otherwise enjoy participating in ongoing process improvement. Remember, too much of a good thing is a bad thing.

Celebrate every incremental improvement. Here's the deal. If you don't make process improvement easy, simple, quick, and fun, you will not improve many processes. You will not engage many colleagues. You will continue to waft in the lazy river of the status quo, and you will fail to build and sustain a high-reliability organization (HRO).

Lead by Example

Everyone gives lip service to safety, but remaining a safety role model is hard work. Being safe slows you down. Following a checklist consistently is tiresome, and it's much easier to preach than practice. The human brain is a self-justification engine, always eager to reassure itself that it is an exception to the rule. And cutting corners is a lot more fun than following the rules.

Unless you practice what you preach, you will not be credible. You cannot lead organizational safety from behind, and you cannot reasonably ask your colleagues to do what you won't do yourself. Everyone is watching to see whether you are behaving safely in every area of your life. If safety is just a uniform you wear at work, those you hope to persuade will not take you seriously.

Make a checklist. Identify the essential safety behaviors in both your professional and personal lives. Don't forget wellness. Ask your colleagues whether your safety checklist is reasonable. If they agree it is, ask them to create such a list as well.

Manage your feelings and beliefs. And help your colleagues manage theirs. Every safe behavior is the consequence of the feelings your brain has created based on the attitudes and perspectives you have embraced during your life. Unmanaged emotions, like anger, will hijack your brain and any brains in your neighborhood. Cooler heads must prevail. Keep your cool.

Ask your colleagues to hold you accountable. Share your values, your aspirational behaviors, and your compliance metrics with your colleagues. Ask them to hold you responsible when you fail to measure up. Ask your teammates to tell you what you need to hear—especially when you don't want to hear it. And ask for their patience and forgiveness when your initial response is imperfect. And it often will be.

Build and Sustain a Safety Culture

Every leader aims to create, sustain, and strengthen an organization that puts safety first, but good intentions are not enough. Those leaders who focus excessively on performance and outcomes send a clear, if unintended, message that the end justifies the means. When leaders tolerate secrecy and fail to view mistakes as learning

opportunities because their bloated egos can't handle the truth, they will create a suck-up culture instead of a safe workplace.

Safety either comes first, or it does not. If you make it clear that you expect results at any cost, the cost will be cutting corners, hiding mistakes, failing to speak up, and fudging the data. People are pretty good at figuring out what matters most to their leaders and adjusting their behavior accordingly.

Safety either comes first, or it does not.

Take responsibility. If your organization is not a high-reliability organization (HRO), it's your fault. Own it. Either you hired the wrong people, failed to make your expectations clear, or didn't hold people accountable for meeting your safety expectations. Admit this painful truth to yourself and others. And then do what it takes to overcome your leadership failures, including asking a more capable leader to lead.

Build trust. Tell the truth, particularly when it hurts. Admit your mistakes and shortcomings. Ask for help. Get out of the office and invite hard questions from the frontline. Insist on transparency, and lead by example. Know your stuff and admit the things you don't know. Earn others' trust by trusting them first.

Celebrate confessed mistakes. Face reality. Making mistakes is what leaders do best. You have a choice. You can admit yours, learn from them, and encourage others to do the same, or you can pretend you don't make mistakes and encourage others to follow your example. Choose to lead up.

Encourage Rethinking

Once people have embraced a particular belief, they are reluctant to let it go. The less real evidence people have for a specific conviction, the more defensive they are about it. The *Dunning-Kruger effect* reveals that the less competent leaders are, the more capable they believe they are.

As critical thinkers, we aspire to choose our beliefs based on the evidence. When the evidence changes, we change what we believe.

Because circumstances are continually changing and new evidence is frequently emerging, leaders must abandon the flawed leadership belief that changing one's mind is a sign of weakness. A willingness to reconsider one's position based on new information is a sign of leadership strength. Constructive doubting and healthy skepticism are the foundations of critical thinking, a leadership competency essential to building and sustaining a high-reliability organization.

Admit you might be wrong. By setting the example of humility, you will encourage others to question themselves and others. Remind your colleagues that this is how science works. As critical thinkers, we aspire to choose our beliefs based on the evidence. When the evidence changes, we change what we believe.

Ask and welcome clarifying questions. Everyone wants simple answers, and they want them right now. But most leadership challenges are complex and simple answers just will not work. You can help others understand this by asking probing questions to reveal the situation's underlying complexity and demonstrate that simplistic solutions will not suffice. When you have shown how complex the issue is, you can simplify the next step. Successful leaders manage both complexity and simplicity. No matter how complicated the situation, the next step must always be simple.

Tell stories about the process of unlearning and relearning. Scientists are the only people who like being wrong. Being wrong energizes them. Learn from scientists and change what you believe about being wrong. Tell stories about how you had to unlearn mistaken assumptions and relearn evidence-based beliefs. Be honest. You will have plenty of examples. And you will have more success in persuading yourself and others that rethinking something is better than just thinking something.

Engage Your Colleagues

A lot of people, including leaders, are *not actively engaged* in their work. Both engagement and disengagement are infectious, but disengagement is more so. Disengaged leaders cannot hope to persuade others to do the right thing despite how they feel. Surrounded by listless colleagues, leaders often comfort themselves with the *Serenity Prayer* and search for a sense of meaning and purpose away from work.

If you hope to build and sustain a high-reliability organization, you must find effective ways to engage your colleagues. The first step is to get passionately involved yourself. If you are unwilling to do that, step aside and allow a competent leader to take over. The

next step is to recognize that you cannot directly engage others in their work; you can only help them engage themselves in their work.

Identify a problem you want to solve. If you are not passionate about finding a solution yourself, you will never recruit your colleagues to your cause. Remember to engage yourself before you try to engage others.

Clarify why. When you have identified a problem, you must decide why you and your team should tackle that issue next. There is an endless supply of challenges as far as the leader's eye can see. Make a compelling case to yourself and others why this one is the priority and why this is the time to take this hill.

Ask for help. You have discovered by now that asking always works better than telling. And people are much more likely to help you do something than do something by themselves. If you haven't heard, the best way to build relationships with people is to ask them for a favor. The human brain is funny that way.

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Keep Score

Identifying, producing, regularly updating, and displaying leading performance indicators to guide team members' daily behavior is not easy. Leaders must begin by thinking carefully about the results they want to achieve, but this is not the most challenging thing. Next, they must specify those processes and behaviors that will produce those desired results if followed consistently. Finally—and this is the most difficult part—determined leaders must hold everyone accountable for behaving that way every day. People, including leader people, don't love to follow processes. We all would prefer to do what we feel like doing instead.

When we are trying to improve, we need ongoing, immediate feedback about our progress. This principle is true whether we are trying to lose weight, learn a second language, or improve our gaming skills. For example, if you want to lose weight, you need to carefully record and prominently display your average daily calories consumed and burned (a leading indicator). Setting a goal weight (a lagging indicator) by

itself will not get you there. Only by achieving your average daily leading indicator goals can you hope to reach your lagging indicator goals.

Select meaningful lagging indicators. The two most common organizational safety lagging indicators in healthcare are *Serious Safety Events* (SSEs) and *OSHA Recordable injuries*. And the goal for these is zero.

Identify the critical leading performance indicators. For most leading (process) goals, the goal is 100. For example, suppose you intend to eliminate all medication errors by your team. In that case, you might measure and display the percentage of time your team members used barcode administration when giving medication.

Display the team score publicly and update it frequently. People want to know how they are doing. If they only get feedback once per month, this will not help them change their daily behavior.

Pretenders talk about what to do to maintain a safe environment; successful leaders do it.

Give Team Members the Tools They Need

If leaders have not identified which safety risks their teams are most likely to confront or what tools are available to help, they cannot provide their teams with the knowledge and resources they need to remain safe. This reality means that leaders must invest the time and energy to become safety experts. And many leaders don't feel like doing that.

There are endless resources that will tell you what the problems are and what to do about them. But there are no books, videos, conferences, or experts who will do the right thing for you. Only you can do that. Consider weight loss. Almost anyone can tell you how to lose weight and keep it off. Only you can do it. Pretenders talk about what to do to maintain a safe environment; successful leaders do it.

Identify your team's most significant safety risks.

Different groups face different safety risks. Nursing and surgical teams risk needlestick injuries, while maintenance teams often suffer back injuries from improper lifting. Everyone struggles with clear communication between teams, distractions, and haste. Identify your team's most likely injuries to decide what resources to provide.

Provide the tools your team needs. To improve patient handoff communication, implement a useful *patient handoff communication* tool, such as *SBAR*. For teams at risk for lifting injuries, post graphics illustrating *proper lifting techniques*. To manage distractions and misguided haste, deploy and mandate the use of the *STAR* tool. Instead of offering a long list of generic safety strategies, assess your team's specific risks, and give team members the appropriate tools they will need to mitigate those risks. Then, make sure everyone knows how to use them and insist that they do so.

Train your team on how to use their tools. Making the tools available people need to be safe is necessary but insufficient. To use those tools effectively at the right time, your team will need training and ongoing practice. Don't make the common leadership mistake of thinking just telling people what they need to do is enough. Persuade them to do it by repeatedly doing it with them.

Manage Tribal Instincts

Humans are tribal primates. Leaders are particularly inclined to believe their tribe is the best. This conviction fuels competition with other tribes or departments, which misguided leaders conclude is a good thing. Leaders who share their team's biases will not likely think to challenge themselves or their team members about their silo-enhancing prejudices.

When bias-blinded leaders lead bias-blinded teams, the interdepartmental collaboration required to create a safe workplace is impossible. If you continue to focus on others' shortcomings, you will never find the enabling common ground to solve your joint problems. The best way to resolve conflict is to begin by admitting your contribution to it.

Recognize this tendency in yourself. The human brain has evolved to prefer our group above all others. When you find yourself criticizing other teams, remind yourself that your critical assumptions may result from your brain's tribal instincts. Force yourself and your team to view the situation from the other team's perspective. Remind yourself that if you were in their shoes, you would see things the same way they do—because you would!

Admit your bias. You cannot hope to help your colleagues recognize, admit, and overcome their tribal instincts until you acknowledge yours first. Talk openly about your prejudices and ask your team members to speak up when they see you jumping to biased conclusions. We can all see others' faults more clearly than our own; take advantage of that skill and encourage teaching oneself instead of preaching to others.

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Stop the trash talk. Never mind what others are doing. Focus on yourselves instead. You will achieve more by improving your team's performance than wasting energy ruminating about where others are coming up short.

Manage Complaints

The unwillingness to manage complaints expertly is one of the most common leadership failures. Most people like to complain, and when inept leaders respond poorly, they encourage complainers to complain even more. Admittedly, confronting complainers and holding them accountable for their disruptive behavior is tough, thankless work. Leaders who manage complainers get complained about for their trouble. It's no wonder leaders are reluctant to challenge these destructive organizational pests.

Passionate leaders do not allow anyone's feelings to call the shots.

But you will not be able to create a team culture of trust and transparency if you allow complainers to talk behind their colleagues' back, blame others for their mistakes, and contribute to the problems instead of the solutions. You can set the right tone by clarifying that you will hold complainers accountable for what they say about others. High-performing team members do not talk about each other; they speak to each other instead. Most people don't feel like challenging their colleagues directly, but passionate leaders do not allow their feelings to call the shots. And they don't let others' feelings call the shots either.

Recognize that someone is complaining. Complaining is so common in the typical workplace that it is easy to ignore complaints, dismiss them as background noise, or accept them as merely grapevine gossip. These reactions are leadership mistakes.

Document the complaint. When you realize a colleague is complaining, grab pen and paper and start taking notes. Do not promise confidentiality. Send a documentation email to the complainer right away.

Investigate and respond promptly. If the complaint is legitimate, the complainer will be grateful for your documentation and due diligence. If the goal is to poison your mind about a colleague without being held accountable for their comments, they will not make that mistake with you again.

Encourage Constructive Conflict

Most people avoid controversy. Insecure leaders want to keep the peace at any price, and unskilled leaders don't know the difference between destructive conflict and constructive disagreement. If the leader cannot teach and demonstrate how to disagree agreeably, team members will likely avoid voicing contrary opinions they fear might make the leader and their teammates uncomfortable.

Leaders who aspire to build and sustain a high-reliability organization (HRO) must encourage their teams to see problems, suggest many alternative solutions, debate the pros and cons of those ideas, and work together to find and implement improved processes. The only way to find innovative ideas is to generate a lot of suggestions. And the only way to identify the best ideas is to engage in constructive conflict. Leaders who are intent on keeping the peace will keep their flawed processes as well.

Explain the value of constructive debate. Explain that you welcome the criticism of ideas but not the criticism of the people who suggest them. Make the difference clear. Encourage everyone to embrace the discomfort of vigorous disagreement.

Demonstrate constructive conflict. Show your colleagues how to do it. Announce that you are about to make a case against the idea you just floated. Encourage them to take three minutes to make their pro and con lists before you go over yours. A time of silent brainstorming before sharing your individual perspectives produces many more ideas to consider. Once people have heard others' recommendations, it's much harder to think of different options.

Thank people for disagreeing agreeably. Make it easy to differ. In immature teams, you may need to arrange for anonymity. Consider asking your fearful colleagues to write their pros and cons and pass them to a reader who will not recognize their handwriting. The ultimate goal in organizational life is to create a culture where

everyone feels free to speak their minds, confident that their contributions are essential to team growth. When people step up, thank them publicly for their leadership courage.

Build Trust

The only way leaders can build a trusting team culture is to be trustworthy. Trust is hard to nurture and easy to kill. Here are some of the hard things leaders must do if they expect their colleagues to trust them. They must tell the truth, even when it is painful. They must eliminate all self-justification. Instead of blaming others, they must take the blame themselves. Trustworthy leaders admit their mistakes, and they refuse to keep secrets about team issues from the team. These leaders hold themselves and others accountable when they fail to meet team expectations. They encourage constructive conflict and manage destructive conflict promptly. In summary, leaders are hesitant to build trust because it is so hard.

Leaders who are intent on keeping the peace will keep their flawed processes as well.

You cannot build and sustain a high-performance team (HPT) unless you create a team culture of transparency and mutual trust. This essential leadership competency demands that you persist patiently in the face of discomfort. There is no shortcut. And you will make mistakes. But your mature recovery will demonstrate your integrity and encourage others to gradually become confident they can depend on you to do the right thing despite how you feel.

Tell the truth and be transparent. Refuse to grant confidentiality beforehand, and make it clear you expect team members to talk to each other instead of about each other.

Deliver on your commitments. Do what you say you will do when you say you will do it. Of course, stuff happens. Explain, but do not make excuses.

Admit your mistakes. Resist the natural tendency to deny, justify, or coverup your leadership failures. Admit them publicly and take full responsibility for them. When your colleagues see you managing your mistakes properly, they will begin to trust they can do the same.

Promote Contagious Enthusiasm

Leaders who are not enthusiastic about their work cannot hope to persuade their team members to become passionate about theirs. For most people, it is much easier to see what's wrong than what is right, to focus on the negative instead of the positive. And most people are instinctively resistant to change. These dispiriting tendencies are the ways the human brain has evolved. Leaders committed to going with the flow will encourage resistance to change instead of eagerness for it.

While positive emotions are not as infectious as negative ones, they are catching as well. Use this to your advantage.

Contagious enthusiasm is the only fuel that high-performance teams can burn. Effective teamwork is challenging, often dull, and usually thankless. Merely talking about the problem or completing a list of tasks will not create enough momentum to get a project airborne. Generating and sustaining the enthusiasm required to see the project through is your primary job as the team leader and coach.

Infect others with your enthusiasm. If you are passionate about your work, your zeal will be apparent, and it will rub off on others. While positive emotions are not as infectious as negative ones, they are catching as well. Use this to your advantage.

Capture and tell inspiring stories. Don't miss any opportunity to observe your colleagues doing something remarkable and telling a story about it. When someone on the team has found a better way or inspired you with their fervor and follow-through, make a big deal of it—because it is a big deal.

Give specific praise. Focus on what your team members do, not how talented they are. Recognize persistent effort, not just outcomes. Seize every opportunity to acknowledge mistakes and failures that contribute to team learning.

Encourage Intrinsic Motivation

Many leaders, particularly those with less experience, skill, knowledge, and insight, focus primarily on extrinsic rewards such as money and prizes to encourage their team members. Marginal leaders mistakenly believe it's their job to motivate others instead of helping others to motivate themselves.

While extrinsic rewards may improve performance in the short run, they are less effective in the long run and may become counterproductive. When the goal is challenging and elusive—such as building and sustaining a high-reliability organization (HRO), the dogged determination to persevere can only come from within the individual questers.

Identify and share your intrinsic motivation with your team. Watching you strive joyfully for the mere satisfaction of tackling complicated problems and leaning into daunting difficulties will inspire your team to seek the same meaning in their work.

Explain why. We all need a compelling reason to do stuff we don't feel like doing. If you cannot help your colleagues explain why they should become personally engaged in creating a safe workplace, you will be unable to awaken their intrinsic motivation. Creating a compelling "Why" may be your most important job as the team leader.

Provide frequent feedback. People striving for a demanding and distant goal want to see evidence that they are making progress. Recognize and reward them for their resilience and persistence despite the difficulties and setbacks. Encourage your colleagues to set their own intermediate goals based on what they find motivating, enabling them to create their personal and unique energizing feedback loops.

Create a Practical Playbook

There are several reasons leaders fail to deploy practical playbooks for their teams. Many leaders assume their team members will learn what they need to do from their job descriptions, their colleagues or figure it out independently. And every organization creates dense policy and procedure manuals, which almost no one reads. Finally, most leaders find the process of creating and updating practical playbooks tedious and boring.

By distilling detailed organizational policies and procedures into practical checklists and actionable steps, you can ensure consistent process compliance. Your colleagues are much more likely to review a simple list of actions to take on their smartphones than spend time trying to locate and interpret the relevant policy and procedure. Of course, you will want to hyperlink your playbook entries to the appropriate organizational policies, but most people prefer the Cliff Notes version when deciding what to do next.

Lead by example. Create a playbook for each of your essential processes as an example. Show your colleagues how you can easily reference the team playbook on your smartphone.

Make your playbook user-friendly. Use bulleted, simple sentences. Record only what users need to know instead of everything you want them to know. Ensure they can find the process checklist quickly on their smartphones.

Update your playbook regularly. Digital applications such as *Smartsheet* have made this critical task much more manageable. Once the responsible leader has updated the original document, everyone immediately enjoys access to the most recent version.

Celebrate Team Accomplishments

Some leaders believe that celebrations are hokey and that people should just do their jobs without needing continuous encouragement and recognition. Others feel only exceptional results justify a team celebration or those big celebrations should occur only once per year. The biggest mistake leaders can make is to assume that everyone on the team shares their perceptions about rewards and recognition. The Golden Rule is seriously flawed. People do not want you to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. They want you to do unto them what they want you to do unto them.

Building and sustaining a high-reliability organization (HRO) is a long, hard slog that never ends. You can make progress, but you will never actually arrive. This reality means you must celebrate effort, productive mistakes, and every bit of progress if you hope to encourage the resilience and persistence required for this career-long journey. Every incremental improvement matters. Team accomplishments—even small ones—are occasions to celebrate and replenish resolve and intention. Seize these opportunities and milk them for all they are worth.

Seize every opportunity to celebrate. Exceptional results will naturally remind you that a team celebration is in order. If you are not careful, you will miss the opportunities to celebrate sustained effort, resilience, mistakes, and failures.

Identify each team member's motivations. People are alike, and they are different. Almost everyone likes ice cream. Everyone does not like performing in silly videos. Take care not to make your celebrations demotivating for some members of your team.

Avoid celebration ruts. Human brains crave novelty and generate feelings of boredom in response to repetition. The best new ideas for meaningful celebrations will likely come from your team members themselves. Ask them.

Some Additional Learning Resources

[Zero Harm](#)

[Why We Make Mistakes](#)

[The Fearless Organization](#)



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