SWEARING, NUDITY AND OTHER VULNERABLE POSITIONS.

JOHN LE DREW

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HELLO!

JOHN LE DREW

I have spent the last 2 decades, agile coach and software engineer. I am also the Host of The Agile Path podcast (where all of this started…)

I'm John Le Drew, I have spent the last 2 decades in the software industry and I have done a lot of different things in that time.

Back in October last year I decided to start The Agile Path podcast. All I knew at the time, was I wanted to do something creatively different from other podcasts in the space. But I had no idea what I wanted to talk about.

So, that month I went to Lean Agile Scotland 2016, and I was able to speak to lots of people.

SAFETY IS
THE WORD.

(BUT WHAT IS IT?!)

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It seemed that safety was (at least implicitly) referenced by almost every talk, and it just kept coming up in conversations.

People would say "I could see the team wasn't safe". And while as a coach I know instinctively what that meant, I wanted to dig deeper. But when I probed for other's definitions, people would say things like "You can just tell, by they way they walk into a room, by they way they look at each other."

It seemed it was essential, but enigmatic.

Like dark matter or dark energy, holding the universe together, but no one really knows what it is.

I THOUGHT
IT WOULD
BE EASY.

So, I left thinking I had this nice, "simple" idea that would be perfect for the first episode.

But, once I began to recognise the scale of the subject

Like Alice, down the rabbit hole I tumbled.

40+ INTERVIEWS
75+ HOURS OF AUDIO

Linda Rising, Bob Marshall, Lineke Kerckhoffs, Jerry Weinberg, Ryan Ripley,
Lisa Crispin, Doc Norton, Yitz Schaffer, David Bernstein, Barney Hanlon, Esther Derby,
David Marquet, Amitai Schleier, Johanna Rothman, Joshua Kerievsky, Troy Magennis,
Arlo Belshee, Cristopher Avery, Stefan Koopmanschap, Mark C. Crowley, Heidi Helfand,
Richard Sheridan, Diana Larsen, Mary Poppendieck, Llewellan Falco, Phelim McDermott,
Mark Dalgarno, Alex Harms, Chris Pepper, Yves Hanoulle, Gitte Klitgaard, Louise Elliot,
Sallyann Freudenberg, Tim Ottinger, Andy Longshaw, Woody Zuill

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So I spoke to many, many people.
And, I also started to do my own research into what safety really was.
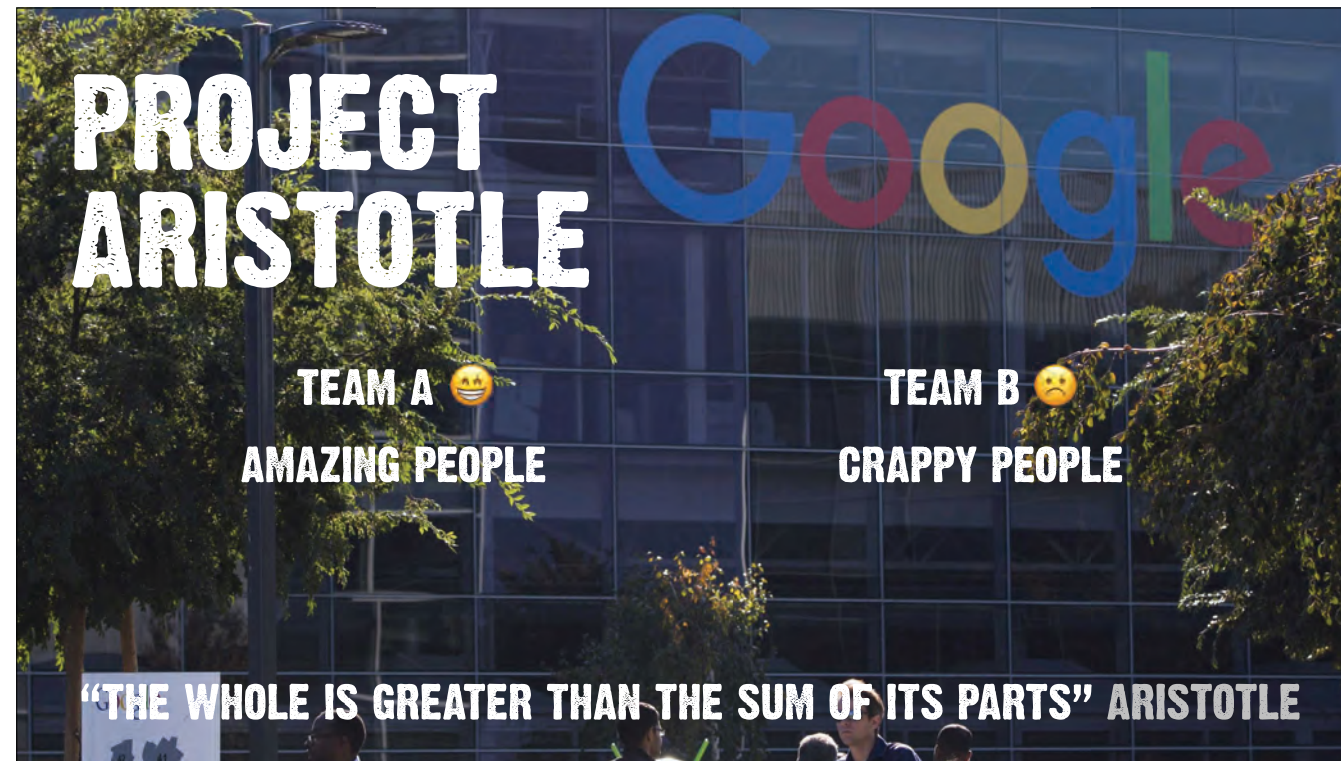
So, that took me to Google's project Aristotle.
Google wanted to find out, what the deciding factor was that makes.
Team A amazing and Team B, not so much.

And, they hypothesised that it wasn't the obvious:

That team A has, amazing people,
Team B, not so much.

But Google surmised that the obvious thing here wasn't the case, that the whole is greater than the sum of it's parts.

So, they started their research in 2012 and over 2 years they studied almost 1500 people in 180 teams around the world.

And they discovered that team effectiveness is less about who is on the team, and far more about how they work together.

SO, WHAT MAKES A TEAM GREAT?

So what does make a team great?
Google found 5 key indicators that team members on their highly effective teams demonstrated.

So from the top, in reverse order (like the music charts)

5 IMPACT

TEAM MEMBERS THINK THEIR WORK MATTERS AND CREATES CHANGE.

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Team members on successful teams need to see that their work has an impact on the organisation they work in.

If I start working at Facebook as an engineer, at any level, I will take part in the Developer Bootcamp, and I will actually put code live within my first few days.

This allows me to see the impact of my change right away.
I have impact (even if it's small) immediately.

In her book the Progress Principle, Theresa Amabile shows us that regular progress on meaning full work is the single most important factor to employee engagement. You need to feel this impact regularly through daily small wins.

But what about making that progress meaningful?

4 MEANING

WORK IS PERSONALLY IMPORTANT TO TEAM MEMBERS.

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In 1983, Steve Jobs enticed John Sculley to leave PepsiCo to become Apple's new CEO, Jobs asked "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want to change the world?"

Jobs tapped into the deep-seated human desire to do meaningful work.

But that doesn't have to mean alleviating poverty, helping cure cancer or putting a desktop computer in every home in the world.

Someones work can have meaning if it contributes value to something or someone important to them.

Meaning can be as simple as making a useful and high-quality product for a customer or providing a genuine service for the community, supporting a colleague, or even boosting the organisations profits.

One area I have seen the effect of this, is in teams that pair program or mob. When you collaborate with someone else, this collaboration inherently adds meaning as you support each other in the problem solving process.

(even if the problem you are solving lacks the, universal meaning)

In a study into pair programming at Utah University, they discovered that as well as the benefits to quality gained from pairing, 96% of the developers in their study reported that they enjoyed their job more than when they were working alone and 95% said they had greater confidence in their solutions.

The meaning here, comes from the satisfaction of knowing you are doing your best work, and supporting your pair.

3 STRUCTURE AND CLARITY

TEAM MEMBERS HAVE CLEAR ROLES, PLANS AND GOALS.

Teams and individuals need to know what they are doing to be effective, they need to understand the direction of the product or service they are providing, they need to understand how their work contributes to moving the team toward the goal.

How many people in this room, by a show of hands, feel they have a good grasp of the organisational goals, how their project contributes to those goals and how they fit into it all?

So, I find teams can often be on the wrong page, I have an exercise where I ask each team member to anonymously and without discussion write down what they understand the current goal for the sprint, project or product to be. The only time I have seen complete agreement was when they all wrote a question mark!

2 DEPENDABILITY

TEAM MEMBERS GET THINGS DONE ON TIME AND MEET THE ORGANISATION'S EXPECTATIONS IN REGARDS TO QUALITY.

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Hopefully, not very surprising! But the teams that ship dependably are the teams that were considered to be more effective.

But there is actually more to this, teams getting things done are externally dependable, but the teams that demonstrate this, also have internal inter-dependability, that is, team members can depend on one another.

This is not dependant on every team member reliably getting stuff done all the time, we all hit a brick wall when problem solving sometimes, the dependance is on communication.

I can depend on you to deliver what you promise or communicate to me when you need help.

1 PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

TEAM MEMBERS FEEL SAFE TO TAKE RISKS AND BE VULNERABLE IN FRONT OF EACH OTHER.

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So, google found that the number 1 predictor was psychological safety, and what's more, they found that it underpins the other 4; at Google at least teams without psychological safety were severely impaired.

WHY DOES SAFETY MATTER?

WE ARE ALL RELUCTANT TO DO ANYTHING THAT COULD NEGATIVELY INFLUENCE HOW OTHERS VIEW OUR

COMPETENCE, AWARENESS AND POSITIVITY.

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We are all reluctant to do anything that could negatively influence how others view our competence, awareness and positivity.

COMPETENCE – Do you feel you can ask for help when you need to, without being judged on your competency?

AWARENESS – Do you always feel like you can ask what the goal is, without the risk of sounding like you're the only one out of the loop?

POSITIVITY – Do you always feel you can raise the red flag when you need to? Without being judged?

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS A BELIEF THAT ONE WILL NOT BE PUNISHED OR HUMILIATED FOR SPEAKING UP WITH IDEAS, QUESTIONS, CONCERNS OR MISTAKES.

Amy Edmondson Psychological Safety and Learning Behaviours in Work Teams, 1999

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In 1999, Amy Edmondson defined safety as a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions on concerns. When I first read this, to be honest, I just didn't buy it.

Punishment and humiliation just seemed to strong. Because we are not talking about seriously abusive workplaces here, which exist, but they have bigger problems that we can cover here!

Managers don't punish their employees, do they?
30 mins in the store cupboard and think about how you made us fail the sprint!

Is humiliation really a thing in the modern workplace?
I'm imagining the whole team laughing as some poor developer admits to not having worked with the latest NoSQL database to land this week.

But, what I have come to realise, is that this is describing our personal experience. Is it humiliating if you are told to RTFM when you ask for help with a new technology? Do you feel punished when you are overlooked for a promotion?

So, let's look at how we might get this.

IMPROVISATION

IM•PROV•VIY•SAY•SHUN
NOUN

SOMETHING THAT IS IMPROVISED, IN PARTICULAR A PIECE OF MUSIC, DRAMA, ETC. IS CREATED SPONTANEOUSLY OR WITHOUT PREPARATION.

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One of the many people I interviewed was Phelim McDermott, he is an Olivier award winning director and has been improvising for over 20 years.

YES, AND...

NO BLOCKING.

You need to *pay attention* to your fellow performers, to make sure you are expanding upon what they have offered and not creating an environment that stymies creativity.

The 'Yes, and' muscle is critical to improvisation.The "yes" means accepting, without judgement, ideas (or "offers" as they are called in improv). So no matter how crazy the idea is, you just go with it. The and stands for developing that idea.

So each performer takes what they are given, develops it, then offers their piece back to the group. If you don't do this, it's referred to as blocking.

One performer walks through an imaginary door and shouts "Hello! It's the doctor here, is everyone ok?" and the person inside the imaginary house shouts back "You're not the doctor, your my wife Mabel!" Well, the story stops right there. We can't tell a story if we don't collaborate.

You need to pay attention to your fellow performers, to make sure you are expanding upon what they have offered and not creating an environment that stymies creativity.

When we are doing these next few exercises, think about how holding this core idea from improv might change they way your teams collaborate.

HUMAN MIRROR

Split into pairs
Face each other
Start, by smiling at each other
Then, without speaking, both of you slowly move, watching and mirroring one another.
Keep it balanced, no one person should be leading all the time.

STRING OF PEARLS

We will tell a story, one sentence at a time.
Volunteers will tell the start, and end.
The start of the line is to the far left, the end of the line the far right.
Then, we fill in the gaps. Bit by bit.
Work with what's there, and add to it. Yes, and!
We repeat the story with each new sentence.
Sometimes, it transforms a little. Sometimes, people forget it. Sometimes, that can be funny. We keep going until we have connected the start and finish.
That is, when we decide it makes sense to us.
(normally followed by a cheer!)

DISCUSSION

Did we tell a good story?
Was this activity engaging? Why?
What made it more interesting?

WHAT HAPPENED?

SAFE TO CONTRIBUTE IDEAS WITHOUT EMBARRASSMENT.

WE ALL HAVE AUTONOMY ON OUR CONTRIBUTION, AND ANYONE CAN CONTRIBUTE (OR NOT).

IT'S SAFE TO FAIL, AN IDEA MIGHT WORK, IT MIGHT NOT, AS A TEAM WE WILL WORK WITH WHAT WE ARE GIVEN.

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WHAT IS SAFETY?

YOU'RE SAFE WHEN YOU CAN SPEAK YOUR TRUTH, RAISE YOUR CONCERNS AND GIVE AND RECEIVE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK WITHOUT THE FEAR OF HUMILIATION, REJECTION OR PUNISHMENT.

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So, after my research and interviews, I tweaked this definition a little to make it more relevant to me.

YOU'RE SAFE WHEN YOU CAN SPEAK YOUR TRUTH, RAISE YOUR CONCERNS AND GIVE AND RECEIVE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK WITHOUT THE FEAR OF HUMILIATION, REJECTION OR PUNISHMENT.

Google's Project Aristotle provides you with a list of exercises that you can apply across all levels in your organisation to assess how well your teams perform across their five indicators. Now, you can call me cynical, but I imagine in the not so distant future, a Certified Organisational Safety Consultant wondering around your office with a clipboard….

Like so many things relating to agile, it's not the practices that matter, it's the mindset.

Across the many teams I have worked with, one key thing stands out to me. Teams are often completely unaware of just how unsafe they are. This is why I like to focus first on awareness, or what I call, Paying Attention, which for me is the foundation to

Experiential safety is my personal experience, it's focusing on how you feel in the moment. This is being mindful, and noticing how safe you are, in a particular situation.
It's about having that conversation with yourself, "I was able to contribute a moment ago, but now I can't, what is holding me back?"
****
Extrinsic safety Is when you expand this to the people you work with every day. Start observing your fellow team members interactions, perhaps they were able to contribute, and now they are not. What changed? What happened? Perhaps their behaviour isn't great, what could be wrong?
****
Then we have environmental, and this breaks down into two areas, first the Organisation.
****
These are organisational policies that affect the team, but that the team often don't have much control over. Think, HR policies that stack rank team members against each other, or bonus schemes penalising developers for how many production bugs they produce.
****
Then, we have personal. This, this is your life. Put up your hand if you have a life?

It's an inconvenient reality that we have to work with humans. Currently (despite Amazon's best efforts) Alexa isn't a viable employee. So we are forced to work with messy, chaotic human beings that have lives.

And even if it's 'unprofessional' to bring your personal life to work, as yet I haven't found a clock room big enough to hang my life in so I can 'focus' on the task at hand.
And frankly, your spouse, parents, children, health are more important than the next delivery.

CURIOSITY OVER JUDGEMENT

THE MOMENT YOU NOTICE YOURSELF
ENTERING INTO JUDGEMENT OVER ANYONE
ELSE, REMEMBER THIS WILL NEGATE YOUR
ABILITY TO CONNECT WITH THEM.

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One of my favourite stories from my research was while visiting Menlo Innovations in Ann Arbour, just outside of Detroit. Rich Sheridan, author of the book Joy Inc. and their CEO told me the official policy for dealing with people who are exhibiting lets, call it "unsatisfactory behaviour". You take them aside, and say "Are you ok?". You show curiosity (and dare I say it empathy), before judgement.

PAYING ATTENTION

PAYING ATTENTION IS ABOUT NOTICING HOW YOU FEEL YOURSELF, HOW PEOPLE AROUND YOU ARE FEELING AND APPROACHING PEOPLE AND THE ORGANISATION WITH CURIOSITY AND NOT JUDGEMENT.

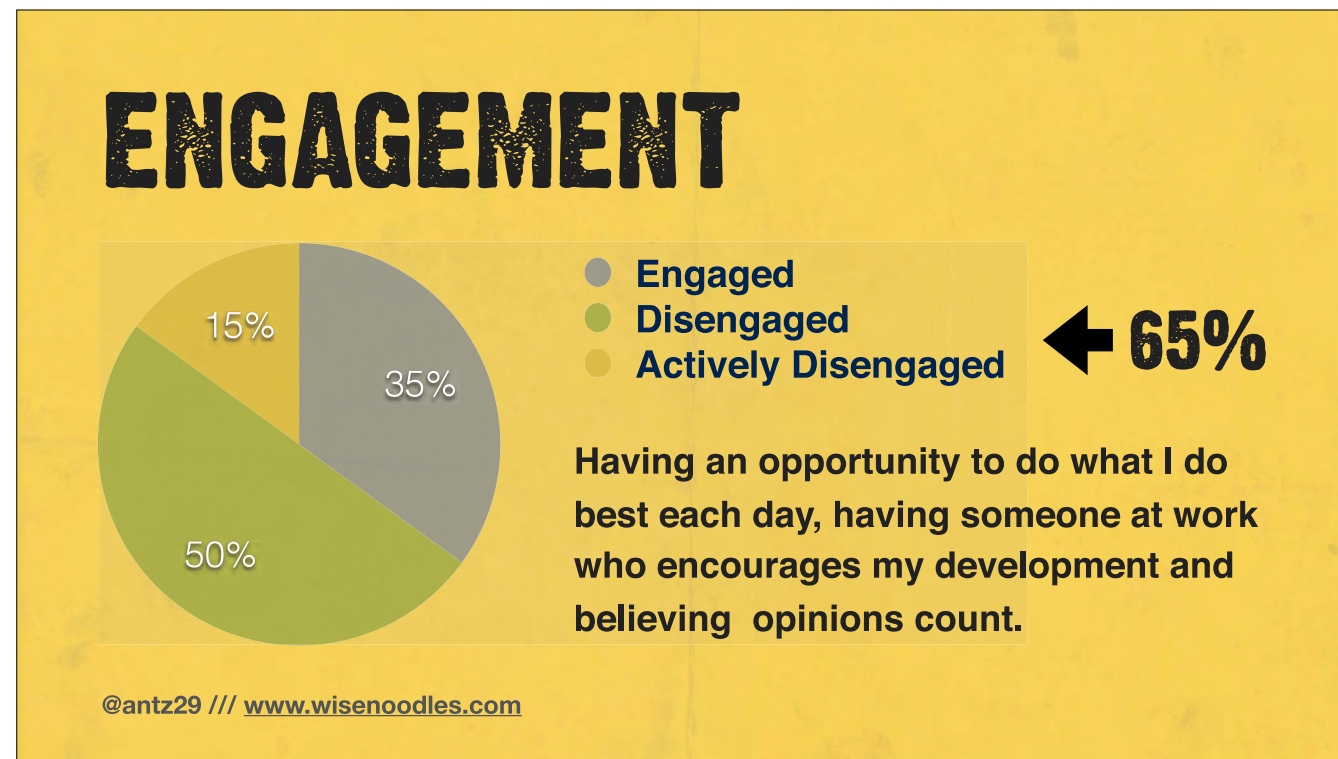@antz29 /// www.wisenoodles.com

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WHY DOES SAFETY
REALLY MATTER?

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There are many benefits if as an organisation you decide to foster safety. As Google and other researchers have now demonstrated, your teams will be more effective, and presuming those teams are executing a well considered strategy, then your organisation will almost certainly be more profitable.

But what got me really engaged with this topic was my realisation of the wider effects

ENGAGEMENT

- Engaged
- Disengaged
- Actively Disengaged ← 65%

15%
35%
50%

Having an opportunity to do what I do best each day, having someone at work who encourages my development and believing opinions count.

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First, let's look at the business perspective.

Gallup interview 1500 people across the states daily to assess , as well as their more comprehensive annual studies.

In studies by the Queens School of Business and by the Gallup Organization, disengaged workers had 37% higher absenteeism, 49% more accidents, and 60% more errors and defects.
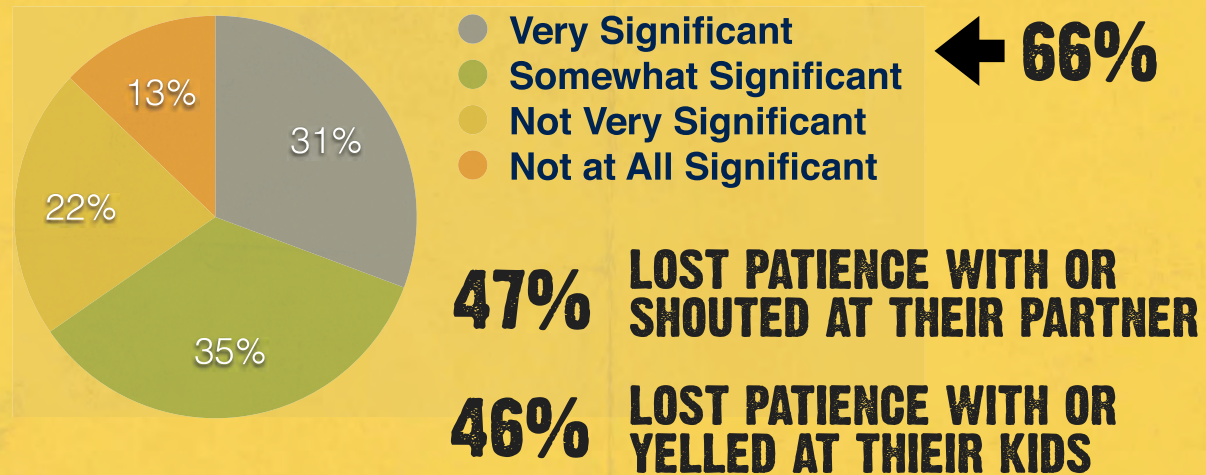
In organizations with low employee engagement scores, experienced 18% lower productivity, 16% lower profitability, 37% lower job growth, and 65% lower share price over time. Importantly, businesses with highly engaged employees enjoyed 100% more job applications

For these reasons, many companies have established a wide variety of perks from working from home to office gyms. However, these companies still fail to take into account the research.

A Gallup poll showed that, even when workplaces offered benefits such as flextime and work-from-home opportunities, engagement predicted wellbeing above and beyond anything else. **Employees prefer workplace wellbeing to material benefits.**

Do you think that engagement is possible, without safety?

WORKPLACE STRESS

- Very Significant
- Somewhat Significant
- Not Very Significant
- Not at All Significant

← 66%

13%
31%
22%
35%

47% LOST PATIENCE WITH OR SHOUTED AT THEIR PARTNER

46% LOST PATIENCE WITH OR YELLED AT THIEIR KIDS

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Now, let's look at the other side.

This is taken from a 2015 study by the American Psychological Association.

STRESS - ENGAGEMENT

JOB DEMANDS / RESOURCES MODEL

PROF. EVANGELIA DEMEROUTI (ET AL.) 2001

WHEN WE ARE ENGAGED, WE ARE MORE RESILIENT TO THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF STRESS.

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I wanted to find a relationship between stress and engagement, but all I could find was stressed people = disengaged people. I didn't disagree with this, but I wanted to see if the inverse relationship had been explored.

The Job Demands-Resources model shows a relationship between engagement and workplace stress.

WHEN WE ARE ENGAGED, WE ARE MORE RESILIENT TO THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF STRESS.

TO FINISH

SAFETY IS THE NUMBER ONE INDICATOR OF EFFECTIVE TEAMS. WITHOUT IT, ENGAGEMENT IS REDUCED AND LOWER ENGAGEMENT BRINGS LOWER RESILIENCE TO STRESS.

SAFETY IS A VERY PROFOUND THING, NOT BEING EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE IN THE WORKPLACE SURE WOULD MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.

ARLO BELSHEE

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SAFETY IS THE NUMBER ONE INDICATOR OF EFFECTIVE TEAMS. WITHOUT IT, ENGAGEMENT WILL BE DECREASED (OR NONEXISTENT) AND A LACK OF ENGAGEMENT BRINGS LOWER RESILIENCE TO STRESS.

Stress has been called the "health epidemic of the 21st century" by the World Health Organisation and is estimated to cost American businesses up to $300 billion a year.

SAFETY IS A VERY PROFOUND THING, NOT BEING EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE IN THE WORKPLACE SURE WOULD MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE. – ARLO BELSHEE

THANKS! BE SAFE :)

QUESTIONS?

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