

**The Hidden Risk – Conversations to help you manage driver safety**  
**A podcast from the National Highways Driving for Better Business programme**

GLEN: Hello, and welcome to this new Driving for Better Business video podcast series, The Hidden Risk. We'll be speaking with leading experts to uncover the often overlooked risks that impact driver safety, operational resilience, and corporate responsibility. These insights will help you take informed, strategic action to reduce those risks, improve safety, and run a high-performance operation.

[Driving for Better Business is an award-winning free programme](#) from National Highways. With a wealth of free tools, resources, and case studies, it gives managers everything they need to pursue best practice in managing driver safety. In episode one, our guest is Tom Geraghty, co-founder of Psych Safety.

And we're going to discuss what psychological safety is, and why it's important for a strong safety culture. Why some company bosses try to rule with fear, and the impact that has on staff, especially those who drive for work. Where does psych safety fit in an employer's statutory duty of care?

And what first steps can you take, such as the importance of surfacing the secrets? And now over to our presenter, Julie Maddox.

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JULIE: Now, a quote I read recently was, a great workplace is worth working for. It's a brilliant philosophy. And we know that people play a key role in any organisation.

They can be invaluable. They're assets to your company and can either make or break the way it works, build or destroy its reputation. And if encouragement looks after to be part of the company, be great ambassadors too.

Sadly, though, some companies rule with fear, leaving their staff scared to speak up. And therefore, their businesses suffer with people either going off sick or leaving. So how can they change?

Well, to tell us a little bit about that and point us in the right direction, how we can look after each other, I'm delighted to say we're joined today by Tom Geraghty, who's co-founder of Psych Safety. Hello, Tom, how are you?

TOM: I'm brilliant. Thank you so much for having me here.

JULIE: It's good to thank you so much for being part of this, because this is a really important thing, isn't it? Culture, the way we actually do treat each other, isn't it?

TOM: Yeah, and arguably, it's everything. It's everything and nothing. It's hard to define culture, but it touches everything we do in the world of work.

Yeah.

JULIE: So can you tell us a little bit about psych safety, Tom, and how you work?

TOM: Yeah, great. Yeah, thanks for asking. So by trade, originally, I was an ecologist.

I started off in ecological research, and then I moved into technology and started managing people and teams and things like that. And through that journey, became really passionate and remained really passionate about creating the conditions in which people can do their best work and achieve the best outcomes. And enjoy work, after all, we spend a lot of time there.

And also through that journey, well over 10 years ago now, I came across the term psychological safety, and it was my epiphany. It was my lightbulb moment when I realised that all the stuff I'd been trying to do up to that point had a name. It was a real thing.

And that was what I was striving to achieve. And until then, I was just sort of making it up. I mean, I was making it up.

But then it turned out it was a real thing. I was really... It was...

And it was psychological safety. And that's what led to where we're... What we're doing now, working with organisations all over the world and trying to foster a greater, safer, higher performance, more inclusive workplace.

JULIE: That's a great philosophy, isn't it? As though, you know, you look after your staff, they look after you, really. Psych safety is clearly something you're very passionate about.

Am I simplifying it by just saying, look after someone and they look after you? You look after each other?

TOM: I think it's one of those interesting phenomena that is both so fundamentally simple, but also under the surface, incredibly mind-blowingly complex. And yes, it's simple in a sense that psychological safety is fundamentally safe in taking the belief in safe. It's safe to take into personal risk.

So it's safe to speak up with an idea. It's safe to admit a mistake, safe to ask someone a question or raise a concern, and safe to disagree, safe to challenge something. Underlying all that is a great deal of complexity at work.

JULIE: Do you know, I know people, I can think even friends, family that don't feel safe to speak up. They really don't. And actually, I mentioned at the beginning, some companies rule with fear.

That's not healthy. It can't be, surely.

TOM: No, exactly. And it's not healthy. And there's two core elements to that.

One is that it's not healthy because that's fundamentally not a good place to be. Like none of us want to be in a workplace where we don't feel safe to ask for help, or ask a question, or point something out, or suggest an idea if we think it might improve something. It's not a nice place to be.

It's on a Sunday night. If we're going to work on a Monday morning, this is where the Sunday night dread comes from. And the weekends are too short, and the weekdays are too long, and we don't want to be there.

And fundamentally, that's a bad thing. But also, we know that a lack of psychological safety in the workplace also leads to very bad outcomes, not just because it's not a nice place to be, but also because it leads to disasters occurring and mistakes. And at the worst end of mistakes, then it can lead to deaths and injuries.

Yeah.

JULIE: And I think that's it. If you do actually nurture someone, not trying to simplify it, they will look after you. I'm pretty sure of that as well.

And you mentioned the Sunday Night Syndrome. I think we've all been there at some point, whether it be at school or sadly in the workplace. Now, one of your workplace stickers that really resonated with me and made me smile, I have to be honest with you, it's a great message.

Skydiving is scary. Work shouldn't be. But as we mentioned, the fact is that so many bosses do literally manage.

They don't actually, they're bossy. They don't actually manage and look after their people. They actually just rule with that fear.

What are they doing wrong?

TOM: Well, I think we should also recognise that. So actually, one of my ways into the world of psychological safety was because I had a boss who ruled by fear and would punish people for all sorts of things. Punish people.

I saw him punish someone for laughing once. He overheard someone laughing in the office and thought they were having too much fun and they shouldn't be. He punished someone for having an earring in, and would on occasion just storm out in the office and rip someone apart just to keep people in line.

Now, it would be easy for us to think that he was just a bad person or just an asshole. And that's the easy conclusion to that. But his intentions, he was trying to do what was right for the company.

He believed that that was what led to the best outcomes for the organisation. It didn't, I could see what was going wrong in the organisation, and people were afraid to speak up, afraid to try things, afraid to take any sort of risk because they knew that if there was any chance of failure at all, then they'd be punished. And so the safest thing to do was nothing.

Just keep your head down. Which meant that nothing happened. Keep your head down and do nothing.

And of course nothing happened. The company suffered dramatically as a result. But he thought he was doing the right thing.

And I think that's a point really worth remembering, that when people rule by fear, sometimes it's because they enjoy it, yes. But a lot of the time, it's because they think that's the best thing to do. That's the thing that works.

And the problem is, of course, is that it often does work in the short term. It works, it can work in the very short term. If we crack a whip and shout at someone, it might mean that they get that report done, they get that thing done, they get that job done quickly and effectively today.

But chances are, it's going to mean worse outcomes in the future.

JULIE: Well, they're going to leave.

TOM: Yeah, well, yeah, they may all leave as a result. But and of course, the future, the future lasts for a lot longer than just now. So we should be optimising for all the future, not just a potentially good outcome on this one occasion.

JULIE: As we said, it is a case of a lot of us think, do you know what, I just keep my head down, go under the radar, get the job done, go home, close my laptop or just forget about it at five o'clock, or whatever time I finish a knockoff work. But it's got to be mindset on both sides, because you mentioned that boss who thought he was doing the right thing for the company, but clearly his mindset needs to be changed as well as the employee, doesn't it? It works both ways.

TOM: Yeah, it does work both ways. It does work both ways. And chances are, he also had a boss that was maybe, and maybe he was behaving that way because his boss also behaved that way.

And so maybe we sometimes call it the chain of screaming because it's possible that it's all that's screaming chain of command is coming all the way from the top and flowing all the way down. And it can be very hard to break that.

JULIE: I'm not sure if I like that phrase, chain of screaming, but I get it. I know exactly what you mean. But it does you actually touched on this as well.

It does impact on our safety. It does impact on the way we work because if someone is scared, mistakes happen. And obviously, for driving for better business, our focus is on safety, improving safety for everybody.

If we are scared and if we're worried about what's going on, we make mistakes. That's literally what happens, isn't it?

TOM: Often, anxiety and fear, and our minds are often preoccupied with anxiety and fear, and it can take up a lot of space in our minds. So we have less space to pay attention to the really important things like the task at hand. And we've probably all been behind the wheel of a vehicle, preoccupied with some financial concern or-

What's for dinner?

Not wanting to disappoint the boss because we're running late. And it's at those points. Those are the dangerous points.

And so reducing our general levels of anxiety in the workplace, particularly when we're focusing on a task at hand that has potentially dangerous outcomes where we do not do it well, that should be a primary focus. And that's where a big part of psychological anxiety comes in.

JULIE: That is actually really important. When you think about driving for work, we've got schedules to make, we've got time cells, particularly if we're delivering things, or we've got a meeting that we have to get to on time. But it is a case of doing things right, and I suppose of having that patience.

I'm a great believer in nobody comes to work to do a bad job. We will try and do our best. And that's what I think it is.

But it's a really important internal communications, which I think is often overlooked, but far too often is talking to people, isn't it? Is that part of what you do with psych safety?

TOM: Definitely. So psychological safety is about creating the conditions in which people can speak up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. And we're often also when we speak up, we don't just mean verbally.

Like speaking up is sort of shorthand for taking any sort of interpersonal risk. It might be sending an email with an idea or maybe writing a note or using sign language. You know, we might not be verbal.

But it's creating the conditions in which people can speak up with those interpersonal risks that have good outcomes. Fundamentally, the outcome of psychological safety is making the world a better place than it was before. It's about suggesting an idea about how we can improve something or highlighting a concern that something might be going wrong.

But you mentioned timescales as well. And, you know, a lot of people will be afraid to tell their boss that that schedule, that drop off schedule or whatever it is, you know, that schedule, that time scale is not feasible. It's not realistic, but we'll keep quiet just in the hope that maybe we'll be able to pull it off.

You know, if we squeeze some bits here or speed a bit there or, you know, skip that bit there or skip that check, we might be able to pull it off and then it will be okay. And even if we don't, then we'll deal with that problem later on, because problems in the future cost less than problems right now. And so we tend to discount the future.

And so psychological safety is about things like being able to tell your boss, no, that time scale isn't realistic. And of course, that affects safety, doesn't it? We need to be able to say what we're saying, really, when we're saying that time scale isn't realistic, is the only way we can reach that time scale is by doing something.

JULIE: Putting ourselves under that unnecessary stress. It really is, isn't it? And that's to say when mistakes happen.

Tom, we can take a break for just a moment, because I know you work very closely with the team at Driving for Better Business. Mark Cartwright is head of commercial vehicle incident prevention at National Highways.

MARK: Part of our work at Driving for Better Business focuses on the importance of looking after each other, taking care of the people who work with us and for us. And the bottom line is that caring about people's mental health and well-being in the workplace can help improve safety. And it's a fact that talking about issues, looking after our staff, protecting employers from physical and emotional harm, enhances a sense of well-being and reduces risk.

So please think about it, and let's take care and look after each other.

JULIE: Thanks very much, Mark. So Tom, we heard there from Mark that it is really important to look after each other. It seems really simple, but organisations aren't doing that.

They should take into account also mental health and well-being, because this all plays a part in improving safety for all of us, doesn't it?

TOM: Yeah. And psychological safety is so fundamentally intertwined with mental health. It's often conflated as the same thing, and it's not the same thing, but it's so fundamentally intertwined, because if we don't feel safe to say to our boss or say to our colleagues, I'm struggling, I'm having a hard time, I'm just not feeling well, or I'm sick, or something's gone on at home, my partner's left me, or something big is going on.

If we don't feel safe to admit that we're having trouble, or that we need to take our foot off the gas for use of a metaphor, then we're going to push ourselves over some threshold, and that's when the mental health concerns and mental health problems hit. And psychological safety is so much about preventative mental health. It's about addressing things before they become a problem.

JULIE: We said earlier, really, is that stress that does really impact on all of our mental health, whether we realise it or not? And I think we are pretty poor. Certainly, we have been in the past about discussing that openly.

We're getting better, though, aren't we?

TOM: We are getting better, and I think the general discourse is more positive around looking after ourselves and looking after our mental health, just in the way we would look at... You know, there's no stigma attached in going to the gym, and there should be no, you know, in looking after our physical self, and there should be no stigma in looking after our mental health. It's kind of absurd to treat them as separate things, that, you know, one is stigmatised and one isn't

So I think we're getting better at it, but there's still a lot more we can do.

JULIE: And I think that's it. It is, you know, learning. I've mentioned earlier, communicating with each other and talking about what is going on in the workplace and how we can improve, how we look after our people.

And it is really, as I've mentioned earlier, those people can either make or break a business. Do you think that's often overlooked too much in an organisation?

TOM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think it's all too often, at a very high organisation level, we often forget that the people really keeping the business alive, the people at the sharp end, the people at the

cold face of work, the people doing the jobs. And this is also where there's quite a big gap between, particularly when we have quite a large organisation, a large maybe hierarchical organisation, where there's multiple layers of management, there's a big gap between the way that those in management or leadership roles perceive the way work is done, and the way work is actually done in the real world at the shop and driving the vehicles, doing the jobs.

And this is where the danger lies, because this is where if we don't really understand how work is actually done, and the only way we can do that is by listening to people candidly and asking them to be honest about the way they do the jobs. If we don't really understand that, then we can't make that job safer or more effective. And when we make changes to the way the work works, then we're in effect changing the way we think the world works, not the way it actually works in practice.

So we need to close this gap between driving as imagined and driving as done.

JULIE: But that works both ways, doesn't it? We're talking about back to the floor from the management down, if you like, but perhaps some of the drivers perhaps need to know how the fleet manager or whoever their boss is actually working as well and what stresses they're actually facing. Because I think it's a lot of silo thinking, isn't it?

TOM: In organisations, we all think, oh, my job's more important than yours. I've got to get this done. You've no idea what I'm doing.

It is, again, comes down to communication, doesn't it? Now, Tom, you've worked very closely, I know, with DFBB on several projects, including their Driver Roadworthiness Guide. And I read in that that you said, investing in your driver's welfare will help you fulfill your statutory duty of care, which includes protecting your employees from physical and emotional harm and protecting them and other road users from road risk.

JULIE: That's a, you know, it's quite a statement, but from all you're saying, it does pay off. It all makes sense, doesn't it?

TOM: Yeah, it does. It does. And this is something that the industries and domains like aviation that have learned decades ago, and arguably because those worlds, aviation, for example, where they've experienced many disasters, many air crashes and disasters and some of the things where once when it was investigated, it turned out that had someone spoken up, various, there were many opportunities for someone to speak up with a concern, with a mistake, with a suggestion, a challenge about the way things were going, that disaster wouldn't have happened.

And so creating and so they had to learn a very painful lesson because these are many, many people died in order to learn these lessons, but these lessons were learned painfully and powerfully, that in order to prevent these disasters, we need to create the conditions in which people feel safe to speak up. And raise mistakes, admit their mistakes and learn from them. And it's taking longer for other industries to pick that up, partly because in many other industries, there's not that direct, there's not that such a quicker link between someone speaking up and something terrible going on.

JULIE: Somebody's watching this today or listening to this, back and thinking, oh, this really resonates with me, whether they are the employee or the employer. I'm not asking for quick wins, but are there some first steps they can make to change how they work or what they do?

TOM: Yeah. I mean, there's a couple of principles at play here. One is that people will only tell you what you make it safe to tell you.

And so we need to make it safe for people to tell us the important things. And of course, we only realise what's important after we've talked about it. And so we need to model and make it safe for people to admit things, admit mistakes and raise concerns and tell us when we're wrong, tell us things that we don't want to hear.

And that can be very challenging. So in many ways, you know, psychological safety is about being uncomfortable. It's about getting comfortable with discomfort.

It's being safe in discomfort. And it's particularly true for leaders and managers because because when we when we're creating those conditions, we're likely to hear things that we didn't use to hear. We're likely to hear things that maybe challenge our ways of thinking, that make us feel uncomfortable.

But they're the powerful things. And, you know, in doing so, we're creating conditions in which people surface the important stuff. You can't fix a secret.

So there are lots and lots of secrets going around in organisations. And people don't think they're secrets. They're little things like, oh, that truck always makes us, oh, you know, that those wheels always make that noise.

Oh, you always have to start that machinery with a screwdriver. Oh, you know, none of us ever actually use our hardhats on this site. These little secrets, we need to surface them so we can fix them.

JULIE: On my desk when I was managing a team, there's a little thing that I kept there, and it said, when somebody does something wrong, remember all the things they've done right. And I just think sometimes you might be tearing your hair out, thinking, why did they do that? Why did they say that?

But then when you think, actually, it works both ways, isn't it? And omitting those mistakes, I think it's got to be that first step, isn't it?

TOM: Yeah.

JULIE: Yeah. Absolutely. Tom, how do we find out more about Psych Safety?

TOM: Head over to [psychsafety.com](https://psychsafety.com), and we've got loads of resources and articles and communities and online meetups and loads of stuff and training and everything that you can get involved in, loads of stuff, something for everyone there. And I always like to hear from people. So if anyone wants to drop me an email, tom at [psychsafety.com](https://psychsafety.com).

I'm always love to hear from folks.

JULIE: Perfect. Thank you so much indeed. Tom Geraghty, co-founder of Psych Safety.

Thank you for being with us today. I do hope you found this DFBB video podcast interesting. More importantly, useful too, to find out more about driving for better business and how you can access the free information and toolkits to improve driver well-being and behaviour.

Just head to the website. It is [drivingforbetterbusiness.com](https://drivingforbetterbusiness.com). For me Julie Maddox, thanks very much for joining us.

See you again soon.

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GLEN: Well, if you've enjoyed this podcast, please like and subscribe to ensure you're notified when future episodes are released. Links will be provided in the show notes for any documents or resources referenced in the discussion.