

Building Buy-In & Encouraging Workers to Speak Up

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For Farm Labor Contractors, HR, Safety, and Operations Managers



Your Roadmap for the Next Hour



Today's Learning Journey

You'll gain practical tools to transform your workplace communication. We'll explore how to create environments where workers feel safe raising concerns, recognize early warning signs through daily interactions, and build lasting trust that strengthens your entire operation.

01	02	03
Create Psychological Safety	Recognize Early Warning Signs	Build Trust Through Action
Build environments where workers feel secure expressing concerns without fear	Use daily check-ins and non-verbal cues to detect issues before they escalate	Develop rapport with workers through consistent, fair leadership practices
04	05	
Understand Cultural Barriers	Apply Field-Tested Strategies	
Navigate organizational and cultural obstacles that prevent open dialogue	Implement proven communication techniques in your daily operations	

A Story From the Field



Why Worker Voice Changes Everything

Last season, a table grape crew kept working through equipment malfunctions that could have been fixed immediately. Nobody spoke up until a minor injury occurred. The cost? Lost productivity, medical expenses, and damaged trust.



When workers feel safe raising concerns early, you prevent accidents, improve morale, and strengthen retention. This isn't just about safety—it's about building operations that thrive because everyone has a voice.

"The quietest worker often knows the most about what's not working."



Understanding Psychological Safety

Psychological safety means workers believe they can speak up about concerns, mistakes, or ideas without fear of punishment, embarrassment, or retaliation. In agricultural settings, this foundation determines whether small issues get addressed early or become serious problems.

What It Looks Like

Workers share safety concerns openly

Questions are welcomed and Answered

Mistakes lead to learning, not blame

What It's Not

Lowering performance standards

Avoiding accountability

Eliminating structure or discipline

Why It Matters

Prevents serious accidents

Improves problem-solving

Builds team cohesion and loyalty

The Business Case for Worker Voice

Creating environments where workers speak up isn't just good ethics —it's smart business. Organizations that foster open communication see measurable improvements across safety, productivity, and workforce stability.

45%

Fewer Safety Incidents

When workers report hazards early, serious accidents drop significantly

30%

Higher Retention Rates

Workers stay longer when they feel heard and valued

25%

Improved Productivity

Small issues get fixed before they disrupt operations

Interactive Reflection

Think about your operation: How many times have workers stayed silent about an issue until it became serious? What did that silence cost in terms of time, money, or safety?

What Stops Workers From Speaking Up?

Before we can encourage worker voice, we must understand the powerful barriers that keep people silent. These obstacles exist at cultural, organizational, and personal levels, often reinforcing each other to create a culture of silence.

Cultural Dynamics

Respect for authority and hierarchy runs deep in many agricultural communities. Workers may view questioning supervisors as disrespectful or inappropriate, even when safety is at stake.

Fear of Consequences

Job insecurity creates powerful silence. Workers worry about retaliation, reduced hours, or termination if they raise concerns—especially in seasonal employment where tomorrow's work isn't guaranteed.

Language Barriers

Limited English proficiency or technical vocabulary makes it harder to articulate concerns clearly. Workers may stay silent rather than risk miscommunication.

Past Negative Experiences

When previous concerns were dismissed or ignored, workers learn that speaking up is futile. This learned helplessness spreads quickly through crews.



Building Trust: The Foundation

Trust doesn't happen overnight —it's built through consistent actions that demonstrate you value worker input and will act on concerns fairly. These practices lay the groundwork for open communication.



Consistency

Show up the same way every day. Follow through on commitments. Workers notice when actions match words.



Fairness

Apply rules equally. Address all concerns seriously. Transparent decision-making builds credibility.



Protection

Never punish someone for speaking up. Actively prevent retaliation. Make safety the priority.

Exploring the Silence

"What's the #1 reason workers in your operation hesitate to speak up?"

Daily Check-Ins: Your Early Warning System

The Power of Brief Morning Meetings

Five minutes before work starts can prevent hours of problems later. Daily check-ins create predictable opportunities for workers to raise concerns in a low-pressure setting.

What Makes Them Effective:

- Same time and place every day builds routine
- Start with safety topics, then open the floor
- Keep it brief—respect everyone's time
- Ask specific questions: "Any equipment concerns?"
"How's everyone feeling today?"
- Thank people who share information
- Follow up on yesterday's issues



When workers know they'll have a daily chance to speak, they're more likely to raise small issues before they become big problems.



Reading Non-Verbal Cues

Workers communicate constantly —sometimes without saying a word. Learning to recognize non-verbal signals helps you identify concerns early, especially when cultural or language barriers make direct communication difficult.



Watch for Changes

Decreased eye contact, hunched shoulders, or withdrawal from group conversations often signal discomfort or concern.



Notice Hesitation

When workers pause before starting a task or look uncertain, they may have unspoken safety concerns.



Observe Group Dynamics

Sudden silence when you approach or workers glancing at each other before answering suggests they're holding back.

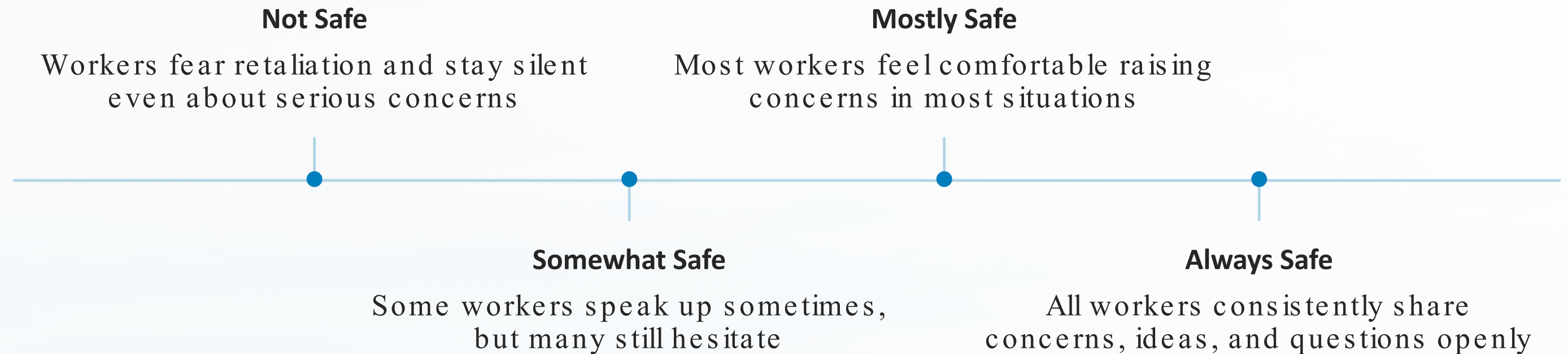


Create Opening Moments

After noticing cues, create private opportunities: "I noticed something—want to talk about it?" shows you're paying attention and care.

The Speak-Up Spectrum: Where Do You Stand?

Let's assess the current state of psychological safety in your operation. This isn't about judgment —it's about honest reflection on where you are so you can plan where you're going.



Ask yourself

Step 1: Mentally place your operation on this spectrum based on your honest assessment.

Step 2: What specific behaviors or incidents influenced your placement?

Step 3: Identify common themes and patterns across different operations.

Field-Tested Strategies That Work

These approaches have been proven effective across Industries. Choose strategies that fit your culture and commit to implementing them consistently.



Normalize Speaking Up

Publicly thank workers who raise concerns. Share stories of how early reports prevented problems. Make it clear that silence is riskier than speaking.



Provide Multiple Channels

Not everyone is comfortable speaking in groups. Offer one-on-one check-ins, anonymous reporting systems, and bilingual support.



Act on Input Quickly

When workers share concerns, respond visibly and promptly. Even if you can't solve everything immediately, acknowledge receipt and explain next steps.



Train Supervisors First

Your frontline leaders set the tone. Ensure they understand their role in creating safety and have tools to encourage worker voice.

The Indirect Safety Concern



"That ladder's been making weird noises lately. I don't know. maybe it's nothing."

The Situation:

During morning check-in, a worker mentions equipment concerns indirectly, hedging their statement and minimizing the issue. They're testing whether it's safe to speak up.

Your Challenge:

How do you respond in a way that:

- Takes the concern seriously
- Reinforces that speaking up was the right thing to do
- Gets more information
- Addresses the safety issue immediately

The Dismissive Supervisor

"We've always done it this way. If you don't like it, there are other jobs."

| The Situation:

You overhear a supervisor dismissing a worker's legitimate safety concern in the field. The worker looks defeated and walks away. Other crew members witnessed the exchange.

Your Challenge:

How do you handle this to:

- Support the worker who spoke up
- Coach the supervisor on appropriate responses
- Prevent this pattern from continuing
- Repair trust with the crew
- Address the original safety concern

What's your immediate response? What follow-up conversations are needed? How do you prevent this from happening again?



Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Even with good intentions, certain actions can undermine psychological safety and discourage workers from speaking up. Recognizing these mistakes helps you avoid them.

Saying "Tell me anything" but punishing bad punishing bad news

Workers notice when messengers get blamed. If you want honesty, respond to all input constructively—even when it's uncomfortable to hear.

Only asking for input you plan to ignore

Don't create feedback channels unless you'll genuinely consider the information. Token gestures destroy trust faster than no process at all.

Treating all issues as equal priority

When everything is urgent, nothing is. Distinguish between safety concerns requiring immediate action and other feedback you'll address over time.

Assuming silence means agreement

Quiet workers aren't necessarily satisfied workers. Actively create opportunities for input rather than interpreting silence as consent.



Your Action Plan: Making It Real

Knowledge without action changes nothing . Before you leave today, commit to one specific step you'll take this week to encourage worker voice in your operation. Make it concrete, measurable, and realistic.

Reflection Questions:

What will you do?

Choose one strategy from today that fits your situation

When will you start?

Set a specific day and time —preferably this week

How will you know it's working?

Define what success looks like in your context

Who will support you?

Identify someone who can help you stay accountable

Write your commitment down. Share it with one other person before you leave. Research shows this dramatically increases follow-through.

Key Takeaways: What Matters Most

As we close, let's crystallize the core principles that will help you build environments where workers feel safe speaking up.

Psychological Safety Is Built Daily Daily

Every interaction either strengthens or weakens trust. Consistency in small moments creates the foundation for workers to speak up about big concerns.

Listen to What's Unsaid

Non-verbal cues and indirect comments often signal concerns workers aren't comfortable stating directly. Learn to recognize and respond to these signals.

Action Speaks Louder

Workers judge you by what you do with their input, not what you say about wanting feedback. Respond visibly and promptly to concerns raised.

"The quietest field often has the loudest problems waiting to happen. Create the safety that allows concerns to surface before they become crises."

Questions & Next Steps



Let's Talk

We've covered a lot of ground today —from understanding barriers to speaking up, to practical strategies you can implement tomorrow morning. Now it's your turn to ask questions, share concerns, or discuss how these ideas apply to your specific situation.



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