

Workplace Leadership Tools

Five Tools Every Leader Can Use to Improve Their Workplace Culture Immediately



Introduction:

After decades of cumulative conflict transformation and peace work within organizations, our group of Peacebuilders and Conflict / Leadership Coaches have identified three Core Pillars that are essential for building conflict resilient and peaceful work environments.

The Three **Core Pillars** of Peaceful Leadership are:

Core Pillar #1 Psychological Safety - The ability to speak up, take risks, and be bold to serve the organization without fear of humiliation or retaliation. Psychological Safety is a foundational requisite for a healthy, productive, and innovative workplace culture.

Core Pillar #2 Employee Trust - The confidence in each other when people work together as a team. Trust contributes to creating clear expectations on tasks, accountability, professional communication, and uses of positions of power. Employee Trust creates ease and confidence when challenges and conflicts arise.

Core Pillar #3 Inclusion - The feeling of belonging to a group, being aligned with others to a common mission, and that individuals have some say in the direction of the group. Inclusion fosters a sense of empowerment, engagement, and ownership over the well-being of the organization.

We have found in our practice and research that leaders are the most important and influential players in fostering and developing these Core Pillars within a team and organization. And most importantly, these Core Pillars don't develop themselves. As a leader, you need to intentionally and actively participate in the cultivation of the Core Pillars on a daily basis. Small and consistent actions cannot be replaced with large annual initiatives or efforts.

So what are you waiting for? Here are 5 action-oriented tools that you can implement TODAY to start anchoring these Core Pillars into your workplace.

Tool #1: Seek Hidden Gems When Receiving Feedback

When we think about feedback in relation to being a leader, we typically think about how we give feedback to others. Which is of course an important skill to develop. However, we should be equally or even more focused on how we receive feedback in order to anchor the Core Pillars into our workplace.

When team members in our organization feel safe (Core Pillar #1) enough to raise issues and give feedback, they are taking some degree of risk by doing so. If we respond poorly or dismiss the feedback, we not only undermine our team members' feeling of safety, but also erode employee trust (Core Pillar #2). However, if we take the time to hear the feedback, we can enhance these Core Pillars, as well as promote a sense of inclusion (Core Pillar #3) for the employee raising their issue.

It is easier to hear feedback when we agree with the feedback or it is given in a way that makes it easy to hear. However, a Peaceful Leader will create space for people to share feedback ESPECIALLY when the feedback is off-based, ill-timed, or poorly given. This can be difficult and feel unnatural, but it is an absolutely critical skill to being a Peaceful Leader and creating a healthy work culture.

ACTION: A quick and easy way to effectively receive feedback is to Seek Hidden Gems when someone is offering you feedback. What about their feedback might you agree with? What fears and goals are underlying their concerns or desires? What bits and pieces could be valuable in what your team member is telling you?

Be patient and curious to try to understand the feedback to the best of your ability by asking questions. The better you can understand where the feedback is coming from, the more likely you are to learn something valuable, which informs how you respond and move forward.

You don't need to agree with the feedback or how it was presented to you. But if you Seek Hidden Gems in the feedback, you will help instill and anchor the Core Pillars into your workplace AND you might even learn something new that can help you lead your team more effectively.

Tool #2: Audit Your Team's Roles and Responsibilities for Alignment and Clarity

One of the most predictable and common causes of conflict is misaligned expectations. This starts with individual roles and responsibilities as the baseline for expectations and clarity around work task and collaboration within teams. When people know and understand what is expected of them and those around them, it creates trust (Core Pillar #2) throughout that team. Members can rely on each other and feel safe (Core Pillar #1) to operate within their job description scope. If you do not have clear job descriptions and expectations for each role, you ought to create these immediately.

Now, it is very common for job descriptions to be developed when hiring and onboarding a new employee, but how often do you revisit the job description after they are hired? What becomes standard practice within the job functions isn't always consistent with how it started out. Throughout an employee's lifecycle, it is possible that roles and responsibilities shift and adapt to best meet the needs of the team and organization.

A Peaceful Leader will make sure that team members are clear on their own job roles and responsibilities as well as the roles of those they collaborate with. This way, employees know who is doing what, giving them more confidence and freedom to operate and excel within the organization.

ACTION: To ensure employees are clear on expectations, **make it an annual practice to audit job descriptions and employee roles and responsibilities.**

● Ask each team member to review their job description and notate the inconsistencies between what is written and what is practiced. This brings inclusion (Core Pillar #3) into the process of aligning employee's roles with the team and organization. After you review the job description, have a conversation about what changes need to be made to bring what is written into alignment with what is being practiced.

A Peaceful Leader will also use this opportunity to help team members align to the team and organization's mission, as well. In your dialogue with team members, make it really clear to them how their role contributes to the larger mission of the organization. This will help anchor mission-driven work on top of aligning your team to their individual roles.



Tool #3: Write Down 5 Strengths for Each of Your Team Members

As human beings, we are wired to be threat detectors, and with that comes a natural tendency to focus on what is wrong in our environment. This mindset can be helpful in many areas of our work. We are more resilient to possible challenges in our work landscape and we easily spot where we need to make changes or adjustments to be more effective. However, when this mindset extends to people (and it often does), we create a workplace culture where there is a lack of safety (Core Pillar #1) for employees to be bold and risk failure in order to serve the organization. If team members feel constantly monitored, scrutinized, and criticized, they will start walking on egg shells, constantly suspicious and cautious. This is no good for a culture.

You can easily (TODAY) start developing a strength-based mindset to increase your tendency to appreciate and celebrate individual strengths and acts of bravery (even when failure is an outcome), which will increase safety and trust (Core Pillars #1 and #2) in your team and organization.

ACTION: Schedule just 15 minutes on your calendar once a week to reflect on the strengths and contributions of one of your team members or colleagues. Write them down on a piece of paper and be as specific as you can as to how those strengths benefit the team and organization. Each week choose a different employee or colleague to complete this exercise. Creating these lists and paying more attention to your team's strengths, rather than their weaknesses, will increase your tendency to be positive and optimistic with your team. Over time, you will increasingly notice and acknowledge strengths and take a strength-based approach with your team with ease, which will enhance and anchor the Core Pillars into your workplace.



Tool #4: Fix Behaviors and Solve Problems, Not People

Remember, our tendency to want to fix and address problems is a natural human response. However, we often conflate process problems, system problems, resource problems, or execution problems, to being people problems. We attribute someone's behavioral flaw to a character or identity flaw. When we make it a person problem, it becomes just that, personal, which raises defenses and often makes what would be a solvable issue, intractable. When these types of issues and problems occur, we tend to respond from a fight/flight/freeze response leading to defensiveness, attacks, or counterattacks, and sometimes pretending the problem isn't there. This dynamic undermines the Core Pillars of Peaceful Leadership.

ACTION: As a leader, you can help your team work through and avoid these issues by addressing problems or problem behaviors by separating the issue from the person. This is a good practice to develop for a variety of reasons and you can start by simply:

- Restating the problem or problem behaviors non-judgmentally.
- Explain the impact the problem or problem behavior has on the team.
- Describe the desired solution, impact, or behavior.
- Support the person or people to address the problem or problem behaviors to move toward the desired outcome.



Separating problems or problem behaviors from people decreases the likelihood that people feel the need to adopt a fight/flight/freeze posture. Instead, they may be more receptive to hearing feedback and making adjustments. When we separate our judgments of behavior from our judgments of people, we increase safety (Core Pillar #1) and trust (Core Pillar #2). When people feel like others don't view them as a problem person, they save face and maintain their dignity, allowing them to feel more empowered and included (Core Pillar #3) in making changes and addressing the issues.

Tool #5: Ask For Input on Your Next Decision

As a leader, you are asked to make decisions every day that impacts your team and your organization. But how often do we elicit input or feedback on our decisions? Leadership decisions are often made without the input of the people who the decisions will impact. When team members are not consulted or are not able to contribute to the decisions that impact them, it hinders their sense of inclusion and belonging (Core Pillar #3) and reduces their feeling of empowerment over their workplace and work role. This is a slippery slope to a disengaged workforce.

ACTION: Involving many people into a decision making process can feel like quite the undertaking, but it doesn't have to be. If you follow these three simple steps to gathering input you will be empowering your team to feel safe to contribute (Core Pillar #1) and to trust that you are considering their input on big decisions (Core Pillar #2).

Step 1: Ask people to **Speak Up**. Give people an option to share their thoughts without judgment or retaliation. You may even want to offer an anonymous option for people to provide input.

Step 2: Listen Up. If you are going to ask people to Speak Up, you better be prepared to **Listen Up**. Show them that you heard their feedback, questions, and concerns by summarizing and repeating back what you have heard. Perhaps even ask some follow up questions to understand their input further.

Step 3: **Follow Up**. This is perhaps the most important part of asking for input. Even if you follow Steps 1 and 2, if you don't Follow Up, your team will start to feel like their input does not matter and they will be less likely to Speak Up in the future, which undermines the Core Pillars. Keep people up to date on the decision-making process so people don't make assumptions. Be clear about what factors and input you are considering, any timelines to the decision-making process, and insight into what went into making the decision you made.

You obviously cannot bring everyone in on every decision, but by following the steps above you can elicit feedback from an individual, a small team, or an entire company depending on what the situation requires. Try to include diverse perspectives in your decision-making to enhance and anchor the Core Pillars in your workplace.

It Starts With YOU!

It takes consistent attention and effort on a daily basis to cultivate a conflict resilient and peaceful workplace culture. A one-time initiative or training may give you some short term gains, but to really be effective, we want to strive for consistency (even in small doses), not infrequent efforts (even if grandiose).



This is why we have developed a Peaceful Leadership Certification Program that is designed to help you anchor the Core Pillars into your organizations and teams through consistent action. All it takes is 30 minutes a week of consistent intentional effort and your team and organization will be on its way to conflict resilient and peaceful culture based in Psychological Safety, Employee Trust, and Inclusion.

What are you doing TODAY to anchor the Core Pillars of Peaceful Leadership into your workplace? Visit us at [PeacefulLeadersAcademy.com](https://peacefulleadersacademy.com) for more information on Peaceful Leadership training.