

# BRAVE SPACES

## TOPIC OVERVIEW

Mia Cary, DVM (she, hers)



## AWARENESS

### What is a brave space?

A brave space is an inclusive environment where all team members feel that they belong and actively participate.

## UNDERSTANDING

### Key take-home messages.

**1 Everyone plays a part in creating a brave space.**

While leadership endorsement and support are critical, everyone can help create a brave space. When challenges, situations or opportunities arise, we are ALL either part of the solution or part of the problem.

**2 These 5 “ingredients” are foundational to brave spaces.**

- Authenticity & vulnerability
- Empathy
- Getting comfortable with being uncomfortable
- Growth mindset
- Radical candor

**3 Get comfortable with being uncomfortable.**

If you don't stretch beyond your comfort zone, you aren't open to growth beyond your current world view. Lean into the discomfort and have tough conversations to develop new perspectives, ideas, and approaches.

## TRANSFORMATION

### Specific actions you can take to generate positive DEI change with your team, workplace, clients and community.

- 1** Search the web for a “workplace inclusivity assessment” that would work best for your team. Ask everyone to confidentially answer questions about your current workplace environment. Discuss the results as a group and agree on some changes to improve inclusivity.
- 2** Take a closer look at how you conduct meetings. Consider: inviting all team members to contribute agenda topics, taking turns facilitating the discussion, having a stated meeting purpose, ending the meeting on time, and ensuring everyone knows who will do what by when.
- 3** Choose to be purposely empathetic by listening to others and providing support without feeling the need to always offer a solution.

## TOPIC ESSAY

# Creating a Brave Space in the Workplace

A brave space is an inclusive environment in which all team members feel they belong and actively participate. Establishing a brave space allows team members to express themselves and challenge one another in positive ways. This is important for a variety of reasons, including relevance. To be relevant to current and future team members, clients, and customers, we must create inclusive, brave spaces where all team members are invited to be active participants. Team leaders as well as individual contributors all have important roles to play in creating brave spaces by cultivating and encouraging the following brave space ingredients.

### Brave Space Ingredients

Brave space ingredients are skills that can be practiced, developed, and strengthened to contribute to a more inclusive and welcoming workplace culture.

#### Authenticity & Vulnerability

Authenticity and vulnerability are intertwined, foundational ingredients of brave spaces. Authenticity is letting go of who we think we are supposed to be and embracing who we really are. When we are able to bring our full, authentic selves into the workplace, then we are more likely to be vulnerable by stepping out of our comfort zone to try new things and take calculated risks. Author and leadership expert Patrick Lencioni's research confirms that when we are trying new things and sharing experiences with our team members, vulnerability-based trust naturally develops. This trust is the foundation of a cohesive team that embraces and creates brave spaces.

#### Empathy

According to nursing scholar Theresa Wiseman, four elements of empathy include perspective taking, staying out of judgement, recognizing emotion in others, and communicating that emotion back to those you interact with. This aligns well with my favorite definition of empathy, "felt connection," from researcher and author Brené Brown. Empathy is a critical aspect of brave spaces because it allows us to listen to others and provide support without feeling the need to always provide a solution. Creating space for others to authentically share and engage requires empathy and is the very definition of a brave space.

#### Getting Comfortable Being Uncomfortable

Another important ingredient of a brave space is a willingness to explore and get comfortable being uncomfortable. To create spaces where people are willing to share topics and ask questions that feel risky, we must be willing to do the same. Moving from a safe space to a brave space takes courage. In Journey for Teams module 3 with Dr. Jen Brandt, we learned about psychological safety, the feeling that you can share your ideas and thoughts freely without fear of humiliation or punishment. Brave spaces are rooted in psychological safety and courageously expand beyond as those in the space are invited to lean into discomfort, identify "elephants in the room," and have tough conversations. A prerequisite is often unlearning what we thought we knew to be true to make room for new perspectives, ideas, and approaches.

#### Growth Mindset with Intention

Based on years of research, Stanford psychologist Dr. Carol E. Dweck has confirmed that there is a mindset continuum with one end anchored in a fixed mindset and

“To be relevant to current and future team members, clients, and customers, we must create inclusive, brave spaces where all team members are invited to be active participants.”

the other end anchored in growth. And most important, growth along this continuum can be cultivated. We can grow, we can develop, we can evolve. We are embracing a growth mindset while cultivating a brave space when we engage in the following:

- view challenges and failures as an opportunity to grow;
- accept feedback as a gift;
- realize that our perspective is not the perspective;
- understand that our intention (what we want to achieve through our actions and approaches) does not always equal impact (how that action is received);
- create space for extending and receiving grace;
- are cognizant that if someone wants our advice, they will ask for it; and
- remain grounded in the present moment.

### **Radical Candor**

Author and entrepreneur Kim Scott shared that when we are being radically candid, we care personally and communicate directly. We care about what is being discussed and we care about who we are discussing it with. We do not have to love or even like the other person. We should, however, recognize them as a fellow human being worthy of our attention during the time that we are conversing with them. Speaking with radical candor can lead to profound growth and change because a foundation of trust is being established. In brave spaces, radical candor is leveraged to establish team meeting norms, rules, and expectations. Invite team members to collaborate in creating meeting ground rules such as the following:

- having a clearly communicated purpose for every meeting;
- starting each meeting with a humanizing quick share such as everyone sharing one good thing that happened over the last week;
- utilizing anonymous polling to gain participant insights;
- inviting all team members to contribute topics;
- taking turns facilitating team meetings;
- reviewing action items before the end of every meeting, including who will do what by when; and
- ending meetings with a WWW EBY round-robin—invite participants to share what worked well (WWW) with the meeting and what could have been even better yet (EBY).

### **Mistakes Will Happen**

When creating and cultivating brave spaces, we are often operating at the edge of, or outside of, our comfort zone and mistakes will happen. If you never make a mistake, then I contend you are not stretching far enough. Of course, we never want to intentionally offend or make a mistake just for the sake of it. When it does happen, we are equipped to deal with it. We apologize authentically and in the moment, learn from it, and move on. Do not wallow in it. Wallowing in guilt or shame does not help you or the situation; it does not help anyone. Guilt, worry, and shame are all useless emotions. Apologize, learn from it, and move on.

### **And Yet**

I love stumbling upon an “and yet” when reading an article or listening to an audiobook. It hints at unexpected and important things to come. The “and yet” for brave spaces? Brave spaces can be exhausting. Ditto with authenticity,

““ When creating and cultivating brave spaces, we are often operating at the edge of, or outside of, our comfort zone and mistakes will happen...When it does happen, we are equipped to deal with it. We apologize authentically and in the moment, learn from it, and move on. ””

vulnerability, empathy, and many of the other brave space ingredients we have discussed. Fortifying ourselves as we create and engage in brave spaces allows sustainability. As the saying goes, we are better equipped to care for others when we first take care of ourselves. I am a firm believer that this “oxygen mask rule” is legit. It is not selfish. It is wise beyond measure and easier said than done. The best way to make self-care a habit is to realize the truth of the oxygen mask rule. As a parent, manager, or team member, when we tend to our foundational needs such as optimal nutrition, hydration, and activity, we set ourselves up for success by being strong, courageous, and brave.

### **Now What?**

What you do from here is up to you. I invite you to commit to one specific next step. Perhaps you wish to dig deeper into one of the brave space ingredients, or perhaps you will read or listen to one of the resources shared with this module. Hopefully, one next step will lead to another and soon you will be creating and contributing to brave spaces everywhere you go. You’ve got this!■



### **Mia Cary, DVM (she, hers)**

Dr. Mia Cary specializes in leadership, teamwork, and inclusivity with the purpose of activating others to thrive. Her professional experience includes leadership and education roles at the AVMA, NAVC, Boehringer Ingelheim, and Novartis Animal Health. She currently serves as CEO and Change Agent for Cary Consulting, CEO for PrideVMC, serves on the board of advisors for Dean Perry at Tuskegee University College of Veterinary Medicine, and authors the Activating Allyship column for Today's Veterinary Business.

## RESOURCES

AVMA Brace Space Certificate Program:

<https://axon.avma.org/local/catalog/view/product.php?productid=125>

Brown, B., & Guillen, B. (Hosts). (2022, November 17). Building brave spaces [Audio podcast episode]. In *Dare to Lead with Brené Brown*. Brené Brown, LLC.

<https://brenebrown.com/podcast/building-brave-spaces/>

Cary, M. (2021, August 31). How inclusive is your workplace?

<https://caryconsulting.com/inclusiveworkplace/>

Praslova, L. N. (2022, June 2021). *An intersectional approach to inclusion at work*. Harvard Business Review.

<https://hbr.org/2022/06/an-intersectional-approach-to-inclusion-at-work>

Radical Candor. (2016, August 15). *Radical Candor – improve your in person, impromptu feedback* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFquOnOHCcE>

RSA. (2013, December 10). *Brené Brown on empathy* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

Twill. (2015, December 7). *Why mindfulness is a superpower: an animation* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4>

The inclusion of resources by this author does not imply or constitute an endorsement by the American Veterinary Medical Association or the Veterinary Medical Association Executives.