

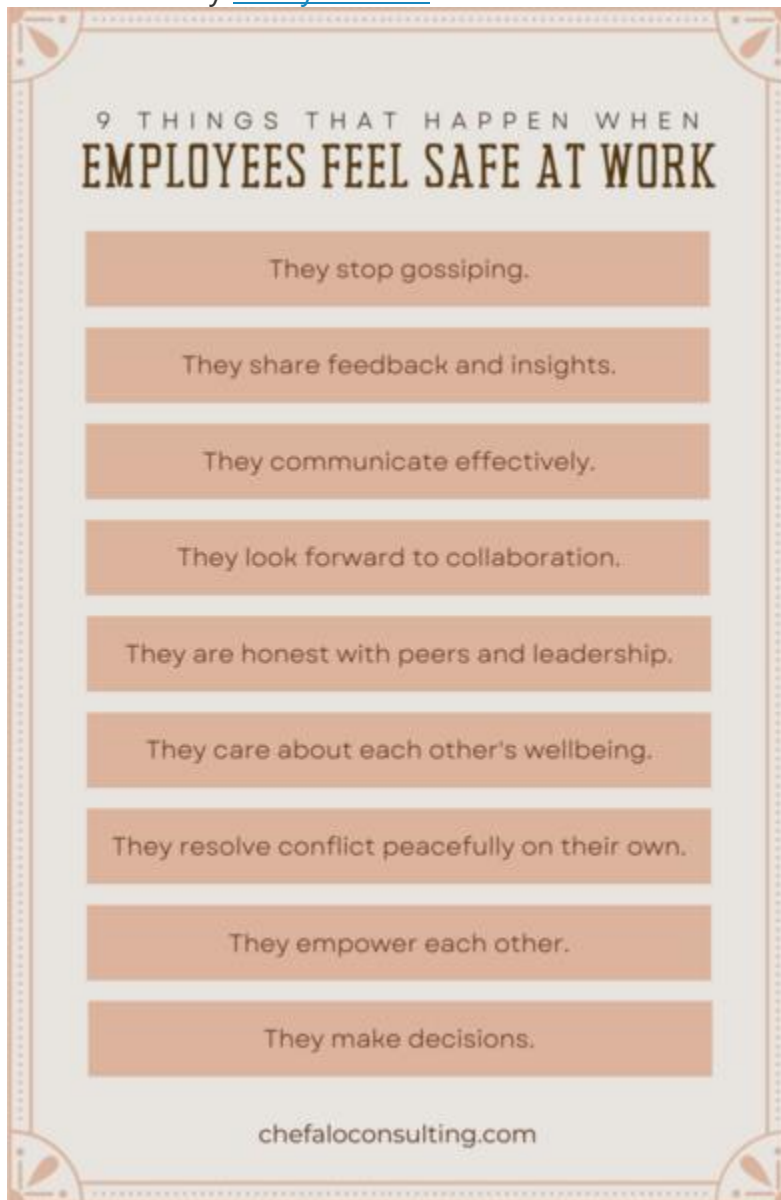
# 9 Things That Happen When Employees Feel Safe at Work



[SHENANDOAH CHEFALO](#) 10/31/22 12:30 PM

If you asked me what the single most important aspect of trauma-informed implementation is, I'd say it's much more complex than that.

But then I'd say [safety at work](#).



To be fair, there are many moving parts when we aspire to create safety at work. It's not an easy task to undertake.

From encouraging employees to develop [individual safety plans](#) to creating a comprehensive [organizational safety plan](#), establishing safety at work can take years. It's a lot harder than following [eight simple tips](#).

But the rewards are worth the journey. Here are a few things that happen when employees feel safe at work.

### **1 - They stop gossiping**

Gossip has a negative connotation to it, but when we boil it down, gossip is when we talk about other people who aren't there. Usually, when people gossip, they say things they wouldn't feel comfortable saying to the person who's being talked about.

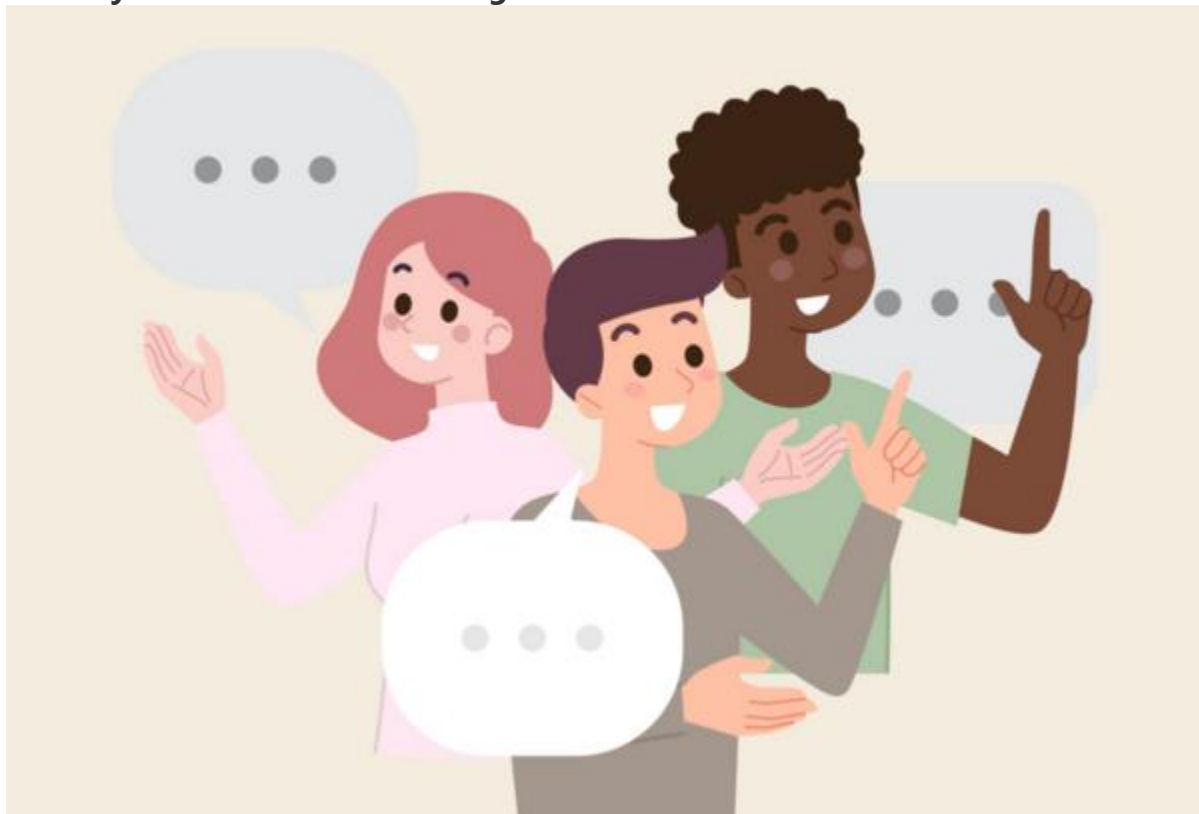
Either, what they have to say is untrue. Or, what they have to say is true, but no one feels safe enough to say it.

Let's assume that the facts are facts and the feelings are valid. What happens when employees feel safe enough to share what could be considered "gossip" freely to those it impacts most?

Gossip transforms into constructive feedback. Suddenly, when employees feel safe at work, they stop gossiping. They stop complaining about each other behind one another's backs.

Instead, they feel empowered to have an open, calm, and constructive discussion with clear goals. With safety, "gossip" builds relationships instead of tearing them down.

### **2 - They share feedback and insights**



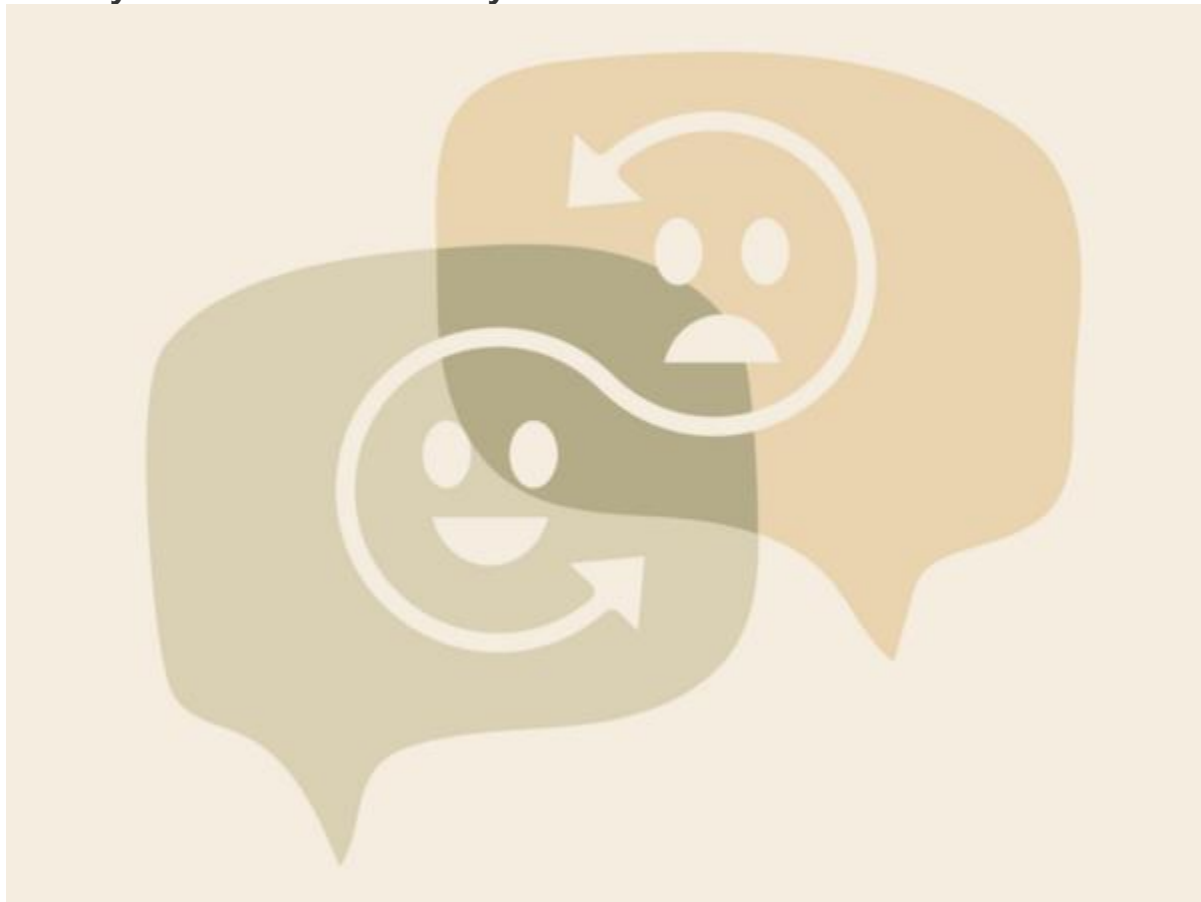
Even if you're not one to gossip, how often are you silent about the feedback you want to give?

Why don't you share? You might rationalize with yourself: "That's not my lane," "I'm no expert," or "They won't even consider it." Or, you might be afraid: "I don't know what will happen if I say that," or "I know something bad will happen."

When we add safety to the mix, those thoughts transform into something new and empowering. Instead, you might think, "I could be wrong about this, but it's an idea worth sharing," or "I know they will value my opinion, even if they decide to take this project in a different direction."

When employees feel safe, they freely and kindly share insights and feedback that would otherwise go unnoticed. When we create a company culture of constructive feedback, we then see positive outcomes such as effective change, growth mindsets, nonjudgmental evaluations, and stronger relationships in the community.

### **3 - They communicate effectively**



Not wanting to tell someone something—whether it's advice on how they could be more effective or something they do all the time that irritates you—is a common experience. Healthy communication is not a value that's embedded into our overarching culture in America.

But it is a trauma-informed value that we must strive to embody.

When we create safety at work, we open safe spaces for honest and effective communication.

Imagine if you could tell your coworker that a habit of theirs disrupts your workflow or that a method of communication you have in place just isn't working. You could work towards a solution together, let go of any lingering resentment, and build a better working environment for everyone.

With safety at work, every employee is confident that others will act appropriately with kindness, respect, and understanding. We assume the best of each other, and there is no fear of retaliation.

#### **4 - They look forward to collaboration**



Have you ever dreaded working with certain people? Many of us prefer to work alone because collaborating with others can be difficult. When there's poor communication, unspoken expectations, or an unfair division of labor, it's understandable why we would prefer to work solo.

This aversion to collaboration usually comes from a place of trauma. We believe that other people are detrimental to our work. We think they are either dangerous or they slow us down.

But, when we introduce safety to the mix, we can counteract these maladaptive beliefs. People are inherently social creatures. If you were asked to collaborate with your close friends, you might be more interested in the prospect of working together than when you're asked to collaborate with your colleagues.

But what if working with your team felt like working with your friends? When there's safety at work, professional relationships can thrive like friendships.

With safety comes effective and open communication. With proper communication comes collaboration. And when there's a history of positive collaborative experiences, employees look forward to working with others.

### **5 - They are honest with peers and leadership**



The default professional culture does not value honesty as much as it does obedience. But, if we want to create safety at work and embody trauma-informed values, we must unlearn old beliefs and replace them with new ones.

When employees feel safe at work, they are empowered to say no toxic positivity. They will stop crossing their own boundaries—and others' boundaries—and being agreeable when they don't truly agree.

How good would it feel to respond honestly about a colleague's behavior that irritated you? Instead of saying, "it's okay," when it is not okay, safety allows us to be honest.

When employees feel safe, they start being honest with each other and with leadership.

### **6 - They care about each other's wellbeing**



When safety is a core value of an organization, every community member can assume that other community members have their best interests in mind. Although there will always be people who act selfishly, a sense of safety opens the door to community. In a safe community, individuals care about each other as individuals. They also care about the health of the group as a whole.

When organizations establish safety at work, employees have the space to care for one another and the organization.

**7 - They resolve conflict peacefully on their own**



Conflict avoidance is a common trauma response; a big part of trauma-informed work includes healthy and safe conflict resolution. Conflict can feel dangerous (especially for employees who have experienced dangerous conflict in the past), but when we establish safety, the perceived danger of conflict at work decreases.

When employees genuinely feel safe at work, they are empowered to resolve interpersonal conflict peacefully on their own without involving management. Divides in organizations are often worsened when one of two parties in conflict seeks out management before going to the other person.

This behavior is the result of not feeling safe. When they feel safe, another option appears: resolving the conflict independently.

### **8 - They empower each other**

We've already dropped this word a lot, but it's worth having its own point—empowerment. When employees feel safe at work, they become empowered. Employees not only feel empowered themselves—but they also create an atmosphere of empowerment for others. Through coaching, collaborative learning, and encouragement, employees become trauma-informed resources themselves by empowering each other.

Empowerment is a great mindset to have because it is also a major factor in resilience.

### **9 - They make decisions**



When employees feel safe and empowered, they are capable of making decisions with a clear head.

Have you ever been in a situation where your organization was stuck? Maybe you're stuck right now. Nothing gets done, employees struggle with decision paralysis, and you repeatedly have the same conversations without coming to conclusions.

When we experience trauma brain, we cannot access our executive functioning skills, which include decision-making and planning. Safety at work can help us avoid getting trapped in trauma brain, thus enabling us to make decisions.

Decision-making can also be halted when employees feel like they don't have the power to make decisions. Without fear of what might happen if employees make the "wrong" decision, they are free to make decisions and push the organization forward.

### **Final Thoughts: The Benefits of Safety at Work**

If you understand trauma-informed work, then you know that the benefits of creating safety at work are nearly immeasurable—after all, how can you truly quantify the value of employee wellbeing and compare it to any other bottom line?

These benefits of safety at work are some of the changes that you can experience in your organization. But it's important to note that these changes often happen hand-in-hand with a greater sense of safety.



Just as safety brings empowerment, conflict resolution, communication, and mutual trust, these aspects of the trauma-informed model create safety.

For a one-of-a-kind virtual networking experience, be sure to tune into [Intentional Conversations](#) this Monday, October 10, at 12 pm CT, where we'll explore your questions and discuss the content of this blog. Seats are free, but pre-registration is required. Consider booking a free consultation to learn how you can create safety at work.