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Zero Trust Starts With People

Building a Culture of Verification, Accountability, and Psychological Safety

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About Me: Lauren LeMunyan

- Founder & CEO, Spitfire Coach (est. 2016)
- Master Certified Coach (4000+ Hours)
- 4 Stages of Psychological Safety Certified (2021 – present)
- Energy Leadership Index Master Practitioner (2016)
- Creator of Future Self Design (2025)
- Host, The Spitfire Podcast (est. 2017)
- Retired Bluegrass Rapper (JRSYFRSH)



Your architecture assumes Zero Trust. Your culture still runs on default trust.

Zero Trust is a technical policy running on top of a human operating system that wasn't built for it.

Zero Trust verifies every request without punishing it for being made. Psychologically safe teams do the exact same thing with people's questions and concerns. Same mechanism, different system.

Everything today builds on these concepts

ZERO TRUST

- Never trust, always verify.
- No access granted by default, no matter how familiar the request looks.
- Access is scoped, checked continuously, and the system assumes something will eventually get through.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

- An environment of rewarded vulnerability.
- A team climate where people believe they can ask a question, flag a mistake, or push back without being punished for it.
- Not comfort.
- Not lowered standards.
- The belief that raising something is safe.

THE ROLE OF FEAR

FEAR

doesn't produce more accountability.

FEAR

produces better hiding.

Blame-driven cultures don't reduce mistakes.

They reduce the visibility of mistakes — until they surface as incidents.

**Psychological Safety is the pre-condition for accountability,
not a substitute for it.**

- **SAME ANOMALY. TWO CULTURES.**

1 Analyst A

Flags the anomaly on Day 1. Wrong twice before — nobody made it cost them.

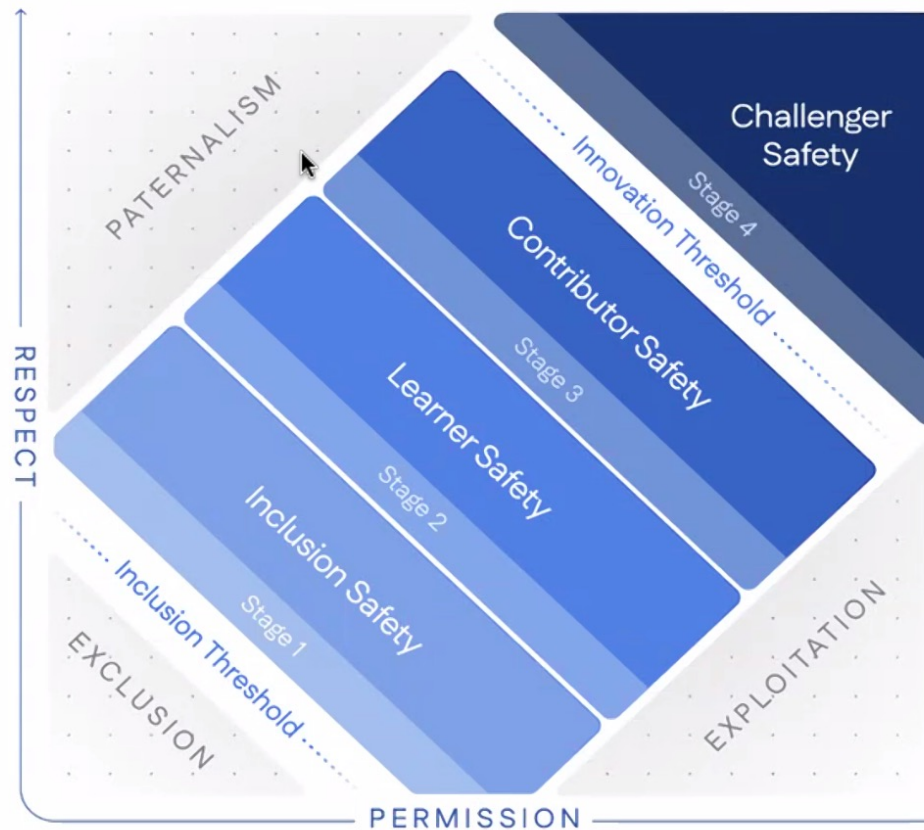
Contained in hours.

2 Analyst B

Sits on the same anomaly for 3 days. Remembers what happened to the last person who was wrong out loud.

Becomes an incident.

THE 4 STAGES OF *Psychological Safety*TM



Source: LeaderFactor



THE 4 STAGES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Simple definitions

1

Inclusion Safety

I feel like I belong here.

2

Learner Safety

I can ask questions and not know things.

3

Contributor Safety

I can participate and add value.

4

Challenger Safety

I can speak up and challenge the status quo.

THE FOUR STAGES, MAPPED TO ZERO TRUST

Each stage builds on the next each

1

Inclusion safety

Can a non-security employee name one reason a control exists?
How are we including people in the process?

2

Learner safety

Can someone ask “why do I reverify this” without feeling behind?
How are we teaching/guiding people?

3

Contributor safety

Can someone flag a weird request without waiting for it to be their job?
How/Who do we want contributing?

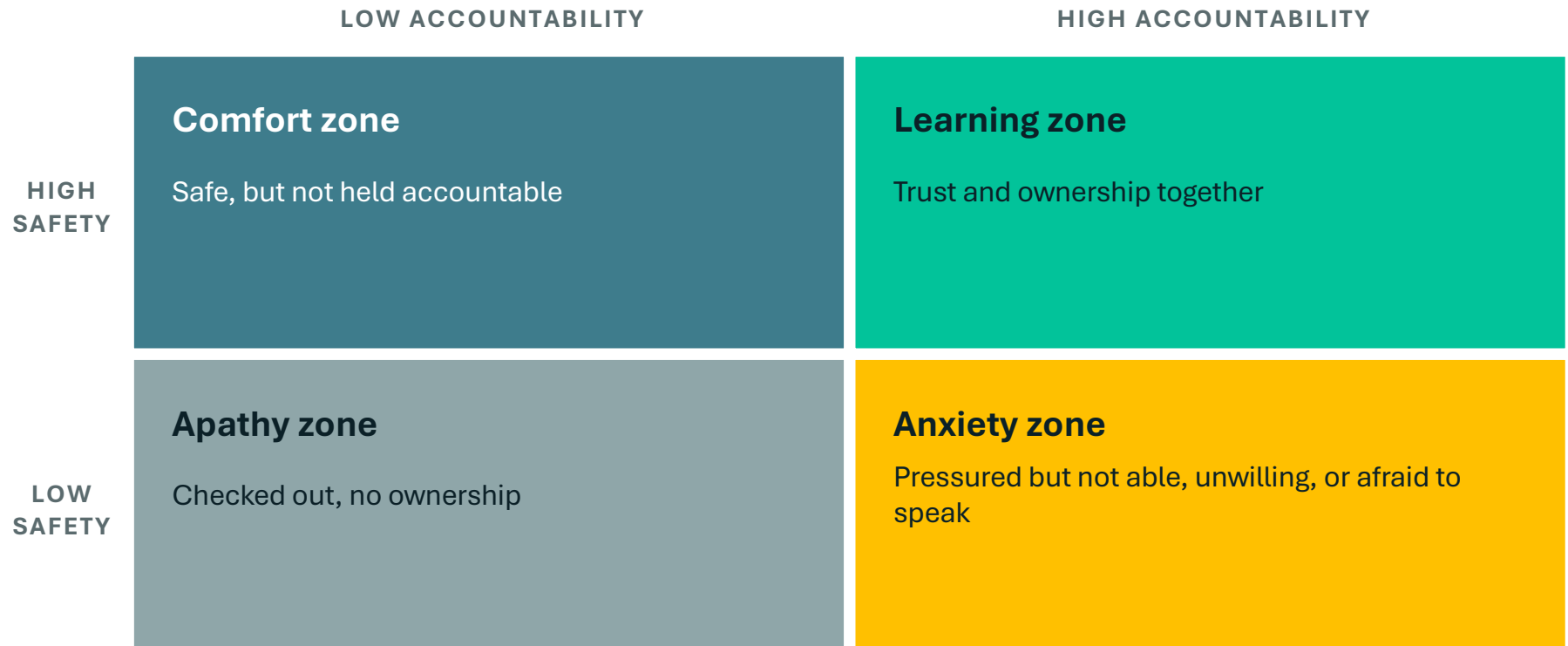
4

Challenger safety

Can someone tell a director the access model doesn't make sense?
How/Who do we want people to challenge status quo?

WHERE IS YOUR TEAM OR ORGANIZATION ACTUALLY LIVING?

Safety + Accountability



ZERO TRUST STARTS WITH PEOPLE



THE HUMAN ATTACK SURFACE AUDIT

Four questions to ask this week

1 Where do people go quiet in your org — meetings, post-incident reviews, upward reporting?

2 What happened the last time someone was wrong in public? Did that story spread?

3 Who gets punished for a false positive vs. who gets punished for staying silent?

4 Is your incident review process designed to find root cause — or find someone to blame?

WHY THIS IS WORTH DOING

4X

“Companies that take time to identify and shift employee mindsets are 4x more likely to rate their change initiative as successful.”

— McKinsey & Company

YOUR FOUR POWER MOVES

Behaviors that reinforce the culture

1

Model Fallibility First

Name your own misses before you ask others to name theirs.

2

Separate the Story

Make it about the behavior/action, not the person/personality.

3

Reward the Flag

Recognize the person who raised it, even when it turned out to be nothing.

4

Close the Loop, Publicly

Show people what happened with what they reported. Silence kills future reporting.

- YOUR ACTION THIS WEEK

Welcome to your new role: Culture Architect.

- 1 Pick one stage that needs the most attention on your team or organization.
 - 2 What's one curious question you'd like to incorporate to increase inclusion, learning, contribution or challenge to your organization?
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Thank you.

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TRUST