

# Seven Practical Steps to Build a Culture of Safety and Human Reliability



## To err is human.

But in complex, modern workplaces, errors are signals, not failures.

Trying to eliminate all errors with strict procedures and tough accountability creates a fear-soaked culture that silences truth-tellers, and causes *more* errors.

There is no one secret or single solution. Instead, the safest and most reliable companies around the world use a “Consolidation of Subtleties.” A combination of practical steps like these.







## SEVEN PRACTICAL STEPS

	<p><b>1) TAKE A LEARNING-BASED APPROACH</b> Many leaders take a control-based approach to errors. This mechanistic view may have worked in simple, repetitive jobs 100 years ago. But most modern jobs are so complex and adaptive that today, a Learning-Based approach is almost always more effective.</p> <p><b>Do THIS:</b> After the next incident or error, before asking, “<i>What went wrong?</i>” ask, “<i>How does this job get done right 99% of the time?</i>”</p>
	<p><b>2) CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY</b> It’s easy to destroy and challenging to create. Yet research from Dr. Amy Edmonson at Harvard and Google’s Project Aristotle reveal that Psychological Safety is the key to successful, safe, reliable teams. In this module, you’ll learn three practical ways to create it.</p> <p><b>Do THIS:</b> After an error, instead of saying, “<i>Joe failed to do [X]...</i>” ask, “<i>What DID Joe do, and why did it make sense for him (at the time) to do that?</i>”</p>
	<p><b>3) LEAD AFTER ACTION REVIEWS (AARs)</b> For over 30 years, they’ve been used in every branch of the US military and by an increasing number of high-hazard industries worldwide. In this module, you’ll learn how to lead these psychologically safe, semi-structured, post-job debriefs for your team.</p> <p><b>Do THIS:</b> After your next successful, complex project, instead of asking, “<i>What could we have done better?</i>”, ask...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <i>What did we set out to do?</i></li><li>2. <i>What did we actually do?</i></li><li>3. <i>How did it turn out that way?</i></li><li>4. <i>What will we do differently next time?</i></li></ol>

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	<p><b>4) TRANSFORM INVESTIGATIONS</b> Traditional investigations often “Name, shame, blame &amp; retrain.” The result? Fear, silence and box-checking on Corrective Actions. We transform that toxic process into one that builds trust, engages front-line experts, and identifies non-obvious, high-value, system improvements, not faults.</p> <p><b>Do THIS:</b> Instead of asking, “<i>What was the error, and who made it?</i>” ask, “<i>How did our systems, processes, and culture set that person up to make that error, and what can we change to set our people up for reliability and success instead?</i>”</p>
	<p><b>5) APPLY DEFENSES (BASIC)</b> Peer Checks. Three-Step Communication. Checklists. These and other simple, yet powerful defenses have proven successful for decades. You can learn them in a few hours, and get real-world results immediately. But beware the hidden drawback.</p> <p><b>Do THIS:</b> Pick a job that you and your team regularly do. Write or update the checklist for that job that includes ONLY the 3-7 items most often missed.</p>
	<p><b>6) IMPROVE SYSTEMS (INTERMEDIATE)</b> Instead of trying to “fix” your workers, improve your work processes &amp; systems. This intermediate-level strategy can prevent thousands of errors without blame or shame. In this module, you’ll see examples of “defensive designs” from utilities, UPS &amp; more.</p> <p><b>Do THIS:</b> Pick a process that you regularly do. Brainstorm with trusted colleagues one low-cost, low-risk, low-fear, low-maintenance, non-mechanical process improvement that would make it easier for front-line experts to do the right thing in that process.</p>
	<p><b>7) BUILD RESILIENCE (ADVANCED)</b> The world’s most High Reliability Organizations (HROs) don’t try to eliminate all errors, or “Proceduralize Everything.” Instead, they build resilience by detecting “weak signals,” adapting quickly, and using fail-safes &amp; resources-in-reserve to recover fast.</p> <p><b>Do THIS:</b> Pick a process that you regularly do. Identify one likely serious error in that process that’s impractical to prevent. Brainstorm with trusted colleagues one low-cost “resource-in-reserve” you could deploy to recover from that error quickly, easily, inexpensively, and safely.</p>

Each of these seven modules is available as a stand-alone presentation or interactive webinar.  
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