

Psychological Safety: The New Currency of Performance

Dr Maurice Duffy

In corporate life, I was once described as a “big beast in anyone’s jungle.” Direct, relentless, sharp-edged. I didn’t soften what needed saying, and I rarely waited for permission to speak truth to power. Some found it refreshing, others found it overwhelming.

But here’s the truth: I’ve changed. Not because I’ve become weaker—but because I’ve become wiser.

Over the years, I’ve had the privilege of coaching elite athletes, FTSE 100 executives, and government leaders. In every great team that I have coached—be it international sports teams or high-performing businesses—I have watched in awe how safe people felt about speaking up directly, how calling out others was not a threat but a sign of commitment to shared goals.

And that’s where this simple framework—encouraging people to own their voice without apology—rings so true.

“Sorry I talk too much” becomes “I’m passionate about this—here’s my take.”

“Sorry I’m not an expert” becomes “Here’s what I do know from experience.”

“Sorry for needing support” becomes “I value collaboration—can you help me with this?”

This isn’t fluff. It’s the language of psychological safety. And in environments where pressure and performance collide daily, it’s often the difference between dysfunction and breakthrough

“In the absence of truth, comfort becomes a cage.”



The truth is, we’ve spent too long in systems that reward deference and punish dissent. Too many people censor themselves to fit in, to survive, to avoid seeming too much. But the cost is staggering—lost ideas, disengaged talent, quiet quitting in its most toxic form: compliance without conviction.

What I advocate today is not volume—it’s value. Not aggression—but assertion. Not dominance—but clarity. There is enormous strength in someone who can speak their truth with confidence, without needing to apologise for existing.

Creating that kind of culture isn’t accidental. It’s a leadership choice. It’s about modelling directness without arrogance, clarity without ego, firmness without fear. And when people feel safe to speak, performance doesn’t just rise—people do.

Because in the end, high performance isn’t about who speaks the loudest. It’s about who feels free to speak at all.