

CAREY LOHRENZ

— BE FEARLESS —



THE 2025 NATIONAL STUDY OF

THE NEED FOR

FEARLESS LEADERSHIP

“

Great leaders grow by facing fear and acting despite it. They confront uncertainty, embrace discomfort, and take steps forward—without waiting for an invitation to make a difference.”

— Carey Lohrenz

INTRODUCTION

The 2025 National Study of The Need For Fearless Leadership is a comprehensive study that started as a passion of mine to uncover new, missing data on leading with confidence in an era of remarkable uncertainty.

These insights have never been more valuable for organizations navigating today's turbulent waters.

Leaders everywhere recognize the future is increasingly uncertain and unpredictable. Since COVID-19, uncertainty now governs decisions, behaviors, and performance across the U.S. and worldwide.

Organizations face new problems without clear solutions. In this climate, leaders seek guidance on how to learn, adapt, and thrive in our evolving reality.

In short, leaders of all ages, titles, occupations, and experiences seek ways to learn, navigate, and lead in this new post-pandemic reality.

But what specific knowledge, practices, and actions do leaders need to achieve their potential and drive results?

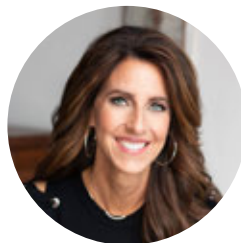
This national study aimed to uncover practical, empowering insights so leaders at every level can lead with greater confidence and impact.

This is the kind of helpful data leaders have wanted but not found—until now.

We are committed to providing the latest insights on leadership excellence and high performance, enabling you to build effective, influential organizations.

Welcome to the 2025 National Study of The Need For Fearless Leadership. We're excited for you to explore our findings.

Your partner in leadership,



Carey Lohrenz, Founder and CEO
Carey Lohrenz Enterprises
Author of 2 WSJ Bestsellers:
Fearless Leadership, and Span of Control

As an expert in leadership, it is clear to me that leadership is needed in new and important ways to navigate this time of uncertainty and drive progress. But where should leaders most focus their time, attention, talent, and organizational resources? What matters most to those they lead to unlock the desired performance, loyalty, connection, and results that are critically important in organizations?

In this special national research report, the data reveals the need for fearless leadership and what that looks like from the view of those being led today.

These insights are essential for leaders of all levels of experience because new leaders want to get off to a great start, and experienced leaders need to know how to adapt to changes in culture, work environment, and expectations.

The exploration of fearless leadership is also timely as much has been written about the current leadership gap. But the study uncovered the attitudinal drivers of those being led and what they want—and need—to do their best. *Let's dive into the findings!*

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS OVERLOOKED IN THE WORKPLACE

Our national study revealed that **39%** of Working Americans feel no psychological safety at work—nearly 4 in 10.

The study defined psychological safety as a shared belief held by team members that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. In a psychologically safe team, members feel accepted and respected.

They are comfortable being themselves, expressing their thoughts and ideas and are not afraid of making mistakes or facing negative consequences for speaking up.

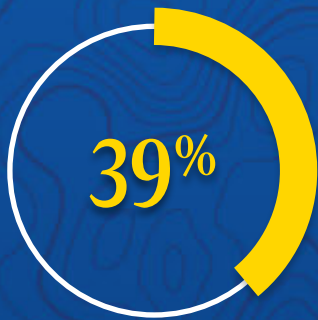
Psychological safety is key for innovation, collaboration, learning, and engagement. But many lack this crucial foundation.

SUPPORTING INNOVATION

When people feel safe to express their ideas at work and in organizations, they are more likely to share innovative thoughts and nontraditional solutions that they might otherwise keep to themselves for fear of criticism or rejection.

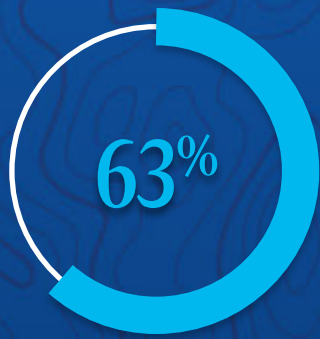
ENHANCING COLLABORATION AND TEAMWORK

Psychological safety fosters open communication and collaboration between individuals, groups, and the larger enterprise. Team members are more likely to trust each other and work well together when they feel psychologically safe in meetings, working solo, and relying on each other for the overall organization to function well.



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63% of Working Americans
would switch companies for
better leadership

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES AND SETBACKS

In a psychologically safe environment, mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and improve, rather than failures to be punished. This promotes a growth mindset and continuous improvement. In fact, in a strongly psychologically safe environment, mistakes and setbacks are expected and seen as necessary to know that learning, appropriate risk-taking, and growth are happening.

IMPROVING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION

Employees are more likely to be engaged at work and less likely to leave their job when they feel psychologically safe. They also will have a stronger foundation to feel more committed and motivated, which can lead to higher productivity, loyalty, tenure, and lower annual turnover.

LEADERS CAN TAKE MANY ACTIONS TO IMPROVE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN AN ORGANIZATION

ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION

Foster an environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions. This could involve regular team meetings where everyone has a chance to speak and ensuring that leaders are approachable and open to feedback from stakeholders across their organization.

SHOW EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING

Leaders should strive to understand their team members' perspectives and show empathy towards their experiences and challenges. Leaders should actively listen to employees, validate their feelings, and show understanding and support.

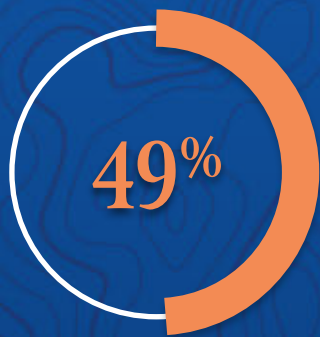
PROMOTE LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

Rather than punishing or penalizing people for making mistakes, support a culture that sees mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow.

One process outlined in *Fearless Leadership: High-Performance Lessons From the Flight Deck* is Debriefing and sharing Lessons Learned. When a mistake is made, we focus on what can be learned from it and how to prevent it in the future, rather than placing blame. This creates the opportunity for a healthy debriefing where "it's not about who is right; it's about what is right."

MODEL PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Leaders play a key role—and are often the most critical cultural influence—in setting the tone for psychological safety across their organization. Leaders can show their team that it's safe to do the same by being open, vulnerable, and willing to take risks. A strong leader starts a Debrief with, "I've made this mistake, and I'll fix it."







49% of Working Americans say their company culture does not support risk-taking

CELEBRATE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Consistently recognize and appreciate team members' diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. This includes fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

Leaders can build psychological safety through:

-  Open communication
-  Empathy
-  Learning from mistakes
-  Modeling vulnerability

By cultivating a culture of psychological safety, organizations can reap the benefits of a more innovative, collaborative, and engaged workforce.

Strengthening psychological safety benefits the 39% who are currently without—and the 61% who work alongside them.




Psychological safety is just one area people want to improve.

What is another?

Risk-taking.

49% of Working Americans say their **company culture does not support risk-taking**. Almost half of all Working Americans feel that their company culture does not support risk-taking, directly impacting *so many* aspects of culture, growth, progress, and teamwork.

When an organization does not support taking risks, the downsides are clear, especially in times of uncertainty. A lack of risk-taking hinders:

-  Innovation
-  Engagement
-  Adaptability

INNOVATION STAGNATION

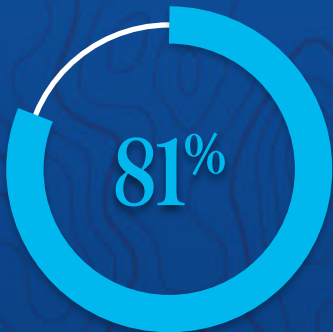
Innovation is a critical driver of growth for most businesses and requires a certain degree of risk-taking at every step of the innovation process. Without a culture that supports risk-taking, companies may struggle to innovate, thus losing out on new opportunities and falling behind competitors that support appropriate risk-taking.

DECREASING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

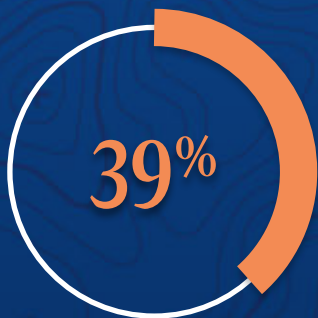
When risk-taking is not encouraged, employees may feel less motivated to bring new ideas to the table or take on new or different initiatives. This can impact overall engagement, productivity, and morale, and lead to employees feeling bored or stuck in the status quo at work due to the lack of newness that avoidance of risk creates.

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Without a willingness to take risks, companies might struggle to adapt to changing market conditions or delay adapting until they are no longer relevant or viable.



81% of Working Americans believe that tenacity is critical for achieving long-term success



39% of Working Americans said they don't know how to build tenacity

DECLINING ADAPTABILITY

In uncertain times, the ability to take calculated risks is often what allows organizations to identify, strategize, pivot, adapt, and seize new opportunities.

Without a willingness to take risks, companies might struggle to adapt to changing market conditions or delay adapting until they are no longer relevant or viable.

In this context, courage, integrity, planning, and debriefing are all key aspects of, and drivers in, fostering a culture of risk-taking. Courage is the ability to face fear, uncertainty, or intimidation, and it's crucial for risk-taking. Leaders should exemplify courage and encourage their team members to do the same, ensuring that calculated risks are valued and supported.

Integrity is about being honest and having strong moral principles. **Part of leading with integrity is constantly putting the mission before the self.**

When a leader remains committed to the mission, and leads by example—that is true fearless leadership.

In a risk-taking culture, risks must be taken with integrity, meaning the leader's values are ethically sound and in line with the company's values.

Calculated risk-taking should involve careful planning. This includes assessing potential outcomes, considering different options, and planning to manage potential fallout.

Companies can ensure that risks are taken strategically and thoughtfully by promoting and valuing thorough planning and debriefing.

How can you apply these ideas in your organization?

By promoting these values and practices, organizations can foster a culture of innovative, calculated risk-taking, which is crucial for navigating uncertainty and driving innovation.

A MISSING CRITICAL COMPONENT: TENACITY

Our national study revealed that **81%** of Working Americans believe that tenacity is critical for achieving long-term success. However, **39%** said they don't know how to build tenacity.

Tenacity, defined as being very determined and persistent, is a crucial trait for both individuals and organizations. Tenacity enables people to persevere through challenges, bounce back from failures, and ultimately achieve their goals.

The lack of understanding around building tenacity presents problems on both a personal and organizational level.

For individuals, lacking tenacity may result in failing to reach major goals or important milestones along the way.

Tangible Ways to Build Tenacity



Set Clear Goals



Develop a Growth Mindset



Practice Persistence



Seek Support

Without tenacity, people may give up too easily when facing obstacles or setbacks, limiting their ability to reach personal or professional goals.

Lacking tenacity also leads to reduced resilience, or the ability to recover after adversity.

For organizations, promoting tenacity can encourage employees to fully commit to their ideas and see initiatives through, even when there are roadblocks or uncertain outcomes.

DEVELOPING A BIAS TO ACT

There's no better way to build the tenacity you need to lead than by building a predisposition for *doing*—a bias for action.

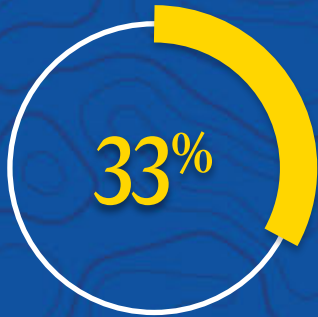
To become more tenacious, a leader must **have the confidence to go out and do it**—and the “doing it” comes first. When leaders learn to act even when they feel stuck, frustrated, or intimidated, they increase their ability to get through situations that demand commitment.

There are tangible ways leaders can build tenacity, including: setting clear, aligned goals; developing a growth mindset and learning culture; practicing persistence deliberately; and seeking guidance and support from others when faced with difficulty.

Here are four tangible ways to build tenacity:

- 1. Set Clear Goals:** Having clear, well-defined goals can provide the motivation to persevere through challenges. These goals should be challenging yet achievable and aligned with a person's values and the organization's mission.
- 2. Develop a Growth Mindset:** Cultivate a growth mindset which is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed with effort, learning, and commitment. This can foster resilience and tenacity.
- 3. Practice Persistence:** Like almost any skill, practice increases tenacity. This might involve deliberately taking on challenging situations or persisting in the face of difficulty, even when it would be easier to give up.
- 4. Seek Support:** A key to developing tenacity is to ask for help, whether that is from a mentor, coach, leader, or supportive colleague. This support can provide guidance, encouragement, and a different perspective when things get tough.

By *purposefully* fostering tenacity, both individuals and organizations can become better equipped to navigate challenges, adapt to change, and stay the course to achieve their goals amid uncertainty, increased competition, and rapidly changing situations.



33% of Working Americans say leaders at their companies do not lead by example






LEADING BY EXAMPLE?

An often-repeated leadership principle states that leaders must lead by example.

However, the national study data revealed that **33%** of Working Americans say leaders at their companies **do not lead by example**.

With one out of every three leaders perceived as *not* modeling expected behaviors, substantial negative consequences can result:

-  **Trust Erosion:** One of the fastest ways to erode and destroy trust in an organization is for leaders to say one thing and do another. This inconsistency can make employees doubt their leaders' integrity, sincerity, and trustworthiness, undermining their confidence in the leadership and the entire organization.
-  **Confusion and Misalignment:** Leaders need to model the behavior they expect from their teams, to ensure clarity around what is expected, valued, and rewarded. Not doing so can lead to misaligned actions and goals across the organization, reducing efficiency and effectiveness.
-  **Culture Degradation:** Organizational culture is heavily influenced by the behavior of its leaders. Cultural decline always follows when leaders don't match stated organizational values and approaches.

This failure to model positive behaviors can even result in other employees also engaging in poor or inappropriate behaviors, potentially leading to issues with performance, collaboration, and workplace culture.

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE?

Leading by example ensures clarity, alignment, and a positive culture. **But, today's leaders must recognize that 1/3 of the workforce believes their leaders don't walk their talk.**

This makes modeling expected behaviors even more important. Reinforcing leadership by example across the organization is critical for culture, trust, morale, engagement, and overall performance.

The influences and impact of leaders drive workplace performance, beliefs and attitudes, and talent acquisition.

Our study uncovered that **63%** of Working Americans would switch companies with no pay raise if they believed more in the new leader.

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Employees lacking trust or belief in their leaders can cause anxiety, confusion, and inability to change, making the organization weaker and navigating uncertainty much harder.

This is a fascinating and unexpected wake-up call about the current employment reality where a focus on wage inflation and turnover garner headlines. This underscores leadership's huge impact on employee:

☆ Satisfaction

👍 Engagement

🔄 Retention

It matters for several reasons and can have far-reaching implications for an organization's leadership pipeline, culture, and ability to navigate uncertainty.

LEADERSHIP PIPELINE IMPACT

Organizations risk losing valuable talent if employees are willing to leave due to a lack of trust or belief in their leaders. This can strain the leadership and talent pipeline, potentially leading to skill gaps and a lack of succession planning. It could also make it harder to attract new talent if the organization gains a reputation for poor leadership.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE INFLUENCE

Leaders play a significant role in shaping, maintaining, and guiding an organization's culture. If employees don't believe in their leaders, the organizational culture suffers, affecting morale, performance, and engagement.

A poor culture can also affect an organization's reputation, making attracting and keeping talent harder.

WEAKNESS IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

During uncertain times, trust in leadership becomes even more crucial.

Leaders are responsible for setting the strategic direction, making tough decisions, and communicating those decisions to the rest of the organization.

Employees lacking trust or belief in their leaders can cause anxiety, confusion, and inability to change, making the organization weaker and navigating uncertainty much harder.

To benefit from these insights (that 63% of Working Americans would move to a new company with no pay raise if they believed more in the new company's leader than their own) organizations should **prioritize leadership development** and **build a culture of trust and transparency**.

This involves leadership training, establishing clear channels of communication, and ensuring that leaders are held accountable for their actions. It's also crucial to solicit and act on employee feedback, as this can help to identify and address issues with leadership early on.

POSITIVE INSIGHTS TO BUILD ON

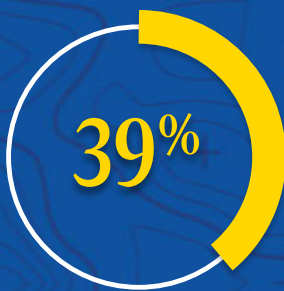
While some findings are concerning, many others offer positive insights that leaders can build on right away.

Our study found that **75% of Working Americans believe they can accomplish their leaders' goals**. This confidence in accomplishing goals is critical for working toward objectives large and small.

Additionally, 64% say their leaders excel at building and maintaining trust across all teams and channels.

These are two perceived strengths of leaders in organizations today that can underpin efforts to foster psychological safety, smart risk-taking, and leading by example to drive growth, collaboration, innovation, and retention. Experienced leaders know that amid uncertainty, build on what is working while controlling what you can.

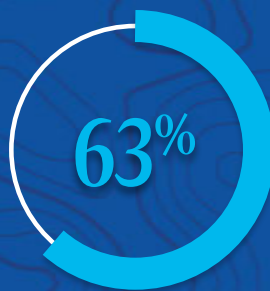
KEY FINDINGS AND ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS: WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO



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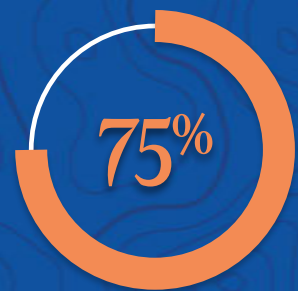
1. Cultivate psychological safety through open communication and empathy.



63% would switch companies with no pay raise for better leadership.



2. Lead by example to inspire trust and performance.



75% believe failure is critical to success, but 36% say leadership doesn't support the vulnerability required for innovation.



3. Embrace smart risk-taking and learning from failures.



RESEARCH STUDY SERIES CONCLUSIONS: THE TIME IS NOW

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Panic-stricken people do not make good decisions, nor do they inspire confidence in their team. In times of crisis, change, and uncertainty, focus on your Span of Control.”

— Carey Lohrenz

The world has transformed dramatically in recent years. Most leaders were not ready. Most employees were not ready. Most organizations were not ready. Now is the time to dive deep and find research-driven truth in the current experience, unmet needs, and leadership priorities. Results matter now more than ever.

This national study series revealed numerous shocking discoveries, important insights, actionable data points, and key trends that leaders must act on immediately.

The findings touch on every aspect of culture, performance, leadership, wellness, innovation, goal setting, planning, and outcomes.

Leading a study of this depth and complexity was a major undertaking. But the discoveries are incredibly valuable for strategic decisions to drive the organization forward through uncertainty.

One thing is clear: **leadership grounded in data and insights is critical.**

This is why I lead this global work, write books, speak, and advise leaders worldwide.

Together we can use this data and these discoveries to create the plans, strategies, and approaches enabling fearless leadership and optimizing your Span of Control.

I'm committed to these goals and am excited to provide this study at no cost, so you can implement these findings for real results.

Reach out to see how we can work together to drive the results you and your organization need right now. Together we have the experience, expertise, and now the data to lead in uncertain times for outcomes you can rely on.

THREE ACTIONS TO LEAD FEARLESSLY AND TAP INTO YOUR SPAN OF CONTROL



Download your free chapters from Fearless Leadership and Span of Control here: careylohrenz.com/free-chapters/



Watch my latest videos at: youtube.com/@CareyLohrenz/videos



Contact my team for an in-person keynote or leadership program at CareyLohrenz.com or BookCarey@CareyLohrenz.com



OUR TAKEAWAY: FEARLESS LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

To thrive in uncertainty, organizations must prioritize fearless leadership at all levels. This research report series reveals a roadmap for building confidence, fostering psychological safety, and optimizing Span of Control™.

By investing in employee development, embracing smart risks, and leading with transparency, organizations can navigate disruption and achieve high performance.

The time for fearless leadership is now.

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NATIONAL STUDY METHODOLOGY

The 2025 National Study of Navigating Uncertainty, Challenge, and Thriving Through Change was conducted in partnership with, and fielded by an independent research firm. The custom research study included a total of 1,003 U.S. participants ages 18-65, who are currently employed full-time, part-time, or actively looking for work.

The study is weighted to the 2020 U.S. Census for age, region, gender, and ethnicity. The research study was conducted online from October 18, 2023, to November 7, 2023. The total sample of 1,003 has a margin of error of +/-3.1 percentage points.

CAREY LOHRENZ

— BE FEARLESS —



ABOUT CAREY LOHRENZ

FIGHTER PILOT, BESTSELLING AUTHOR, KEYNOTE SPEAKER

As one of the first female F-14 Tomcat fighter pilots in the U.S. Navy, Carey Lohrenz knows firsthand how inconsistent execution can generate catastrophic results in high-stakes, fast-moving environments.

Lohrenz has translated her pressure-tested leadership and strategy experience to help business leaders thrive in today's competitive business environments. Lohrenz has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, NBC, CBS, ABC, and NPR, and in Vanity Fair, Inc., Time, Huffington Post, and more, and has delivered her high-impact keynotes and programs to thousands of Forbes Global 2000, Fortune 500, and other companies worldwide.

A CEO, board member, business owner, and mom to four kids, Lohrenz inspires individuals and teams how to summon the courage, tenacity, and agility required to execute with excellence amidst adversity. By following her approach, they learn to navigate complexity, lead change, and deliver results when it matters most.

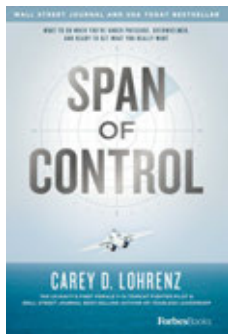
CAREY'S BESTSELLING BOOKS

FEARLESS LEADERSHIP



In “Fearless Leadership: High Performance Lessons from the Flight Deck,” she walks readers through the three fundamentals a leader must possess to exhibit real fearlessness: courage, tenacity, and integrity. Lohrenz then reveals what fearless leadership looks like in action, offering advice on how to set a bold vision, bring the team together (as wingmen, not Top Gun Mavericks), execute effectively, and stay resilient through hard times. Whether they're stepping into their first leadership role or looking to get out of a longstanding rut, readers will find this resource to act like an afterburner, rocketing them to ever-higher levels of performance.

SPAN OF CONTROL



In Span of Control, Lohrenz picks up right where Fearless Leadership left off—encouraging readers to develop resilience for facing hard times. Span of Control offers a collection of moving stories, actionable tools, and opportunities for reader reflection, all of which can be applied immediately in businesses, on teams, and in readers' personal lives. The central tenet of this book—that we focus our attention and effort explicitly and relentlessly on a limited number of priorities that we can, and should, control—offers a clear path out of the chaos and overwhelm that can accompany our biggest challenges and our moments of greatest distress.

FOR MORE TOOLS, RESOURCES, AND MEDIA INQUIRIES CONTACT US



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