

# 2020-07 Silence Is Golden

I am sure many of you have heard the phrase "Silence is Golden." While there are different interpretations, one of the ones I like is that peace and quiet leads to creativity and value. But, when it comes to safety, "silence", especially from those on the front line, can lead to the exact opposite and that not only jeopardizes the health and well being of our teams, but also our businesses. As leaders, it is your responsibility to listen to your teams and create an environment where your employees feel safe and want to speak up and share not only the things which are going well, but more importantly, those areas where there is an opportunity to improve.

Sandrine Rochat from Novacare recently shared the following thoughts about what leads to "Silence in the Workplace" and what YOU can do to break the Silence.

## **Many mechanisms contribute to organizational silence:**

- **Psychological mechanisms** : *When an individual is placed in a difficult situation that they cannot change, they unconsciously change their perception of the situation to make it more bearable.*
- **Group mechanisms** : *It is very difficult to be the first to provide information, make a report, or propose an idea, when you are a member of a group where silence is part of the culture.*
- **Organizational mechanisms** :
  - o **managerial illusions**: *managers can believe that the situation is under control, simply because of the number of procedures.*
  - o **managers don't understand the situation in the field** : *an employee will be reluctant to report a hazardous situation if the manager lacks the technical knowledge and experience needed to be able to understand the subtleties of a problem.*
  - o **normalization of deviance**: *when there are so many rules that it is impossible to follow them all, it becomes realistic to break one of them.*
  - o **when what is prescribed is incompatible with day-today reality**, *most actors in the field take refuge in silence.*
  - o **sanctions policy**: *if, in some case, reporting hazardous situations or errors is punished, it is likely that a wall of silence will soon follow.*
  - o **lack of a response**: *why continue to provide feedback if nothing is done about it?*

## **To counter organizational silence, you need a just culture to encourage a climate of trust and have workers feel free to speak-up**

- **a clear boundary between what is acceptable and what is not** : *life saving rules for ex....*
- **appropriate and consistent managerial reactions to deviations** : *the right to make mistakes, fair treatment*
- **giving recognition for positive contributions** : *initiatives and suggestions for improvement but also reporting incidents.....*

COVID-19 has impacted all of us in different ways, including physical and psychological fatigue/strain. Creating a climate of trust and a safe place for people to speak up will enable you to create the bonds you and your teams need to stay safe and emerge stronger from this pandemic.

Stay Safe and Healthy,

James