

SECURE BASE LEADERSHIP: A POWERFUL APPROACH FOR A CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Founded on a large body of work on attachment theory¹ and developed for use in a contemporary leadership context.

Think of a toddler: Assuming they are with a care giver who provides safety and connectedness, their instinct is to explore. They check from time to time to make sure that the care-giver is still present. Having gained reassurance that it is safe, they continue with their exploration.

If we feel safe, our natural instinct is to explore, to stretch and learn. The care-giver is the secure base for the child.



Secure base leadership works on the same principle: A secure base leader provides a sense of protection, safety and caring AND offers a source of inspiration and energy for daring, exploration, risk-taking and seeking challenge².

Of more than 1000 Australian employees canvassed in an online survey in 2017 and again in 2019, only 44% indicated that mistakes they made at work were not held against them, and only a third in 2017 (and 28% in 2019) agreed that it was safe to take risks at work³.



In the face of an actual or perceived threat, our primitive brain prompts us to resist change or avoid risk to protect us.



Secure base leaders simultaneously shut down the brain's focus on fear and threat and encourage curiosity and risk taking, while inspiring exploration, which brings out the inherent potential in people².



Creating a psychologically safe environment at work is the starting point for secure base leadership (necessary but not sufficient). Secure base leaders need to do more – once followers feel safe and cared for, the secure base leader needs to challenge followers, encouraging risk-taking and exploration, in other words unleashing potential.

Secure base leaders positively impact performance; they rate higher than their non-secure base counterparts on the following⁴:

As measured by their followers:

- Leadership effectiveness
- Job satisfaction
- Psychological safety

As measured by their leaders:

- Leadership effectiveness
- Results orientation
- Relationship orientation



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Are you a secure base leader?

Behaviours of secure base leaders:



1. Stay calm

Remains composed and dependable especially under pressure



2. Accept others

Separates the person from the problem, avoids judging or criticising



3. See potential in others

Challenges people to do their best, delivers tough feedback and holds people accountable



4. Use listening and enquiry

Listens, asks open questions, engages in dialogue versus telling people what to do



5. Deliver powerful messages

Simple, powerful statements or gestures delivered at the right time



6. Focus on the positive

Sees the opportunity for learning even in times of difficulty



7. Encourage risk taking

Dares people to unleash their potential, provides opportunities, supports autonomy, doesn't over-control



8. Inspire through intrinsic motivation

Because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable



9. Signal accessibility

Creates the perception of accessibility – and back it up with actions

Actions of secure base leaders:



1. Build trust and create a bonded team



2. Lead change, including grieving loss



3. Focus the attention of self and others



4. Play to win (vs. not to lose)

Secure base leadership is not passive; it is an active engagement by leaders with their followers. Secure base leaders have tough conversations, and they hold people accountable. Members of secure base teams believe that their leader 'has their back' and 'believes in their potential'; they are more likely to take on board feedback, rise to the occasion and deliver great outcomes.



In order to sustain being a secure base leader for others, you need to have secure bases yourself. Secure bases need to be a combination of people and goals. Who and what are your secure bases?



Check out these videos for more information:

1. [Secure Base Leadership – An Introduction](#)

2. [Secure Base Leaders – Frequently Asked Questions](#)

3. [Secure Base Leadership – Characteristics of Secure Base Leaders](#)

4. [Secure Base leadership – Actions of Secure Base Leaders](#)

To learn more about how you can enhance your secure base leadership skills, please contact

Liane Kemp at LKemp@KempStreetPartners.com.au