

Leading at the Speed of Change:

Safety, Trust, and Adaptation in Modern Tech Leadership

This document builds on our lightning talks at CTO Craft Con, exploring how technology leaders navigate sustained scrutiny, uncertainty and pressure while protecting trust, safety and performance.



Session Summary

Jenny Martin - Leading with the Heart: The Case for Kindness

We all know about technical debt, but what about cultural debt – the gradual erosion of trust, autonomy and engagement that builds when pressure drives leaders towards more directive, extrinsic approaches to motivation. Too often the response is a set of sticky-plaster fixes – pizza evenings and duvet days – rather than addressing the underlying cultural and systemic issues at play.

Kindness is not softness. It is clarity, consistency and courage under pressure, and leadership that actively protects the basic human needs for autonomy, competence and belonging.

“In the past jobs were about muscles, now they’re about brains, but in the future they’ll be about the heart” – Minouche Shafik

Jenny is a practitioner and facilitator with over 25 years’ experience at the intersection of technology, delivery and human behaviour. She supports senior leaders to build compassionate, high-performance cultures grounded in psychological safety. She is author of OOPSI, a practical framework helping teams cut through complexity and deliver with confidence.



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Matthew Bellringer - Safe-enough for Uncertainty

You face a double-bind - the pressure to deploy unproven tools versus the need to deliver robust, reliable systems. As seen in the 2025 Amazon US-EAST-1 outage, complex change is never fully predictable. To break this impasse, you cannot wait for certainty; you must leverage diverse perspectives to identify "weak signals" and improve problem tractability.

To be able to benefit from diverse perspectives, you need people to share them willingly. Since meaningful work is consequential and the risk of speaking up differs for different people, "safe spaces" are often unrealistic. Instead, aim for a "safe-enough" environment. This framework empowers the most vulnerable voices to contribute, allowing you to navigate the uncertainty you face more effectively.

Matthew supports senior leaders navigating uncertainty and complexity, helping them combine diverse perspectives to make better decisions in ambiguous environments. His work centres on creating conditions that are “safe enough” for experimentation, adaptation and sustained performance in rapidly changing contexts.



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Ceri Newton-Sargunar - Impactful Leadership Under Pressure

Pressure to deliver at pace in high-volatility environments often triggers unhelpful reactive behaviours. Stress narrows thinking, communication becomes abrupt, and decisions can land poorly. What begins as urgency can escalate into overwhelm and conflict.

When leaders understand how stress shapes perception and behaviour, they are better able to recognise and regulate their responses in real time. This creates space to respond intentionally rather than reflexively.

The shift from reactive to regulated leadership strengthens clarity, influence and systemic awareness. It enables leaders to shape change rather than be driven by it.

Ceri is an interactions specialist, systemic consultant and trainee neuroscientist who helps leaders make sense of complexity and work together more effectively. With a background in teaching and coaching, she translates behavioural science into practical insight for senior teams navigating pressure and change. Her work centres on helping leaders find calm in the chaos and make clearer, more deliberate decisions.



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Core Leadership Tensions

Technology leadership now operates under **sustained scrutiny and pressure**. AI acceleration, stakeholder expectation, shifting priorities and delivery demands collide. Expectations remain high. The margin for error feels thin.

CTOs are required to **act before certainty exists**. Decisions are made with incomplete information. At times, change can feel profoundly unsafe; like walking through a minefield. Getting something wrong may carry serious or even catastrophic consequences. The responsibility sits with you to get things moving safely.

As pace intensifies, communication becomes more transactional and blunt. Relationships strain. Conflict is avoided or escalates. **Team cohesion becomes harder to sustain**. Trust quietly erodes. This leads to lower motivation and engagement, rising stress and less consistent performance. Absence increases.

Under this pressure, everything feels urgent at once. It becomes harder to think clearly or hold the whole picture. Decisions become more reactive. Even experienced leaders question their capability in these moments. The responsibility remains. Stress becomes the norm. **What begins as professional pressure tips into sustained overwhelm**.

Together, all of these tensions lead to struggling, burnt-out leaders and teams, who cannot perform at the level they can and must.

How We Can Help

We work with senior technology leaders to strengthen the capability to lead well under scrutiny and pace, combining experience in uncertainty, team performance and leadership under pressure at the intersection of strategy, relationships and decision-making.

Our work supports you to:

- Navigate uncertainty more effectively, making decisions with incomplete information and engaging with failure constructively rather than defensively.
- Lead with greater compassion and courage – strengthening clear, authentic communication, addressing conflict constructively and modelling the behaviours that build psychological safety.
- Regulate under pressure, step back when everything feels urgent and make clearer strategic decisions rather than reactive ones.

The result is greater clarity and confidence under pressure, enabling stronger influence and environments where teams operate at pace with sustained cohesion and performance.

Ways We can Work Together

Focused Leadership Workshops

High-impact sessions hosted by us, centred on navigating uncertainty, leading with compassion and courage, and making clear strategic decisions under pressure.

Extended Bespoke Leadership Development

A tailored programme combining leadership workshops with 1:1 support, designed around your specific context, priorities and leadership goals.

Strategic Leadership Partnership

A longer-term engagement enabling cultural and systemic change, through assessment, targeted interventions, team support and ongoing advisory input.

If you would like to explore how this could support your leadership team, we would welcome a short conversation. You are also welcome to contact any of us directly.

Book a Conversation:

<https://meeting.calendarhero.com/ctocraft>