



## How do YOU Handle Others' Mistakes and Failures?

April 2017



**Let's face it –  
we all make mistakes and we all fail at times.**

Sometimes it's because we're too rushed and overwhelmed and we're not paying attention, we miss a deadline or we didn't think it through. **Sometimes it's because we made our best decision at the time, but it didn't work.** Sometimes it's because we didn't know enough or we didn't enlist others' help and guidance. There are all kinds of reasons that don't mean we're incompetent or uncommitted. These are the mistakes and failures I'm talking about here.

I'm not talking about mistakes and failures that occur because of laziness, lack of commitment, sloppy work, incompetence or negligence. Those need to be addressed differently and that's another whole discussion.

### **How have you been treated when you messed up?**

That can color how we treat others. Let me share a story with you



### **What did you learn from your last mistake?**

There are things to be learned on a daily basis if we're paying attention and asking questions. Do you just move on or do you take time to look at the situation to mentally register your learning?

### **Here are some great questions to ask yourself or others:**

- In hindsight, what would you do differently?
- What did you hear in the way of comments or feedback and what do they mean?
- What factors were at play that I might examine more closely?
- What worked? Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater!

that continues to impact me today whenever I'm tempted to beat myself up over mistakes and failures. I had a boss years ago whose name was Bob. He taught me a huge amount and was a great model for how to manage people. The organization encouraged experimentation, trying new things and creating new methods, services and solutions. I loved being part of that and whenever I'd try something and it failed or fell far short of my goals, Bob would say to me, **"So what did you learn? What are you going to do differently when you try it the next time?"** He didn't discourage me, but instead, encouraged me to try again using what I had learned.



**Too often, when we try something and it doesn't work, we walk away from it.** Did you know that on average, inventors fail seven times before they succeed? Thomas Edison had 1000 attempts before he finally got the light bulb to work. Do you encourage others to fail? Do you treat them and their failures with curiosity, as a learning opportunity and the chance to try again? One thing I hate hearing people say in an organization or a team is, "We tried that once and it didn't work." That always spurs me to ask, what happened? What did you learn? How could you do it differently next time?

### What about when you mess up?

Well, Bob taught me about that too. I remember once I really created a problem for others in the way I handled something. He came to me, and simply and directly said, "Joy, you screwed up. You did X and as a result, this happened. Next time, do this. Understand?" I said yes, I got it! And then he said let's go get some lunch and I never heard another word about it.

- What is the biggest thing you would change?
- What is the smallest thing with the biggest impact that could be changed?
- What did I learn about the way that person reacted and a better way to approach them in the future?
- Who knows about this who could give me another perspective?
- Am I being too hard on myself or others?

You can't make the **same** mistake twice.  
The second time you make it, it's no longer a mistake.  
**IT'S A CHOICE**

**IT'S NOT HOW WE MAKE MISTAKES, BUT HOW WE CORRECT THEM THAT DEFINES US.**  
RACHEL WOLCHIN  
THEGOODVIBE.CO

**When you have made a mistake, what do you do?**

He taught me a number of things from those three little sentences and his demeanor. One, he didn't shy away from dealing with the issue. He didn't brush it under the rug just because it's hard to tell someone they messed up. Two, he was direct and clear. He made sure I understood the consequences of my actions along with how he expected me to handle the same situation differently in the future. And three, he didn't dwell on it. He didn't make me feel terrible. And we went to lunch and it was never spoken of again which told me I still had his confidence and support. He was one of my greatest cheerleaders throughout my career. **He cared enough to see that I got the feedback I needed to grow and that he still had my back and was there to support me.**

### **So what do you do when a colleague or a subordinate messes up?**

Do you have the courage to give them the feedback they need to hear so they won't make that mistake again? Do you make sure they know the consequences their action created? And do they walk away knowing it was a single incident and it doesn't change how you feel about them or how you want to support them as a team member?

The way Bob managed me taught me to pick myself up and try again and when I mess something up, to acknowledge it, know what I should have done and move forward with new experience under my belt.

We have long-term impact in others' lives in the way we handle their mistakes and failures. **If they are a good team member, committed and competent, then show them your support and help them to get back up and learn so they can move forward and be better for the future.** Someone did that for me and it made all the difference! Even if they aren't yet a great team member or fully competent yet, supporting them and handling their mistakes and performance well can help get them there.

How you respond says volumes about you, and the way you handle it often has a greater impact than the mistake itself. Covering up mistakes often doesn't go well. It's usually better to admit the mistake, apologize if it's appropriate and what you're going to do to fix it or to see that it doesn't happen again. Apologizing has an amazing impact. Often, the apology means more to people on the positive side than the mistake did on the negative side. Be a big enough person to apologize.



**And, if you've had a really bad day and you're reeling from a failure or mistake, go home and hug your dog.**

**If you don't have a dog, stop by the pet store or the pound on the way home and they'll loan you one for a few hugs.**

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Oh, and one more thought. When someone's mistake or failure affects the team, its success or its reputation to higher ups, when asked what happened, don't point the finger at the individual. You can say that there was a mistake made or that something didn't work as planned or that unfortunately a deadline was missed, but when asked who, you can say, we're a team. It doesn't matter who – we're all working together to fix it, to move forward and to make sure it doesn't happen again. That will not only show the individual you have their back, but when you train your team to respond in that way, you will be building invaluable trust and cohesion in that team and they will also learn what it means to support one another and function as a team. Watch their productivity soar when that happens!

Warmly,



**Learn how to make every mistake an opportunity for growth. Contact me!**



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