

Workplace Mistakes: A Survival Guide

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Workplace Mistakes: A Survival Guide

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With an employment background that includes Manager of Training and Employee Development for an international engineering and design company, Operations Training Manager for a Fortune 500 bank, and co-owner of a bank courier company, he understands performance and leadership issues from the perspective of line employee, senior manager, and executive level.

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Introduction

This course is not about how to avoid making mistakes – as if writing such a course were actually possible – but how to recover as gracefully as possible from the inevitable moments when you wish you could rewind the tape and start over.

There will be times when you make a mistake because some external source was not as reliable as you thought. Or, it may come from your own internal errors in processing information, being impatient, or simply using bad judgment.

Regardless of the reason for your mistake, your reaction, recovery, and learning will almost always determine the impact of the event on your career from that moment forward. Everyone makes mistakes. It is essential to learning and a part of life. But not everyone recovers well or learns from them. As philosopher George Santayana said, *“Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”*

If you can set aside your ego for personal growth, you can get to the point where you see every failure as bearing a gift for you: the gift of learning. That was Thomas Edison’s philosophy when he replied to a reporter who had asked him if he was afraid of making mistakes saying, “No. That’s how I learn what doesn’t work.”

This course will help you assess the situation quickly, recover, and move forward with the least amount of career (and relationship) damage possible while continually learning...learning...learning.

Learning Outcomes

Participants taking this course will:

1. Learn to identify the common source of all mistakes we make
2. Be able to list the five key failures within common mistakes
3. Be able to identify the foundation to personal growth when dealing with mistakes
4. Be able to identify the two obstacles to getting help from others
5. Be able to list six obstacles to effective listening
6. Be able to discuss the Sunk Cost fallacy and how it applies to decision making

The Common Source of Your Mistakes

Dictionary.com defines mistake as “An error in action, calculation, opinion, or judgment caused by poor reasoning, carelessness, insufficient knowledge, etc. It is a misunderstanding or misconception.”

In other words, it is **an action originating with you – you are the common source of all your mistakes!**

Success does not consist in never making mistakes but in never making the same one a second time.

[George Bernard Shaw](#)

Please do not take offense here – I am not trying to be antagonistic but only to lead you to the recognition, and admission, that regardless of what external sources contributed to your particular mistake, it is still your action that made it happen.

Consider these common situations in the workplace:

- You are late for work because:
 - You overslept when the alarm did not go off. (Who is responsible for setting the alarm or has a backup in case the power goes out?)
 - There are traffic problems. (Who selected that road you took or what time to leave home?)
 - Your car had problems. (Whose job is it to maintain the car?)
- You missed a deadline because;
 - Someone on whom you relied for information failed to get it to you. (Who failed to keep in touch to make sure they could meet your deadline?)
 - You got sick. (Who failed to maintain your health or act at the onset of earliest symptoms?)
 - IT problems prevented your collecting the data, writing the report, and printing the hardcopy. (Who failed to anticipate potential problems and plan accordingly?)
 - Your boss kept changing the requirements. (Who failed to tell your boss that constantly changing the requirements meant that you could not settle down and

deliver a final set of data? If you do not tell him or her that their actions are causing you problems, it is too late to say something when the deadline passes. Who is responsible for your work performance – the Boss or you?)

- You missed an appointment because:
 - You misplaced your schedule. (Who manages YOUR schedule for you?)
 - You lost track of time. (See the previous 'Who...' statement)
 - Your transportation failed to materialize. (Who manages your mobility?)

In every case, you either failed to plan sufficiently or did not have plan "B" ready as a backup.

It is critical to recognize your role in the mistakes. Without that admission, you cannot take the steps necessary for career recovery and personal growth. Additionally, it makes it more likely that others will forgive you if you are sincere - and they believe you - about your role in the situation. (We will talk a lot more about the recovery stage later.)

Learn from the **mistakes** of others- you cannot live long enough to make them all yourself.

- [Martin Vanbee](#)

Key Failures within Common Mistakes

There are at least five key failures associated with the common mistakes we make at work.

In no particular order:

1. **Failure to admit** to being an imperfect human being;
2. **Failure to use** available knowledge, skills, or experience
3. **Failure to understand** *from the other's viewpoint* the expectations of the situation
4. **Failure to assess** your personal habits, beliefs, or practices for potential traps;
5. **Failure to consider** what *could go wrong* instead of *what may go wrong*

Failure to admit...

Admitting that we are less than perfect is the foundation for any potential growth that may result from making mistakes. Even though we may have graduated at the top of our class with a perfect 4.0 GPA or had a grandmother who constantly gushed about how perfect we were growing up, we still have room for errors and subsequent learning from them. But only if we are smart enough to admit our imperfections.

This self-directed honesty is the basis for rehabilitation from destructive behaviors such as making repeated mistakes to alcohol or drug addiction. For example, when a participant rises to speak in an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, their first statement is always, "Hello, My name is (name). I am an alcoholic." You cannot grow as a person if you do not think there is room for it.

If you can always consider yourself a work in progress with the capacity to make mistakes, admit them, learn from them, and move on, then your career will continue to grow as you earn the admiration and respect of those around you.

For example, the popularity of advice columnist Ann Landers rose when she announced that she was getting a divorce in the 1970s. The so-called expert relationships had problems of her own. She publicly admitted them. Communication experts and public relations folks have found that people dislike those who admit their mistakes (characteristics we most see in ourselves.)



What about President John Kennedy's handling of the Cuban offensive in the Bay of Pigs? Consider this one of the hallmark blunders of our leaders to do the right things but are impudently in the habit of blaming everyone around them.

More recently, lifestyle diva Oprah Winfrey served a prison term as a stepping-stone to her success. Clearly, people can recover from colossal blunders.

To view the remainder of the course material and to take the quiz for PDH credit, you must purchase the course. Close this window and click "Add to cart" on the product page.