

## SOLUTIONS

# Making Good Mistakes

**If you don't want a mistake to get the best of you, make the best of the mistake!**



Continued from the Front Page

As we all continue to learn from our mistakes, here are some of Ramsey's observations to keep in mind:

**Most mistakes are not as bad as we think they are.**

Sure, our mistake may seem like a big deal when we're the one who made it. But to almost everyone else, it's just another day at the office and something your peers will likely leave at the door and forget as soon as they go home. Most people just have too many other things to worry about. A few of your detractors may try to dwell on it, but the majority won't notice and probably won't care. As Ramsey states, "It happens to everyone. Ho-hum. Move on."

**Making a mistake can actually be a good thing.**

Catching a mistake early on can point you to potential hot spots in a work process or procedure, a problem that could be brewing in a professional relationship with a team member or customer, or simply prevent you from taking the wrong course of action on some future endeavor. Ramsey believes that mistakes are only bad "if we don't pay attention to them" and learn from them.

**Not all mistakes are preventable.**

Stuff happens. Ramsey contends that, "some errors will occur no matter what safeguards or preventative measures you employ." When mistakes happen – and they will, ask yourself, "Did I do the best job I could do with the resources and information available to me and my team at the time?" If your answer is yes, move on. If your answer is no, plan what you will do differently the next time. Then move on.

**Do not be paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake.**

Author and lecturer Elbert Hubbard said, "The greatest mistake a man can make in life is to be afraid of making one." As a leader, you have been

placed in a position to make things happen. Whatever that means for you, some action on your part will generally be better than doing nothing at all, even if the action proves to be wrong. To paraphrase Ramsey, successful leaders must know the difference between caution and ineffectiveness.

Look at Thomas Edison, the great inventor who tried two thousand different materials in search of a filament for the light bulb. When none worked satisfactorily, his frustrated assistant complained, "All our work is in vain. We have learned nothing." Edison replied very confidently, "Oh, we have come a long way and we have learned a lot. We now that there are two thousand elements which we cannot use to make a good light bulb."

**Don't procrastinate when it comes to admitting – and fixing a mistake.**

Admitting to a mistake as soon as it is discovered is the first step to getting back on track and getting down to business. Your employees and workplace peers will respect your courage to take responsibility and your detractors (should you have any) will be left with little to say once you have said, "I'm sorry, I was wrong."

Once you've acknowledged the mistake, put on your thinking cap and rally your team to help you plan your next steps. Remember, by taking this action, you are also sending your team a message. The message is that you expect them to display

the same courage you have shown when they make mistakes too. As author Pearl S. Buck stated, "Every mistake has a halfway moment, a split second when it can be recalled and perhaps remedied." If your team feels that they can't admit a mistake to you or anyone else, that "split-second" chance your team may need to remedy the situation may be lost.

---

**Mistakes can  
break leaders or  
reveal them**

---

Continued on the next page.

Your employees need to understand that just as you make mistakes, so will they. When it happens, it will be part of your job to help them correct it. How you do it will define who you are as a leader. Perhaps author Hans Finzel states it best in his book, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leader Make*. Finzel says, “good supervisors are people who can step on your toes without messing up your shine.” In other words, even George Gobel’s brown shoes can still look good!

### **The Bottom Line**

Whether you realize it or not, you are being watched. That may sound a little scary, but it’s true. Your team, your peers and your leaders are watching you. No, they’re not trying to catch you wearing one brown shoe and one black shoe. They are watching to see how you react to the challenges you face – and how you react to a mistake you make. Ramsey believes that “mistakes can break leaders or reveal them. How you handle your mistakes will determine what kind of leader you are – or can be.”

Ramsey believes that mistakes are part of life’s working “tests.” And that when we are faced with one of these “tests” we should each try to avoid the following reactions:

- Ignoring the mistake
- Denying the mistake happened
- Lying about how the mistake happened
- Hiding the mistake
- Shifting the blame for the mistake
- Giving up

On the other hand, if you want to meet a mistake head-on, deal with it and pass the “test,” Ramsey encourages leaders at every level to consider some simple strategies:

- Take responsibility
- Make a sincere apology
- Correct the error as best you can
- Make amends (if necessary)
- Learn the lesson
- Move on and try again

Remember that a mistake can only be as big as you allow it to be. If you don’t want a mistake to get the best of you, but instead, want to make the best of the mistake, following these strategies will help you grow as a person and enhance your reputation as an outstanding leader.

[Click here](#) to return to the Front Page.

---

Resources:

Ramsey, Robert D. (2003, January, Vol. 64). The art of making mistakes. *Supervision*.

Finzel, Hans. (2004). *Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*, Chariot Victor Publishing.