

Addressing Mistakes

Acknowledging that you have made a mistake is the first step in moving beyond it. Ignoring an error will only compound the problem for you, your organization, and your team.

If you have made a mistake, consider these suggestions for owning it and moving forward:

- 1. Apologize.** Keep your apology short and to the point.

Sample language: “I (state mistake). I am sorry about how it will affect our workload and the reputation of our team.”

- 2. Take responsibility.** It’s hard to swallow your pride and own a mistake. However, doing so may increase your credibility with colleagues. Avoid placing blame on others or putting too much emphasis on circumstances. Stay focused on solving the problem.

Sample language: “This is my responsibility. I know I’ve set us back.”

- 3. Outline a recovery plan.** Ask your team for suggestions on how to get the project back on track. Obtain as much input as possible from those directly affected by your error.

Sample language: “I need your help to fix this. What do you think we should do first?”



- 4. Outline preventative steps.** Most people will tolerate a mistake so long as it is not repeated. Using an error as a learning opportunity, or “falling forward,” as it is sometimes called, may help improve internal processes, training, communication, and individual work habits. Get your team’s input on ways to avoid repeating this mistake (or others like it) in the future.

Sample language: “What steps can we take to prevent something like this from happening again?”

Mistakes are an opportunity to model the behavior you expect from others in similar circumstances. A solution-focused response will demonstrate that you are capable of handling a challenging situation. Accept the fact that you will inevitably make mistakes; then make the best of them.

The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can provide suggestions on how to “fall forward” after a mistake. Call 24/7/365.

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