

How "mistakes" can build stronger teams and drive success!

"Nothing has been achieved without a mistake first being made."

Our society is based on right and wrong. Most of us who are adults now probably went through school with the understanding that there was only one right answer and all others are wrong. The conditioned belief we developed from this message was that if we get things "wrong," we are a failure.

The truth, however, is that nothing of significance has ever been achieved on this planet without a mistake first being made. The stories of Thomas Edison, Colonel Sanders and other visionaries tell us that people who make a difference are not afraid of mistakes; in fact, they celebrate each and every time they make them. When Thomas Edison finally nailed the invention of the light bulb, he reportedly was asked how it felt to have made so many mistakes before he got it "right". In response, he excitedly stated that, rather than seeing his efforts as mistakes, he was quite happy that he had successfully discovered what not to do on his next attempt. Every mistake provides the information we need to succeed.

Reframing the Definition of "Mistake"


If we equate mistakes with failure, we significantly limit our capacity to succeed. With this perspective, we also affect the capabilities of those we work and live with, because we also think of them as failures when they don't get things right.

There is, however, a simple, easy-to-implement solution – a way to recondition our minds and "reframe" how we respond to mistakes. Think of a situation recently where you made a mistake – you really blew it. What was your response? If you are like most of us, you probably felt terrible and began to beat yourself up. You probably spent significant energy and time going over and over the situation. Or, maybe your initial reaction was to blame it on someone or something else – it wasn't your fault.

It is wholly appropriate to attempt to find a solution – avoiding making the same mistake a second time can save significant time, money and energy. There is, however, a simple solution that takes less energy and is much more productive.



3 Keys to Transforming Mistakes into Success

The solution lies in reconditioning our response process. Through our years of experience, we have learned that there are 3 critical steps in this process.  -irstly, if you and/or your team can begin to think of and refer to mistakes as "learning experiences," focussing on what you have learned, rather than what went wrong, over time you

will become less afraid of making "mistakes" and will be able to respond and correct faster and with more success.



Secondly, we recommend a simple, yet powerful process for "debriefing" learning experiences. This process can be used in teams, between individuals, or when reviewing your own actions. There are four questions to ask, in this order:

1. What happened? (Just the facts! No emotions allowed!)
2. What worked/didn't work? (Create two lists.)
3. What did I/we learn?
4. What can I/we do differently next time?



The final piece is to celebrate. Every mistake we make offers us the opportunity to learn. Learning something new is exciting. It means that we are, in some fashion, "bigger" than we were before. So, we encourage you to celebrate every single time you or others around you have a learning experience!

These strategies may sound simple, or, to some, a bit hokey, but don't write them off until you try them – because they work. A tremendous body of research has proven that the ability to get the "lesson" in every mistake and see the opportunity it presents is one of the critical factors in driving individual, team and organizational success. It's one step in getting The EQ Advantage™.

What you can do right now...

- *Stop calling them mistakes and start calling them "learning experiences!"*
- *Establish a simple, easy-to-follow "debrief" model to use when reviewing mistakes. Get agreement from the people you work with to use this model to create a "safe" way to talk about the situation.*
- *Establish a ritual (such as giving a "high five") to celebrate every learning experience. You'll find this simple process takes the emotional "edge" off the situation and makes people less afraid to discuss the situation.*

EQ Advantage Programs that can help ...

- *Team communication and relationship training.*
- *Creating a culture of trust.*
- *Establishing a common language – cross-functional communications systems that work.*

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