



3 Leadership Tips for Creating Learning Opportunities from Mistakes

When you make a mistake, don't look back at it long. Take the reason of the thing into your mind and then look forward. Mistakes are lessons of wisdom. The past cannot be changed. The future is yet in your power.

Hugh White

While I was working for a client on a training program for his organization, I was approached by one of the junior supervisors with a question. "How can you correct a behavior without discouraging the person?"

The situation was that the boss who worked for the agency I was working with had several junior supervisors and he was trying to build their leadership skills. That was great. However, several of the newer members of the team were very inexperienced and their mistakes were often the only feedback they received from their boss.

In a perfect world, people would understand that criticism is not a value judgment on the person. But rather, a suggestion as to how a behavior should be modified in order to be more effective. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

Particularly with new supervisors, they don't yet have the confidence that comes with experience not to take criticism personally. That is why it is so important that experienced managers remember this and package their suggestions in a form that clearly removes criticism of the person from the behavior to be modified.

This is how I answered the question.

Before any criticism, preface comments with at least one positive comment. This relaxes the person listening and will enable them to better listen to what you have to say.

Ask the person how things could be made better. Rather than telling someone what to do, ask them and turn the discussion into an opportunity to learn. First, being asked your opinion is always a complement and shows that your opinion is respected. Secondly, a solution suggested by the person who needs to modify their behavior is much more likely to be successful.

End with another observation on what the person did well. It doesn't hurt to remind people what they did well in order to reinforce the behavior. Also, people will leave the conversation feeling more positive and more willing to listen at future learning opportunities.

Leadership is all about communications. The ability to help subordinates separate criticism of the person from criticism of behavior enables constructive feedback to become opportunities for learning.

Being a new leader can be challenging. Often, you are not taught how to lead. Rather, you are expected to learn it on the job. This can be a slow and frustrating process. In order to kick-start your leadership development and better enable yourself to rise within the organization, give John a call today.

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