

Taking The Sting Out Of Mistakes

‘Responsibility equals accountability equals ownership. And a sense of ownership is the most powerful weapon a team or organisation can have,’ wrote Pat Summitt – who Kate Ashley-Norman quotes in this article on building employee confidence and not letting previous mistakes become a barrier to future innovation.



Pat Summitt was a US college basketball coach who won an astonishing 84% of her games. When she was 12, Pat’s father, a dairy and tobacco farmer, left her in a hayfield, pointed to a tractor and said, ‘when I come back, this work better be done’. No instructions, no sympathy.

Pat figured it out and completed the gruelling task. Her can-do attitude gave her confidence to crack on regardless.

There are those who can roll up their sleeves and get on with a task even if they don’t really know what they are doing; and there are those who faff around the edges, make a coffee, check their phone – and then double check once again what they need to do.

Procrastination

It may be that the procrastination comes from waiting for someone to reassure us that what we’re

doing is the right thing. Or it may be that we are so frightened of making mistakes that taking that next step forward is frozen in indecision. Think back to some of the mistakes you’ve made in the past. How many of them have you truly owned up to?

We’ve all felt it – the gut-wrenching, bottom-clenching realisation that you’ve made a massive balls-up that could potentially cost you big. It keeps you awake at night. It dogs your every waking moment.

Why do we try and hide mistakes?

The greatest driver is fear. Fear of being found out. Fear of being judged. Fear for our position. Fear that we have let an individual or an organisation down. Fear of appearing incompetent, stupid. Fear of the possible consequences. Working with the fear of making a mistake can trigger Cove’s Law. Cove’s Law states that when there is a

conflict between your conscious will and your imagination, your imagination will always win. So, we can go through life desperately hoping not to make a mistake but the fear is there – and the fear is stronger, leading to an inevitable mistake.

Ownership

Engendering a greater sense of responsibility and ownership will encourage an individual to build confidence and pride in their work. That confidence and pride will decrease overall stress levels, which in turn will help the individual to focus better and be less likely to make mistakes. If mistakes are made, ownership of those mistakes will rip away any long-term negative consequences in the bud. We must learn and understand that the mistake is a valuable lesson and seek to rectify that mistake in a manner that is proactive. And just as importantly, move on without dwelling on that mistake.

That is where you as an employer and I as a consultant, can help to take the negativity out of mistakes and use them as productive life and business lessons – whilst letting your staff know they must learn from but not cover up mistakes. **i**

[Kate Ashley-Norman partners with fenestration companies to strengthen employee wellbeing.](#)
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