

## For managers, humble pie is on the menu

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It's something few of us consider when we dream of the corner office with its lavish views and plush carpets. Rarely is it discussed when hi-po's (high-potentials) get together over cocktails to discuss how much better they'd do things than their bosses. But there it is, managers, staring you in the face on a pretty regular basis. That tugging, sinking feeling in your gut after you realize you screwed up. Now you have to publicly take responsibility due to that snazzy office of yours.

The higher you rise, the bigger the decisions you make and the bigger messes you can therefore create. Now your decisions not only affect how your boss feels about you, but maybe an entire company as well. Oh, the shame. Oh, the horror. Oh, mea culpa. No matter what the excuse or reason, you messed it up and now you have to face the music. But how you admit defeat will set the tone for the rest of your tenure at your company and maybe for the rest of your career.

The grace with which you handle failure defines you, Generation X. The way you finesse your way through a major flub shines a light on your innermost fabric and illuminates your fairness and humility. While I'd love to write that you'll only make one mistake and never experience ill fate again, this wouldn't be the truth. We all make mistakes, some of us daily. In between you will see many successes; but I'd be fooling you if I said you'd never trip up again. We are only human and as such we are fallible. As a wise person once said, "the bigger they are the harder they fall" and fall you will. I can only offer you some advice as you do. Call it a Band-Aid or a crutches, but here it is:

1) Own up. As a manager it is very hard to continue to discipline someone who is earnestly sorry and willing to accept the part he played in the debacle. Stand out in front of the mistake and others will follow. This is a big step toward creating a culture of accountability and authenticity. Just make sure you aren't faking it, which could get you into even more trouble.

2) Spill it. It's possible your manager might not want to know why you messed up, but when the time is right do find the words to restore faith in your abilities with your manager and co-workers. Too often we find ourselves feeling as though we don't have to explain ourselves to others, but this is wrong. Authentic humility goes a long way in rebuilding trust and also providing context to those around you. Just make sure your explanation doesn't involve a long sordid tale of relationship woes or personal financial struggles. Keep that stuff to yourself. "I've been very distracted by a few personal matters" will suffice.

3) Get it together. Tell your manager and others who are affected what you will be doing in the

future to avoid mistakes. Most people value action. Telling people what you will be doing differently and then sticking to that plan shows them it's important to you not to let them down again. Just make sure your plan isn't a veiled way to show others to shift blame, like "I'll be checking Sally's work from now on to ensure it doesn't happen again".

This may be over-simplifying, but no matter the magnitude of your mistake, taking responsibility will help restore the trust you've worked so hard to build. Throw in some context and a plan and you may breeze over this bump. It's important to remember that one mistake does not define you. You may find that you take these steps for some things you didn't even do directly; you'll do it on behalf of those who work for you. This comes with the territory. As a manager you are not only responsible for your gaffs but for those of your employees as well. So get comfy with the three suggestions above and prepare for the storm, Generation X. The corner office isn't always peaches and cream; it's one part power and one part humility. Get used to the taste of humble pie and you'll make out just fine.

NextGen Workbytes is written locally by and for Gen Xers learning the realities of the workplace. Bettyjo H. Bouchey is vice president of campus operations at Empire Education Corp. in Albany, and is involved with a local young professionals' group.

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