



THE Learning Advantage

Mobley's Musings: Mistakes Can Lead to Learning . . . or Lying

When people mess up and admit their mistakes rather than blaming others or covering them up, good things happen. Learning occurs as the person reflects on what happened, what didn't work, and what would achieve a better result. And when the person shares the mistake, it can prevent others from making the same one. I'm reminded of a story about a general manager who made a huge mistake on a product launch that cost the company millions of dollars. When the CEO was asked if he intended to fire the manager, he barked, "Fire him? Hell no! I just spent \$50 million training him."

When people know that mistakes are forgiven, they are more willing to try new things and take risks. And owning up to our mistakes shows our humanity and vulnerability. That, in turn, opens possibilities for others to make mistakes, share them and promote a learning environment.

When people don't admit mistakes, especially when everyone else sees the error, it causes distrust: what else are they covering up? And when public figures who are caught in a lie simply deny wrongdoing and get a pass, it sets a bad precedent for everyone. But lately, I can't remember when someone admitted a mistake and was forgiven. If good behavior is punished and bad behavior ignored, which are we likely to see more often?

Sandy



Sandy Mobley

Ask Sandy

Ask Sandy: How to talk to employees who are never satisfied

What do you do with perpetually dissatisfied employees, the ones who complain that their pay is too low and their promotions too slow? How do you determine if they have a valid concern?

Raj has been in a senior role at a consulting firm for 17 years. He feels he is well paid, but he has not been promoted at the rate he thinks he deserves. Not one to complain, Raj gets irritated when a direct report badgers him about being promoted. He acknowledges that she does good work and has built solid relationships with clients and her staff. Her pay and level are in line with equally talented peers but she wants more.

Another client, Sherry, gave a direct report the highest bonus possible and thanked him for the great work he had done over the year. Sherry works for a government organization and with recent cutbacks, it was a miracle she was able to get his bonus approved. When Sherry asked him how he felt about receiving a bonus, he said, "Well, my last manager took us out for ice cream." Only half-jokingly she told him she'd take everyone out for a lot of ice cream if he wanted to give his bonus back.

Raj's and Sherry's employees are dissatisfied, but their complaints may point to a different issue. In my experience, if I enjoy the work I'm doing the salary is a secondary consideration. But if I don't like the job, pay and promotion become more important: when the work isn't rewarding I need to be rewarded in other ways. I would ask these employees whether they enjoy their work and feel successful doing it. If they honestly like their job but still feel underpaid, passed over for promotions, or otherwise underappreciated, some research is necessary.

First, I investigate the positions' internal equity, comparing how people in similar roles within the organization are paid and promoted (and plied with ice cream). If the internal comparisons are fair, I next look into external equity, checking salary surveys and promotion structures at other companies. But even when shown data that supports their current compensation, some people still need to learn their market value themselves by applying at other employers. I encourage that. If they get a better offer, I'm happy for them. Some companies can afford to pay more than others, so if the pay, benefits, and the position are better for them, I don't try to keep them.

It's been said that the squeaky wheel gets the grease, but sometimes it just gets replaced.

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If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



What Kind of Learner Are You?

"The only competitive domain that remains is how fast we learn," according to Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline* and professor at MIT. Given the importance of learning, how we view our abilities can impact how we approach learning. In her book *Mindset*, Stanford professor Carol Dweck identified two approaches to learning: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. People with a fixed mindset believe they have a set of abilities and that is all. They identify areas where they excel and then hone those skills. They rarely venture into new areas fearing they might not be successful or would look foolish.

The benefit of a fixed mindset is the ability to focus and go deeply in areas of interest. This can serve someone well in a technical area where knowing everything about a particular topic is highly valued. And it can be suitable in a field where things change slowly if at all, like paleontology. I think of a fixed mindset as the force that drives an excellent performer: he knows what he is good at and he performs his tasks well.

But in a changing world, having a fixed mindset can keep you from recognizing the need to enhance your skillset. Performers are great when they are in their zone, but if the situation changes and they have to change what they do and how they do it, problems arise. (Laurence J. Peter, a counselor and university professor, coined this phenomenon "the Peter Principle," where people rise to their level of incompetence.)

People with a growth mindset are dedicated learners. They're always curious, enjoying learning for the sake of learning and more interested in the process than outcomes. As a result they are not goal oriented and, taken to extreme, they may neglect deadlines and ignore the mandate to produce. In the information technology world, these are the folks who spend days and days learning new technology but never get around to sitting down and coding.

Underlying both fixed and growth mindsets is the quality—or depth—of learning. Some learners seem to dabble, flitting from topic to topic. Their knowledge is a mile wide but an inch deep. Others strive to fully understand a topic before moving on, as described by George Leonard in his book *Mastery*. The key is to identify the appropriate depth of learning.

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