



How to Correct Your Employees' Mistakes



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Someone on your team has made a mistake —now what?

Hammer down too hard and the employee might check out. But if you go too soft, the employee might walk all over you. Discover how to firmly address the mistake while treating the employee with respect.

What Really Happened?

You may not have the full story. Give the employee the opportunity to explain the situation. You want to gather as much information as possible before going into a corrective conversation.



In a private setting, try asking open-ended questions like these examples:

- *“What do you feel happened here?”*
- *“How do you think this will impact...?”*
- *“What were the expectations here?”*

Once you’ve heard the employee’s side of the story, use the following script to give your perspective on the mistake and what you expected instead.



Example Script

You [describe mistake in neutral language]
because [repeat the employee's explanation
in your own words], **do I understand correctly?**

- *“You submitted the report to Accounting before me because you misunderstood the process, do I understand correctly?”*
- *“You gave the customer the wrong quote because you had incomplete information, do I understand correctly?”*



When that happens, [describe the negative impact of the behavior]...

- *“When that happens, I don’t have a chance to check the numbers against my updated data...”*
- *“When that happens, the customer can be disappointed and less likely to work with us again...”*

...which is why [describe your expectations.]

- *“...which is why my process checklist had the tasks in that order.”*
- *“...which is why you need to be absolutely sure of the quote before offering.”*



What can we do in the future to ensure this doesn't happen again?

- You're now opening up the conversation for questions. Now that the problem is clear, you can help the employee troubleshoot.
- Even if you have a clear answer you'd like your team-member to reach (*"clear your quotes with me before offering"*), it's best to let them recommend it and take ownership of it.



Fail Forward

This last question represents the important concept of “**failing forward.**” Staying positive and future-focused, shows that mistakes aren’t opportunities for punishment, but for improvement.

Together, you’ll want to answer these questions.

- What went wrong?
- What did we learn?
- How did we fix the problem?
- What will we do differently next time?



And the final step?

Hold them to it.

If the mistake is repeated, your conversations may need to move from correction to discipline.

This may be as simple as shifting the focus of the “negative impact” portion of the conversation from the company to their career.

The Correction Script

- What do you feel happened here?
- You _____
because _____,
do I understand correctly?
- When that happens, _____...
- ...which is why _____.
- What can we do in the future to ensure
this doesn't happen again?





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