



All leaders screw up

Have you ever sent out an email you shouldn't have? It's OK, we all do it. It's natural and these kinds of things make us human. Quite simply: we all make mistakes. As I sat back and reflected on some of the mistake emails I have sent in my lifetime, I thought about a common question asked in interviews all the time: tell me about a time when you screwed up. Have you ever wondered why interviewers ask that question? I believe it's not what happens to you that defines you; it's how you respond...especially when the "you know what" hits the fan. It is what you do in the heat of the moment that shapes all downstream consequences. So, what do you do when you make mistakes? Do you:

- Look for blame?
- Find a "fall guy"?
- Blindly defend your position?
- Argue until the other person caves in?
- Escalate, escalate, escalate?
- Spin the message in your favor?

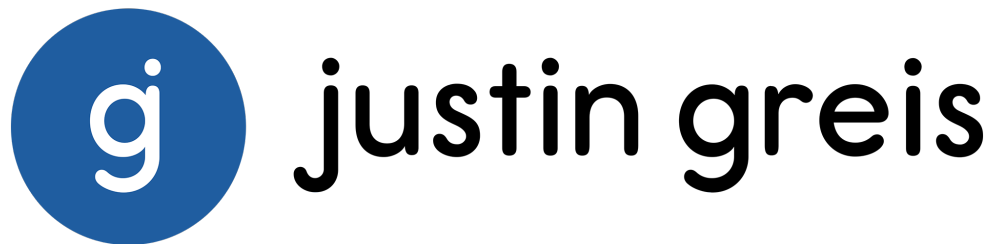
Owning mistakes is something leaders take great pride in. After all, all leaders screw up! It's the nature

of being in the position they are in. Leaders must take risks and risk has consequences, good and bad. If leaders did not take risks, they would be completely ineffective. And since we know that no one is right 100% of the time, leaders are bound to make some bad calls from time to time. And guess what? That's OK. One of the biggest leadership fallacies is leaders do not make mistakes. Leaders make mistakes...and lots of them! At least the good ones do. So, why do so many deflect, dodge and dive below the accountability line and never admit fault? Who knows...Fear, ego, hubris, toxic cultures, and pride are just a few of the common culprits. One of the things I do when I am in situations where I have made a mistake (and I know it) is a trick I employ to counter many reflexive physiological reactions:

1. I stop what I am doing (that means no emails).
2. Take 3-5 deep breaths.
3. I remove myself from my physical surroundings for at least 3-5 minutes. If I can go outside, all the better.
4. I call or talk to the person I offended in-person and do something bold...

Apologize. Admit fault. Tell the other person what I am going to do to make it right.

Admitting your mistakes is not weakness, it is power in the truest sense. Admitting fault displays a sense of awareness and empathy that is so refreshing in a world where mistakes travel at the speed of social media. The most important lesson here is: leadership is not about always being right; that is impossible. After all, all leaders screw up. Whether a thoughtless email or epic public failure, all good leaders own their mistakes and wear them as badges of honor as proof they are wiser for having survived being human.



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(nice to meet you)

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