

# Messenger

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## Overcoming Common Managerial Mistakes, Part 5

This month we are only going to look at one managerial mistake. While it may seem like overkill to devote an entire newsletter to just one, I feel that this is a very important mistake that has a lot of pieces to it. No employee is perfect and mistakes will be made. How you handle those mistakes can make or break the success of your entire organization. If you don't understand how to give criticism correctly, you will have an entire company of upset and unsatisfied employees. This will hurt the morale and productivity of everyone.

### ***Mistake #18 - Failing to Keep Your Criticism Constructive***

Swallowing criticism is tough, regardless if it's justified or not. Most people know when they've screwed up. Is it always necessary to beat them over the head with it? While criticism is required in some instances, be sure you are doing it for the right reasons and in the correct way. Just trying to put fear into your employees is not the proper motivation behind pointing out mistakes. This will not reap the benefits for which you are looking. Before dishing out the criticism, determine whether it will increase performance, production, or profits.

Ask yourself these questions before criticizing to help keep things positive and constructive.

1. *When something goes wrong, do you tend to assume who is at fault?*

When something goes wrong in your department, is there someone your mind immediately goes to for the blame? Is that fair? No one appreciates

getting blamed for something they did not do. This is true in the workplace, but also in every area of your life. I have three small children. Whenever my daughter comes to me crying, I immediately assume that my middle son has done something to her. Yes, I know that's not fair--it's usually true, but still unfair. Honestly, I think that my son may hit his sister more often because of this. People, whether adults or children, will start to act in the way they feel others are perceiving them. If they are always going to get blamed for anything that goes wrong, they may start causing more problems.



2. *Do you do your best to get all the facts first?*  
Don't condemn a person until you get all the facts. Rumors and hearsay can't be accepted as truth. Get specific details of who, what, when, where, and why before casting blame.

3. *Do you talk down to the person who's at fault?*  
Just because a person made a mistake, does not mean that she is stupid. Don't make her feel that way. Talk to her as the capable adult that she is.

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***Failure is an event, never a person.***  
***William D. Brown***

# The Mathis Group's Messenger

(continued from page 1 *Overcoming Common Managerial Mistakes*)

**Do you have a situation that no one in your organization can figure out a way to change?**

Enroll in our *Advanced Project Management Coaching and Mentoring Program*. This coaching program assists people in making behavioral and performance changes. Each *Advanced Project Management Coaching and Mentoring* level will give you high interaction through webinars, one-on-one feedback, personal telephone coaching sessions, and in-depth training to support the behavioral and performance changes desired. Please visit our website at [www.themathisgroup.com](http://www.themathisgroup.com) to learn more about the Gold, Silver, and Bronze levels.

4. *Do you make clear to the person the specific offense?*

Specifically explain to the person what has been done wrong. Give precise details. If you want performance to change and improve, you can't be vague and assume he will know what you're talking about. Don't just tell him that he needs better performance. Explain why the performance is lacking and give some suggestions for improvement.

5. *Do you control your temper when criticizing a person?*

When you learn of a mistake, it's easy to lose your temper. This is NOT the time to seek out the person who made the mistake. Take time to calm yourself down so you can be in a reasonable mood. There are three things you should never do. First, never raise your voice. The moment your voice goes up a notch, the other person will immediately become defensive and her voice will raise as well. Second, never use profanity. Profanity has no place in the workplace. No only is it insulting, but it is also offensive. Finally, Never act in haste. If you are



angry during a conversation, you usually don't take the time to make a rational decision.

6. *Do you always talk things over in private?*

It is embarrassing to be criticized in front of others. When you must talk with a person about his performance, it's best to do it in private where there are no extra eyes and ears to know what's going on. People are more likely to improve their performance if they haven't lost face to their peers.

7. *Do you praise before you criticize?*

One of the best ways to get a person to willingly change her behavior in a particular area is to praise her on something else. Tell her how well she did on her last project or report. If you start with some sort of approval, the criticism seems less harsh. She will be more willing to improve in the given area when she knows that you're not against everything she does.

8. *Do you share responsibility for the mistake?*

You can take some of the sting out of criticism if you are willing to take some of the blame. Saying, "Perhaps I didn't make myself completely clear on that" can make the criticism a lot easier to swallow. By sharing some of the blame, you show that you make mistakes too.

9. *Do you listen to his side of the story, too?*

Have you given the employee time to explain his side of the story or did you just go into the conversation with guns blazing? Do you remember back to question #2 that we just talked about? This goes hand in hand with getting all the facts first.

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***Patience is never more important than when you are at the edge of losing it.***

***O.A. Battista  
Scientist and Writer***

# The Mathis Group's Messenger

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Don't assume that you know the whole story. Some incorrect or biased facts may have been given to you in the beginning. When a problem arises, most people are eager to tell you their side of the story. Let them! It shouldn't take much coaxing to get them to tell you what happened.

## 10. Do you allow a person to retain his dignity?

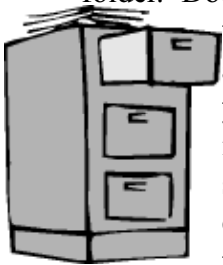
When the employee leaves the private meeting, she should not feel like a worthless failure. Remember to reiterate that you aren't happy with her *performance* not *her*.

## 11. Do you suggest specific steps to prevent recurrence of the mistake?

Don't make your employee guess how you want the problem fixed. Give him specific, reachable steps to take to make sure the problem doesn't happen again. Once he leaves your office, don't forget about him. If appropriate, occasionally check to see if progress is being made.

## 12. Do you keep accurate records of your counselling sessions?

After each meeting with an employee, place a detailed account of the meeting in her personnel folder. Document the date, time, who was present, what was discussed, and the steps of action which were agreed upon. If you fail to have the proper document, it will be harder if further or more serious action is needed. If she doesn't change her behavior and dismissal is warranted, you could face something as serious as a lawsuit if you can't produce the proper documentation.



## 13. Do you forgive and forget?

Even though you must have a record of your meeting in his personnel folder, don't "carry his file around in your hip pocket and whip it on him every time he" does something you don't like. Once you've

told him what corrections you would like to see, both of you should move on. He should do his best to improve his behavior, while you should not lay in wait for him to make a mistake again. Give him a clean slate.

If you can answer each of the questions in a positive manner, you are well on the way to creating a constructive and encouraging environment for your employees. Even when a mistake is made and consequences given, no one should feel belittled or put down. They should feel that you have confidence in their ability to rise above the mistake, make necessary corrections, and learn.

Adapted from *The 22 Biggest Mistakes Managers Make and How to Correct Them* by James K. Van Fleet



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