

## TLP Five-Minute Read Over Coffee – Powerfully communicating mistakes

➡ We can all be intensely self-critical when we make a mistake at work. A mistake might or might not give us useful information about something we can improve, or it might simply be because we are all human!

➡ What is clear is that the 'what next' matters. Someone I respect a lot told me 'that there is never a better opportunity to show your companies culture and values than when you mess something up.' How you deal with your mistake can leave a lasting impression on your customer/contact.

### 💡 10 Principles

☑ 1) Sit with your mistake for a little while. Don't send an email in anger! The same truth can be applied to that instant anxiety that bubbles up in your stomach. In that place it is easy to overpromise and overcompensate. Get up from your desk and walk around the office, take some deep breathes.

☑ 2) Don't hide and be responsive. It is very easy to hide behind an email when delivering bad news. I believe that the more difficult the message the less effective emailing becomes. Your first step might be to pick up the phone.

☑ 3) On record. An email is often a very good follow up, to give clarity and transparency.

☑ 4) Own it and apologise. How you apologise matters. 'I would like to apologise for..' is more formal than 'I am sorry that...'  
Should you use 'we' or 'I'. Do you want to take individual accountability or is it more reassuring to speak on behalf of your team/company?

☑ 5) Don't be false. Don't 'sugarcoat' a difficult message as you might annoy your customer even more. 'I hope your week is going well' is not a good way to start an email highlighting a significant mistake.

☑ 6) Conversely don't be needlessly direct! Keep your style professional,

empathetic and human. There are lots of little verbs/expressions that enable this.

7) It is important to concisely explain the context to your mistake, in terms of managing expectations/your credibility. However, understand the difference between an excuse and an explanation. If too much time is given to making a shopping list of excuses – you simply come across as defensive.

8) Focus on the solution and the timeline. The mistake has happened, what are you going to do next and when will you do it by? Note the impact of different words here, 'We are going to', 'we expect to', 'we will do our best to' all offer different degrees of certainty.

9) Formality: Get the formality right. If emailing is it - 'Dear Mr Higson', 'Dear Toby', 'Hi Toby' (There is no right answer - it depends on your professional relationship!). Do you need to use a 'would' based expression to be more calming or formal, or would this feel too cold in the context of a close customer relationship?

10) The principle sitting beneath all of the above is that powerful communication is both simple and generous to your audience. This means yes, you always strive to keep it simple but you also focus on how you say it and the impact of your message on your audience.

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