

Navigating New-Hire Mistakes and Providing Support

It is up to employers to create an environment where employees can report honest errors, near-misses, and uncertainty early and securely, while implementing error resolution, learning, and a means of holding the employees and the organization accountable.

A healthy mistake culture does not mean “anything goes.”

“Allowing mistakes” means avoiding automatic blame for human error and focusing on learning, while being clear about where zero tolerance applies.

Reinforce early reporting and asking questions by recognizing the behaviour that protects quality and safety:

- “You stopped and checked before continuing—that was good judgment.”
- “You raised this quickly, which let us fix it before it affected a customer.”
- “Your question showed us that our instructions need to be clearer.”

Make leaders go first so employers are openly modelling ownership. When a manager’s mistake is acknowledged calmly and paired with a visible correction, employees learn that admitting an error protects the team.

- “I gave unclear directions, which contributed to this error. Here is what I will do differently next time.”
- “I made the wrong call. Thank you for raising it before it became a larger problem.”
- “I don’t know the answer yet. Let’s verify it instead of guessing.”

Set clear boundaries so employees know exactly what is “allowed.” Mistakes in some situations (like safety-related situations) aren’t tolerated, and if an employee is uncertain in a high-risk safety situation, they should consult their supervisor.

- “You are allowed to make a mistake once, but you must document the fix so that we don't repeat it.”
- “Experimentation is encouraged, but we must avoid these risks for the following reasons.”
- “Honest mistakes are learning opportunities but hiding them is a performance issue.”

Responding to Errors with Curiosity:

Thank

“Thank you for letting me know quickly.”

Protect

“Is anyone at risk? What needs to be stopped, corrected, or communicated now?”

Understand

“What happened? What information, conditions, or process led to it?”

Learn

“What made this easy to miss or hard to do correctly?”

Improve

“What will we change?” (Training, instructions, equipment, workload, review point, system, etc.)

Close the Loop

“Here is what we changed because you discussed the issue.”

Sources: www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/what-is-psychological-safety-at-work/ | www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/blameless-work-culture?co=US

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