

How to Deal with a Setback at Work

Setbacks in life are impossible to avoid — the same is true with the workplace. Whether you've made a mistake, or received a bad performance review, how you deal with it can make a huge difference to your overall career progression.

WHAT IS A SETBACK?

Setbacks can appear in life in many different forms. In professional environments, setbacks include:

- Not getting a job or promotion that you wanted.
- Not securing a contract with a new client.
- Letting a team member down.
- Getting feedback that you find difficult accept.

If you're wondering how to deal with a setback, it's likely you've already experienced one. Perhaps you're reflecting on how you've previously handled a setback, or you're in the midst of coping with one now. Knowing how to deal with setbacks is the first step to personal and professional improvement.

With so many different ways a 'setback' could happen, or could be perceived, a setback for the purposes of this tip sheet means:



An event in your professional life that thwarts plans you may have made, or disrupts how you were expecting to be able to work.

6 WAYS YOU CAN DEAL WITH A SETBACK

1) Build a mentally strong foundation beforehand

If you are feeling down about life, a setback can feel harder to get over. Ultimately, the more solid your footing, the harder it will be to knock you off your perch, and the easier it will be to recover and adjust. This means maintaining good physical health (e.g., getting plenty of sleep, healthy food and regular exercise) but also maintaining your mental health by practicing mindfulness, being close to nature, finding purpose and meaning, and also surrounding yourself with a strong social network.

2) Acknowledge a mistake

"It's important to not only expect setbacks in our professional lives, but also to fully accept mistakes when they happen. Denial will get you nowhere. Communicating an error to your colleagues, boss or even friends is important and can be constructive. In these moments, seek out the people who are likely to push you to learn from the setback, instead of those who will join you in a 'pity party'.

3) Own your mistake

When you experience a setback, it's normal to want to know where things went wrong. This can sometimes be difficult to do, especially if there are a few people involved in the setback. Whatever the case, shifting blame between people will not only be detrimental to your colleagues, but won't help you overcome the setback and learn from your own mistakes. On the flip side, don't be too harsh on yourself. There is a difference between understanding what has happened and what needs improvement, and blaming yourself or someone else for a mistake or setback. If your mistake has caused someone to lose trust in you, it's important to offer them a sincere apology. Ask what you can do to restore their trust. But be patient—forgiveness may take some time.

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4) Shift your mindset

Think back to the most powerful things you have learned in life. Now think of the event that caused you to learn it. Many of our biggest enlightenments are connected to a setback, so, when one occurs, take it as an opportunity to learn something new. Furthermore, think about how you've overcome setbacks before and understand that any negative feelings you have about your most recent one will dissipate over time — just like they have in the past. Remind yourself that the aftermath is temporary and will lead to valuable outcomes.

5) Strategise

Once you understand what went wrong, you need to put strategies in place to minimise the chances of the setback reoccurring. This step can also involve others. Seek feedback and advice from trusted colleagues and mentors, or seek appropriate resources online. Gather the information you need and put a plan together. For example, if the setback is a disappointing performance review, work with your manager on implementing the right strategies to make changes.



6) Get back out there

A setback can affect confidence, especially if you know you slipped up. The key is to not let your errors make you afraid of experimentation. Once the mistake is behind you, focus on the future. Remember, a mistake is not a sign of weakness or ineptitude, and recovering from them demonstrates resilience and perseverance. As the former head of Bank of America's Global Wealth and Investment division, dealing with setbacks at work - Flourish, famously said: "If you're not making some notable mistakes along the way, you're certainly not taking enough business and career changes."

It's so easy to get caught up in what went wrong, how you could have acted differently, or what you should have avoided when a setback occurs. The key is not to dwell on it for too long, consider the suggestions discussed here, and understand that what's done is done.