



## Dealing with Mistakes

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*Grace leadership needs to be studied because it precedes humans, it co-exists with humans, and it provides a recovery from mistakes. This is important because mistakes are an intrinsic part of daily living and in dealing with blunders, one realizes not only those mistakes happen but that recovering from that mistake is intrinsic to the Grace Leadership construct. As humans, leaders make mistakes related to the mechanics of decision-making, follower manipulation, and using blame as a reflex. A classic case of Grace Leadership is illustrated by the pericope of Matthew 26. Jesus spent time and energy building relationships with his disciples, and this was important in the measure of grace afforded Peter when he denied knowing Jesus while Jesus was on trial. Instead of accusing Peter, Jesus met him in an intimate setting and reminded Peter to re-align on the Great Commission. The case for grace is as a tool that allows recovery from a mistake, but it is also a pre-existing relationship that helps with re-alignment. It allows for uneasy conversations*

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*to properly treat the problem. Further, grace exists outside of humanity, and it influences leadership.*

This world is made up of hundreds of countries. Each country has many cultures and deals with at least three generations: towards or in retirement, actively in a profession or vocation, and the younger generation. This creates a curious dynamic wherein individuals and collectives think and behave differently. Consider the case of the coronavirus pandemic. Each country was implementing different processes to prevent the spread of contagion, to find a cure and vaccine, and help keep the vulnerable safe. Just these conditions suggest decisions made at different layers: at the individual level, at the family level, and the organizational level. Even when a person was asymptomatic, they could still pass on the virus to the vulnerable without knowing. Ignorance is not bliss; it can have a damaging impact as the situation permutates. If a person chose not to practice social distancing or if an organization did not/could not implement teleworking options, these were decisions that had associated actions that could have a long-lasting negative impact. This was just one example of a real-world complex situation that required a series of decisions and actions from countries, organizations, and individuals which increased the possibility of making mistakes at every level/scenario.

Humans make mistakes. While one can argue whether a mistake was malicious, intentional, or accidental, this does not detract from the axiom that to live this life means that mistakes are inevitable. Bligh et al. (2018) illuminated that the rate of global change and the acceptance of ambiguity affects the costs related to organizational mistakes. Note that costs are on at least two fronts: tangible and non-tangible. Tangible costs are associated with resources such as food and money whereas intangible costs are more perception-based such as a lack of confidence in leadership decision-making due to the negative impact of previous or current decisions. A classic example of this intangible cost is again related to the US federal government's response to coronavirus. The situation affected every industry in the USA in different ways including the medical field, the religious network, trade, service, supply chain, transportation, and education. This is not a critique of the decision-making process at the macro and the micro levels due to the coronavirus pandemic. The scenario is leveraged to show the complexity of decision-making that spans a spectrum of good decision-making to poor decision-making. Intuitively, good decisions deliver good results, but poor decision-making yields a breadth

of consequences such that organizations need tools to recover effectively from poor or heuristic decision-making. This requires a measure of damage control in symbiosis with a healthy and sustainable recovery process to prevent history from repeating itself, where possible.

Consider that humans making mistakes is not a new thing. Logic suggests that humans will continue to make mistakes. However, it is one thing to make a novel mistake in a new scenario but another to persist in making mistakes when variables remain constant. The Bible has many examples of mistakes being made and at least some examples of how recovery was also made. Note, though, that recovery is part of absolution and does not remove consequence. “And there came a voice to him: ‘Rise, Peter, kill and eat.’” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Acts 10:13). The larger context of this pericope is that Peter had a vision where all types of animals came down on a sheet from heaven and Peter’s initial reaction was predicated on the consumption of unclean meat. This was an analogy that the Good News was for all, and not just the Jews. When Moses disobeyed God and struck the rock to give water to the people, God still supplied water to the people, but Moses was banned from entering the promised land (Dt. 32:51). This mistake was not repeated and there was a consequence, but the God-Moses communion persisted. Conversely, King Hezekiah showing off Israel’s wealth to the Babylonian emissary did not prevent Babylon from conquering Israel later (Is. 36–39). Consequences themselves are not a bad thing if they add to learning. After Saul approved of Stephen’s stoning in Acts 8:1a, he was confronted by Jesus on the Damascus Road (Acts 9). This directly impacted the growth of Christianity in its infancy. Another key figure of that time to pay attention to is Simon Peter. As one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, the Gospels show that he had intense epiphanies such as declaring that Jesus was the Messiah (Mt. 16:13), his walking on the water to meet Jesus on the Sea of Galilee (Mt. 14:29), and his response to Jesus’ transfiguration (Mt. 17:4). Peter also had some misplaced responses such as (Jn. 18:10), distancing himself from Gentiles (Gal. 2:12) and rejecting that he knew Jesus at that fateful trial (Mk. 14:66–72; Jn. 21:15–19; Pardee, 2016). In each negative situation, Jesus acted in grace towards Peter (Lk. 22:15–19). These passages showed that each situation had consequences but also that grace was necessary in recovery.

De Haan (2016) defined leadership as influencing others so that they willingly do what is needed for a situation. While this can be construed as a power play, the key is that the followers willingly act. In the case

of mistakes, the follower needs to realize that a mistake has been made and that a path out of that quagmire is provided by the leader extending an olive branch. The lens of leadership in this situation provides a more wholesome response instead of mere power play and this will be discussed at length shortly. The Bible is filled with examples of grace. Harkening back to the fall of mankind, God exercised grace by not only calling out to Adam and Eve in the heat of the day but also providing the animal sacrifice plus clothing when He discovered the recent actions of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:9–21). Dalferth (2017) argued that even as the Bible is filled with such acts of grace, one must note that God first acted on grace to change situations. That fall had and has many repercussions, but God removed the couple's access to the garden east of Eden while providing for their immediate as well as mankind's eventual relief in that pivotal moment before (Gen. 3:15, 21). Even as leaders in the postmodern world make mistakes, how can grace be a relevant tool to recover from complex and cascading consequences of mistakes? This is the question that this chapter wrestles with.

### LEADERS MAKE MISTAKES

When humans make mistakes, consequences follow. However, when leaders make mistakes, the spectrum of consequences can be even more problematic. Van Prooijen and de Vries (2016) argued that organizational conspiracy beliefs exist when leaders choose despotism instead of democracy. They suggested that these beliefs are harder to identify and treat because actions based on conspiratorial beliefs may be harder to define and therefore treat. These beliefs are often based on the perceived actions of leaders, whether said actions were intentional or not. For instance, if the leader's work ethic aligns with that of a sub-group of followers, while this may be unintentional, it can be perceived as favoritism. In this situation, the leader may not even be aware of the mistake made and how it may affect organizational behavior making this a potential source for mistakes. Van Gils et al. (2017) specified that when followers identify with their organization, the followers are more likely to make ethical decisions in business dilemmas. A leadership mistake is to try and manipulate their employees to be more ethical versus creating environments where employees choose to identify more with their organization and therefore choose to behave more ethically.

Yet another leadership mistake is often related to gender stereotyping. Thoroughgood et al. (2013) posited that female leaders are expected to be more socially astute and express genuine concern for followers. This is on the premise that females are associated with motherhood and supposedly mothers are more aware of the needs of their children than fathers are. The authors argued that due to this premise, female leaders and female followers are expected to perform at a higher level of organizational concern versus their male counterparts. This is a multi-faceted leadership matrix due to the various permutations that arrive from the male-male relationship, male-female relationship, female-male relationship, and female-female relationship. This leadership mistake matrix is further compounded by how aligned each gender type is to any stereotypical gender bias. This argument assumes that gender is binary but when people transcend gender, that is, non-binary in orientation and behavior, this may clash with organizational expectations that then leads to leadership challenges.

Leadership mistakes are inevitable since every organization and every leader is different, and each organization deals with its evolving scenarios that present opportunities for making mistakes. Prasad and Junni (2016) reflected that since business environments are always in flux this makes the future unpredictable and volatile, which further increases uncertainty since the cascading effect cannot easily be controlled. Consider the global recession of 2008 wherein the US government intervened to prevent a difficult situation from spiraling into a depression. While one can argue on the effectiveness of the intervention, it is hard to disagree that it had some effective immediate impact, with a potential positive future impact. Making decisions can be difficult when there are no unknowns, but the realities of life are such that in most situations some unknowns exist and that exponentiates the difficulty of making and acting on decisions. This is further compounded by leadership styles, regardless of industry or profession. One can argue that the selected leadership style for a specific situation could be a mistake and that certain leadership styles are more suited to specific situations versus others. For instance, the US federal government providing confusing information about the necessity of vaccination as a response to throughout the pandemic, thus leaving its citizens diverse reference points in making such a decision at an individual and an organizational level. Is a person's leadership style innate, or can learning and training develop leadership skills further? Furthermore, how a person chooses which leadership style may not be as formulaic as literature might

suggest. After all, one might be hard-pressed to argue that Jesus was nurturing or meek during the ruckus He caused in the temple when riling against the money changers (Mt. 21:12). Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) extended the challenge of leadership style selection by arguing that leaders who choose to manage by exception are more laissez-faire in that standards are established and response is reactionary when followers do not comply.

Lupton and Warren (2018) reasoned that when wrong decisions are made, the reflexive behavior might be to first point the blame, defined as sanction applied to the person at fault. This has several associated leadership challenges. For instance, how can the correct person be identified so that the blame can be ascribed? What degree of blame, and therefore sanction, would be justified? Finally, even if the leader takes the blame for a situation, there is a risk of the followers being incorrectly motivated since their leader pays the price of their actions instead of a shared situation or when individuals express collectivistic versus individualistic behavior. Kassim and Asiah Abdullah (2010) found that Arabs tended to be individualistic and collectivistic because their tribal loyalty scored higher than their loyalties. This makes it difficult to recover from the negative situation that an organization might find itself in. A rather recent example of this was the behavior of Wells Fargo senior management when that bank's personal banking scandal was initially covered by the various national and international news agencies. Yet another leadership mistake can be sourced in the lack of reflexivity. Schippers et al. (2013) argued that when leaders do not reflect on past team performances, this can affect future team performance since the value of past actions is lost. Furthermore, since change is constant, leaders make the mistake of not communicating effectively with their followers resulting in sub-par effects of the intended change. According to Carter et al. (2013), face-to-face interactions with employees allowed for question-answer sessions which enabled grass-roots effort to implement change. While face-to-face is one interaction of greater consequence is the dialog between the leaders and her/his followers.

Leroy et al. (2012) suggested that leaders practice high behavioral integrity by following up on promises made and this strengthens trust between leaders and followers. One way to rapidly diminish trust is the practice of passive management by exception, as contrasted by active management by exception. Sommer et al. (2016) distinguished these

wherein the active method monitors follower behavior to address deviations as they arise whereas the passive method uses criticism and reproof after the mistake is made. Yet another leadership mistake is not understanding the cultures that form an organization and a lack of awareness of the culture within which an organization exists. Yaghi (2017) exemplified that in the United Arab Emirates dominant culture creates informal gatherings between decision-makers and ordinary citizens for deliberations about certain issues. The world is made of diverse cultures that behave differently such that behavioral assumptions by leaders can be emblematic of larger issues. If a healthy dose of overconfidence is part of the culture within and without an organization, this creates fewer relational issues versus when there is a mismatch on this front which can lead to how feedback is interpreted (Chen et al., 2015). Finally, another leadership mistake based on cultural dimensions is with the degree of autonomy that is expected and/or desired. Wiedner and Mantere (2019) defined autonomy as something that is not just given but also something that is claimed. Different cultures may have different appreciations of autonomy, and this can also be a common pitfall for leaders even when an organization only operates from one geographic location since the organization would still have people from different walks of life.

### PETER BEFORE AND AFTER JESUS' CRUCIFIXION

The Bible has much to say about leadership mistakes. Jesus had predicted his death and Peter had claimed that he would accompany Jesus to death. Luke 22:54–62 and Mark 14:66–72 provide a very stark contrast because, at the time that Jesus faced his trial with the political powers of Israel, Peter denied that he ever knew Jesus. However, Jesus had known Peter well enough to provide an olive branch for the restoration of Peter (Jn. 21:15–19). Peter denied knowing Jesus three times and Jesus asked him the same question three times after his resurrection. The epilogue is that the restored Peter was key in establishing Christianity after Jesus' ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In the pre-crucifixion account, Huizenga (2011) highlighted the contrast where Jesus did not deny the charge that was leveled against him by the power players of that time and place whereas when a slave girl asked Peter if he knew Jesus, Peter denied knowledge to protect himself (Mt. 26:63, 69). As shocking as that was, this would not have come as a surprise to Jesus because he had previously predicted that people would

betray him (Mt. 26:31), and that included Peter (Crenshaw, 2019). This suggests that Jesus knew Peter well enough in the three-plus years that the group had spent time together. Whitaker (2013) added that while Peter denied in very strong terms, that the pericope did not vilify him because Peter was isolated and afraid. Therefore, even when the writers recorded this low point in his life, they provided not only environmental context for this behavior but also the sense of loss of a fisherman caught in the middle of political and religious contention. The authors also do not rebuke, provide commentary, or even justification for Peter's vehement denials. Bozung (2000) reflected on the Mark narrative where Jesus did not have any human support at this critical juncture of his life; Judas had sold him for 30 pieces of silver, the disciples had fled, and Peter denied any affiliation. There was not even a semblance of solidarity for the situation that Jesus was placed in from the garden in Gethsemane until his resurrection. Vaquilar (2012) surmised that Peter was well-intentioned but impulsive and unreliable. Of course, this begs the question of not only why Jesus called Peter to be a disciple but that he kept Peter within that circle; unreliable but with potential for great good since he was renamed to Cephas (Jn. 1:42).

Hicks (2013) delivered a fulcrum in this narrative in recognizing the Hellenistic view that virtue and vice worked together for emotional growth. This seems to hold for the dynamics of the Jesus-Peter relationship. Following Peter's low point, the next interaction between Jesus and Peter is after the resurrection. As they shared a meal at the beach, Jesus asked three times if Peter loved Jesus (Jn. 21:15). Upon each affirmative answer, Jesus reminded Peter to feed his sheep. One can ask why Jesus would talk about shepherding to someone whose vocation was of a fisherman. The response to that juxtaposition is beyond the current scope. However, Shepherd (2010) suggested that Jesus was self-sacrificial, just as shepherds in those days were, and that this was an expectation of Peter after Peter's restored fealty. Brown (2015) noted that while there were 12 disciples, only three are mentioned in John's epilogue: Peter, Thomas, and Nathaniel. This has its significance even as a literary device since characters in an epilogue serve their purpose, in this case, the birth of Christianity in which Peter played an important role as attested by Acts and by the two letters of Peter. Continuing with the shepherd's call, Gunter (2016) established that at this beach encounter Jesus did not rebuke Peter for his lapse in judgment or lapse in character but that the command to feed His sheep was non-negotiable. Peter was not recused



from this responsibility since Jesus had invested a lot of time and energy in training his disciples while knowing his self-sacrificial end and resurrection. Similarly, Culpepper (2010) reassured that this restoration of Peter was not just for his benefit but was thematic for the restoration of grace that is extended to all; grace that is needed when coming out of moments of lapse.

So why did Jesus ask Peter the same questions thrice on that Galilean beach? Yes, it is a literary device because Peter had denied him thrice. Consider also that this was an in-person conversation and repetition in conversation can aid memory formation. Donelson (2004) specified that this repetition was also to drive home the point to Peter the importance of the shepherd's heart and the need to take care of the sheep. After all, the larger crowds that followed Jesus during his years of ministry did not have the intimacy that the disciples had with Jesus such that this larger body of believers would need guidance. If Peter did not emulate Jesus in this fashion, then the gospel that Jesus had preached would be lost. In today's parlance, this might be synonymous as a mentor-protégé relationship. The restoration of Peter was key for he was wracked with guilt for failing Jesus when he had promised not to. Huffman (2016) posited that self must die for God's work to progress. This requires the person to go through an emptying process with pre-conceived notions that fed into past failures. This process allows also a springboard to leave the mistakes of the past in the past and to start afresh. This leads to the obvious question of whether Peter's restoration on that Galilean beach was effective. Albanese (2019) pointed to 1 Peter 1:1 where this apostle addressed the "exiles of the dispersion" (*English Standard Version*, 2016/2001). The words "exiles" and "dispersion" are of specific significance. Firstly, dispersion is an emptying process. The difference is that this emptying is of a collective. In this case, Christians were dispersed from Jerusalem and Israel due to religious persecution for believing that Jesus was the Messiah foretold of old. There is a sense of loss and of gain that Peter would have understood from his last encounter with Jesus. Secondly, exile is a forced scenario where persons must leave regardless of their preference to stay. Peter had to leave his old self in that moment of restoration and the person revealed in the book of Acts is very different from the impulsive and unreliable Peter that Jesus had initially called. This also suggests grace at work.

## THE CASE FOR GRACE

The first section of this chapter addressed at least some of the sources that may contribute to mistakes made by a leader. While this list is lengthy, it is by no means comprehensive. The next section looked at the pericope where Peter denied knowing Jesus and afterward when Jesus restored Peter. This illustrated the tandem dance between human potential, mistake, and grace. While Peter's denial was understandable, it contrasted with his intent, and therefore this was a leadership mistake that could have severely damaged Christianity even before it was born. Furthermore, whether a leader or follower, in its fallen state, humanity makes mistakes. Even in this postmodern global village which is bombarded by information (the salient and the trivial), leaders will make mistakes. Thus, the question for this chapter was to discover how grace can be a relevant tool for the organizational leader. Note first that grace is an exchange, a relationship between two people where grace is given, and it is received. Peters (2019) reflected that the relationship first is between the person and God, where God is gracious enough to keep the person in His loving embrace. Just as Jesus knew Peter, God knows people; that includes strengths and weaknesses, the good days and the bad days. Van Hunnik (2019) indicated that grace allows for a healthy relationship where questions can be asked with sincerity and any available answers are shared when possible. Consider that in each scenario when a question is asked and the receiver is offended, choosing not to answer with empathy, this creates a lose-lose situation. However, if the receiver decides that the question was not posed with ill-intent, then information is more freely shared thereby creating a win-win situation. However, for this to work, the receiver must choose not to shut down at the offense and this is grace at work.

Vasko's (2017) wordplay on "disease" in the context of mental health reflected on dis-ease, meaning that people talk about things they are uncomfortable talking about for various reasons. Vasko encouraged that when parties in such conversation are in dis-ease, this can create learning opportunities since people perceive a problem from different perspectives. Rev. Dr. Frank (2019) reminded that salvation was a free gift of God, delivered by grace through faith. Three elements to note here. One, even the free gift of Christ bears a cost, for the giver as well as the receiver such as the potential cost of ostracization for receiving the free gift. Two, salvation being afforded to humans by grace means that God already

paid the price for restoration so that people do not have to. Third, it is accessed through faith because a person must choose to believe in this gift to receive it. Again, this does not remove the consequences of past poor decisions, but it allows a fresh start. Peters' (2016) interpretation of Thomas Aquinas' philosophy on grace was that it was afforded to every human and that grace pre-existed humans. Barclay (2018) built on this notion to state that grace is mercy unconditioned by the moral, social, or ethnic worth of its recipients. Therefore, when a leader has a judgment error and acts on that error, options exist to recover from that mistake. Again, neither does this remove the consequences nor does it mean that the mistakes become a part of life since grace is linked to repentance and restoration. After all, the grace that was extended to Peter by Jesus, Peter extended to others in those early days of Christianity (1 Pt. 1:3).

Grace persists beyond time and space. Vacek (2015) encouraged that it is always present and that certain circumstances such as celebrations or difficulties bring it to the forefront. Martin (2014) presented a polarity wherein grace opens the possibility of new ways of doing things versus fear that limits a person in suspicion and division. Park and Mayer (2018) argued that grace is not sometimes obvious since it is in operation when people chose to learn from difficult situations such as in failure; they termed this "grace from the underside." Speaking of the event horizon at which grace comes to the forefront, Lazer (2017) indicated that it cannot be separated from the intensified human exchange and its confirmation. Again, alluding to Peter's experience at the beach and considering his affection for Jesus, he must have felt quite dejected because of his recent denials. However, Jesus spoke to him, and this expresses the value of that relationship. Jesus did not rebuke or chastise him for his denials and only affirmed Peter's call. This allowed Peter's self-concept to be realigned into thinking of the greater picture afforded by the self-sacrifice that Jesus lived. Thralls (2012) posited that grace is not just confined to the walls of an ecclesial organization but abounds wherever humans are found. It exists in every organization and every institution. Consider that children often overlook the injuries that are done to them, and they do not have the mental maturity that adults have. Therefore, if grace is there for people who are not fully formed yet, developmentally speaking, then surely it is there for leaders who make mistakes.

However, Lake (2011) echoed Paul the apostle in reminding that just because grace exists eternally, one must not assume that a mistake made today will automatically be covered by grace tomorrow (Rom. 6:1). When

a leader makes a mistake and looks for restoration, the persons that were wronged have it in their power to provide the restoration or not, and to what extent. Therefore, the leader must be careful not to abuse the available grace. Of course, it is a very Christian act to forgive for the wrongs that are done, no matter what the circumstances. Furthermore, this grace is not limited by elements such as ethnicity or geography (DiSilvestro, 2015). O’Gorman (2009) defined grace as unanticipated, unsolicited, undeserved, and unrecognized providence. Jesus meeting Peter at the beach after the resurrection was not an appointment they had agreed upon previously. From Peter’s perspective, this meeting was unexpected and undeserved since he had reneged on his commitment to Jesus.

## CONCLUSION

This world, with its many cultures, national boundaries, belief systems, and perspectives is a complexity difficult to comprehend. However, one does not need to completely comprehend this complexity to understand that it creates unlimited opportunities for every human to make mistakes. Thus, every mistake acted upon has an immediate response, also known as damage control, and a long-term response of recovery. All that to say that mistakes are unintentional, partly due to environmental flux, but they still have consequences. While any organization will have leaders and followers, it would be a grave mistake to think that leaders do not make mistakes or have some false expectation that leaders ought not make mistakes. Some common mistakes that leaders make include the mechanics of how decisions are made, opting to manipulate followers, gender stereotyping organizational roles, blame as a defense mechanism, and the leadership style chosen for a given situation. Understand that humans are limited, and mistakes are inevitable so what might be a more effective response?

The Bible, being replete in imperfect humans making mistakes, provides many examples not just of this inevitability, but what can be done as a response to that mistake. Even though Jesus had predicted Peter’s denials and Peter had rebuffed, when Jesus was on trial in front of the Sanhedrin, Peter vehemently denied knowing Jesus to the commoners nearby. After Jesus resurrected and met with Peter on the beach, Jesus did not accuse Peter of being spineless but instead reaffirmed Peter. In doing so Jesus acknowledged Peter’s mistake but kept focus on the more important Great Commission that was the spark of Christianity. For the

most part, the Bible is a chronology and talks about grace even before grace is seen in action amidst humans.

Grace exists beyond the human condition, is available to humans, and is a canopy of leadership since leaders directly affect their followers and their organizations. One can see it as a tool to be used but needs to be careful of the hubris of entitlement. Grace is not an excuse to make a mistake but is a tool of recovery, with near- and long-term impact. As illustrated by Jesus and Peter, it is exercised in a relationship. When a senior leader knows their mid-level leaders with some intimacy, this allows the senior leader to help the mid-level accept the mistake but also re-focus on the important. This relationship is foundational because it helps get a sense of what is really troubling the leader that has made the mistake, making a bridge out of the situation. Jesus had invested significant time and energy in Peter and the other disciples before Peter hit this roadblock. Further, when a mistake is made, there is a period of dis-ease, especially of the person who made the mistake since they know that they could have and should have done better. This can lead to crippling guilt, but it can also lead to a way out of the situation when the priority is brought into focus again. Jesus knew Peter and reaffirmed the responsibility that Peter had for starting the Great Commission, as an expression of grace in action. Grace precedes humans and is afforded to humans, regardless of which existing leadership styles they choose to employ. Grace influences leadership because it helps humans, and organizations, to admit and recover from their mistakes.

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