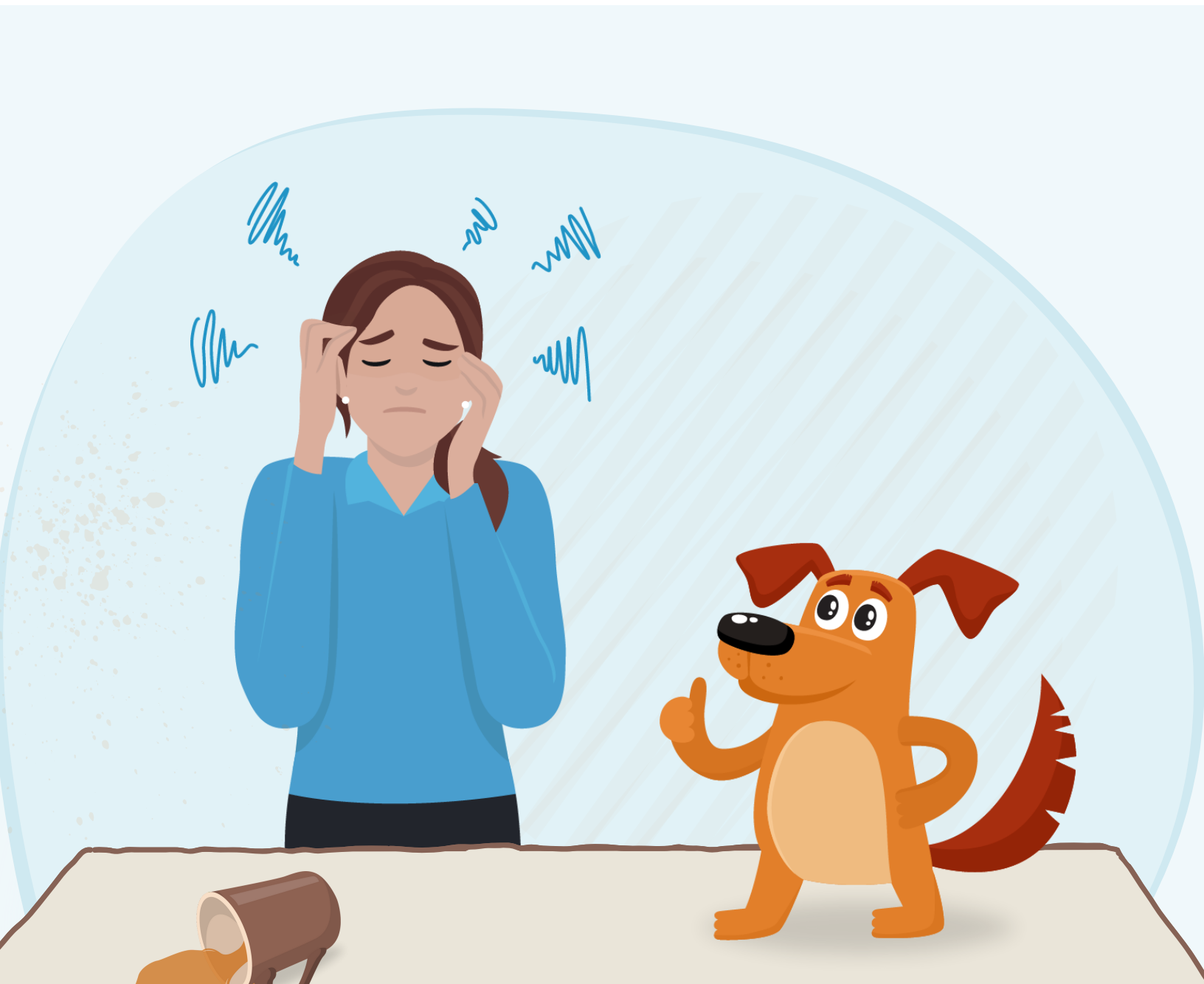# MASTERING MISTAKES

REDUCING ERRORS IN YOUR PRACTICE

TRUTHS ABOUT MISTAKES

As managers or supervisors, we can spend an incredible amount of time finding and highlighting mistakes. We can't help but notice them; we're drawn to things that are broken, erroneous, and out of place. It's a human condition. Here are some truths about mistakes:

- **We notice mistakes more than effectiveness**

  We can't help but notice them; we're drawn to things that are broken, erroneous, and out of place. It's a human condition. Thousands of years ago it saved our lives to notice the flood waters rising or the tiger in the weeds. Today, we still remain adept at noticing the mistakes on our veterinary team.

- **We often apply judgement to the reason for the mistake**

  When we notice someone doing something wrong, we tend to make judgements, like, "This person just isn't trying as hard as they should." As a result we respond as if they are flawed, rather than responding in ways that help them improve.

- **We often try to fix mistakes through awareness**

  Many times, we think that spending our time pointing out the error will be helpful; awareness is important. The challenge is that often that's all we do, and lots of times lack of awareness wasn't even the cause. Mistakes don't always happen because people aren't aware of the right way to do things.

- **We do not achieve excellence by trying to prevent mistakes**

  Often it feels like our jobs as managers is to prevent people from making mistakes. This may prevent our team from being at our worst, but it won't help us reach greater success.

And - - — — — — — ⟶

WE DON'T LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES

Mistakes and failures attract our attention and that will likely continue. But, as leaders, we have a responsibility to do the right things to help our team get better when the mistakes show up.

Perhaps most important of all, we create an environment where mistakes are viewed as an opportunity to learn, improve, and grow.

There is a learning opportunity after every mistake.
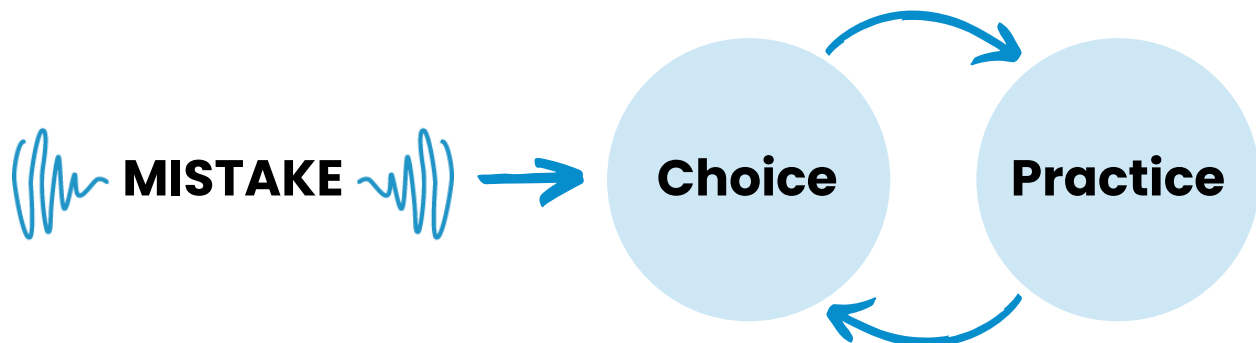
Directly after a mistake happens, whether we made it ourselves or notice someone on our team has made one, we have a **choice** to shut down and admit defeat or ask ourself:

- What can we do next?

- How can we improve our process?

- What would "good" look like?

As we make these choices, and involve our team, we can improve through **practice**.

HOW TO HANDLE MISTAKES

When we make mistakes, or notice that others have made a mistake, what we do next can make all the difference. As leaders, we have an opportunity to:

- **Consider the big picture**

  Often we will see something happen in an instant, but we don't take time to see the big picture. A person's mistake doesn't paint a full picture of their job performance and engagement.

- **Catch people doing the right things too**

  Our team's engagement is affected by the fairness of the environment they work in. If improvement goes unnoticed while mistakes are called out, people will disengage.

- **Focus on what happens next**

  When you notice a mistake, you can create an opportunity to improve by asking questions like, "If you wanted to do this well every time, what would your process look like?"

- **Assume positive intent**

  It is easy to assume people simply weren't trying, or that they just don't care. But, we want to work on assuming positive intent by shifting our focus to improving the process so fewer mistakes are made.

- **Coach proactively and consistently**

  Having regular conversations with our team that include questions about what they're working on, where they think they're improving, and where they may feel they need help is key to consistent growth and improvement.

- **Define success more than failure**

  Often our definition of what good looks like as a team isn't as clear as it needs to be. If we can't define what success is for our team, processes, and hospital, then we can't successfully move toward it.

WHEN MISTAKES HAPPEN, DON'T:

Just as our actions after mistakes have occurred can lead to improvement, increased engagement, and greater success for our practice, they can also hinder our growth.

When mistakes happen, we should be careful not to:

- **Punish when errors occur**

  When we punish people for making mistakes, people will become reluctant to try new or different things. This hurts the culture in our practice and causes our team to become disengaged.

- **Focus on blame more than improvement**

  People will try to hide if we focus only on assigning blame. If we use mistakes as opportunities for improvement, our culture and performance will improve.

- **Focus on "bad humans" instead of poor processes**

  It's possible that our processes are complex, poorly defined, or misunderstood by the team. If this is true more mistakes are likely.

- **Miss opportunities for improvement**

  Similarly, when we see things that are error-filled, we can improve how they happen, and use these moments as opportunities to create more engagement on our team by involving them in the discussions.

- **Let preferences be our guide to success**

  It is easy to say, "Here is the way I think this should be done," and assume that is the "right" way to do things. But, others may have a different idea of how a process can be more efficient. It's important for our culture that we involve our team in deciding what success looks like.

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