

Sound Practical when Talking About Making and Overcoming Mistakes

In order to avoid making a mistake, it is important to consider all options before making a decision or judgement. If you **overlook** some important factors, then your decisions will be **wide of the mark**.

If you find yourself in an emergency situation, you might not have the time to consider all the consequences of your decisions or actions. In this case, you might make a **rash decision**.

Another potential cause for mistakes is a person's stubbornness. If someone is **stubborn**, then they are unwilling to change their attitude towards something even if there are good arguments to do so. **Stubborn** people always believe that they are right even if others disagree with them.

Sometimes, managers could take actions which they believe will benefit the company, but instead these actions do some damage to the company, which means that their actions **backfire**.

When things are going really well, it is very easy to relax and to think that the game is won. Being **complacent** can cause many problems. If you think that you don't need to try as hard any more because the game is won, this can your competitors to catch up with you, or it can cause you to miss deadlines or exceed your budget. It is important never to **take your eye off the ball**, even if you think that you are far ahead of your competition, or that everything is going well. Often, if you take your eye off the ball, you might be completely unprepared for quick changes. It is easy to be **caught off guard** by competitors suddenly innovating or by the market changing. If you make a mistake such as this, you can **pay the price** for it, meaning that you suffer bad consequences. If you manage to avoid any negative consequences for your mistake, then congratulations, you have **got away with** your mistake.

If you make a mistake, it is important to **take accountability for** the mistake or **take ownership of** the mistake. It is important not to be stubborn, as stubborn people often fail to do this. It is then important to work hard in order to **make up for** it, which means to make everything better again.



A) Match the phrases to the definitions

Based on the context of the article, can you match the words in the box to the definitions listed below? Then add the word into the example sentence. You may need to change the form of the word to fit the meaning of the sentence.

to overlook	to be caught off guard	to be wide of the mark	a rash decision
to take accountability	stubborn	to get away with	to backfire
to make up for	To get complacent	to pay the price	to take your eye off the ball

1. A decision made without thinking clearly about it first: _____

"He panicked and made a _____."

2. To stop monitoring or paying attention to something: _____

"As an investor, you can't afford to _____ because the markets change all the time."

3. Refusing to change your point of view, even if it means that you are being unreasonable: _____

"The manager was far too _____. She decided to proceed with her plan anyway despite the fact that we all warned her that it wouldn't work."

4. To compensate for something: _____

"She _____ her previous mistake by delivering record profits the next year."

5. Incorrect or inaccurate: _____

*"Our projected profits for last year turned out to be really _____.
"The government's housing scheme was very _____. They didn't tackle the root causes of the crisis, so they only made it worse."*

6. To escape negative consequences when you make a mistake or do something wrong: _____

*"We missed the deadline by 2 days, but I think we have _____ it. Neither customers nor shareholders seem too concerned."
"The company has broken a few regulations. I don't think they're going to _____ it. It looks like they're going to receive a penalty."*

7. To become overly satisfied with your achievements to the point that you feel you don't need to try as hard any more: _____

"We got too _____ as market leaders and we stopped innovating."

8. To experience the bad result of something that you have done: _____

"He made some very negative comments on social media, and he _____ by getting fired from his job."

9. To fail to notice something: _____

"We admit that we _____ a lot of the potential risks when we made the decision."

10. To have the opposite and negative effect from what was expected:

"The move to arrest the election candidate _____ as it caused her party to gain even more support."

11. To accept responsibility for making a mistake: _____

"As a leader, it is important for me to _____ for problems that the team are facing."

"She is refusing to _____ for her error."

"We aim to encourage a culture of _____ for decisions and actions."

12. To be taken by surprise by something when you are not ready for it: _____

"We were _____ by the sudden changes in the market."

B) Key Words in a New Context

Below you can find a paragraph. Can you fill in the gaps in the paragraph with the words from the box below? In some gaps there is more than one possible answer. You may need to change the form of some of the verbs in order for them to fit into the sentence.

to overlook	to make up for	to be wide of the mark	rash
to take accountability	stubborn	to be caught off guard	to backfire
complacent	to pay the price	to take your eye off the ball	

The Downfall of Nokia

The once famous and much-loved Nokia 3210 now looks like something more likely to be seen in a museum. The Finnish company were once giants in the tech market, dominating the mobile industry with their sturdy, reliable and user-friendly devices. Believe it or not, such devices were extremely fashionable among consumers in the early 2000s. So how did Nokia, once a leading mobile phone company, go from being a market leader to falling quite spectacularly into a now fairly obscure corporation?



One of the most prominent mistakes Nokia made was around 2007 after Apple released the iPhone. By this time, Nokia had become so _____, believing that the strength of the brand image was enough to maintain their popularity. However, the company completely _____ the rise of the smartphone, and they _____ regarding changing trends and consumer preferences for larger touch-screen phones.

Nokia's _____ middle-management at the time refused to switch to an Android operating system. The heavy bureaucracy in the company meant that it was slow to adapt to changes in the market, even when it was clear that the company was on the

wrong track. As a result, they missed many opportunities for innovation. This

stubbornness also led to a series of _____ decisions that proved to be _____ and ultimately _____, as nothing went according to plan. For example, allowing themselves to be acquired by Microsoft in 2013, at a time when Microsoft was really struggling with losses proved to be a huge mistake, which they ultimately _____ when they lost around 90% of their market share within 6 years.

Unfortunately, Nokia never managed to _____ their mistakes, and failed to recover in such a fast-paced industry after they had missed the boat on so many innovations. To this day, no-one at Nokia has ever willingly _____ for the company's mistakes. We could say that the whole world was _____ by the speed at which the mobile industry grew, but that will not be much of a consolation for Nokia. Nor will be the fact that my Nokia 3210 still works perfectly to this day.

C) Comprehension Questions

1. What lesson can be learned in paragraph 2 about brand image?

2. According to the article, what were 2 main flaws in Nokia's middle management during their downfall?

3. What did Microsoft do in 2013, and why was this a bad idea?

4. The final paragraph refers to how Nokia 'missed the boat' on so many innovations. What do you think that 'missed the boat' means in this context?

5. Which 2 factors mentioned in the article will not make Nokia executives feel any better?

D) More Uses of Selected Key Words**To overlook**

Be careful not to mix up this word with 'oversee'. Both of these are very common in Business English:

To overlook: to fail to notice something

"Unfortunately, we overlooked some of the risks involved with the project."

To oversee: to supervise someone or something, especially officially

"I am currently overseeing the product launch."

To be caught off guard by..

We are often caught off guard 'by' something:

"We were completely caught off guard by the sudden change in the market."

We can also 'get caught off guard' by something:

"Don't get caught off guard by their hard negotiation tactics. They do it all the time."

We can also 'catch somebody off guard':

"The new AI chatbot innovation has caught many competitors off guard."

Stubborn

We can also use stubborn as a noun: stubbornness

"His stubbornness sometimes leads to bad decisions."

To make up for

We can also follow this phrase with an -ing form, as with any phrase ending in a preposition: *"It is essential that we make up for missing that deadline."*

To pay the price for

We can also follow this phrase with an -ing form, as with any phrase ending in a preposition: *"The company have paid the price for taking their eyes off the ball."*

To get away with

We can also use an -ing form with this phrasal verb as well:

"The company got away with overspending because they were rescued by investors."

If we get away with something, it means that we don't suffer any negative consequences for the actions that we take. In a meeting, we can also discuss how far we can push something without receiving any negative consequences:

"Do you think we could get away with raising our prices by as much as 15%."

"If we delayed the launch any further, I don't think we would get away with it."

To take accountability for

The noun 'accountability' means being responsible for what you do and giving satisfactory reasons for your actions. This is seen as a really positive characteristic of managers and employees, and is encouraged in companies:

"We encourage a strong culture of accountability at our company."

We can also use the phrase 'to be accountable for something'. This means to be completely responsible for the actions that you have taken:

"He is accountable for the recent downturn in profits."

Someone can also be held accountable for something, meaning that someone is made responsible for something and must give a satisfactory reason for the actions that they have taken:

"The government has to be held accountable for their treatment of homeless people."

"The fund managers must be held accountable for mismanaging clients' investments."

E) Idioms + regarding

If we want to use the idioms in the middle of a sentence, it is better to follow these with the word 'regarding':

To be wide of the mark regarding

"We were really wide of the mark regarding our projections for 2022."

To take your eye off the ball regarding

"We took our eyes off the ball regarding the rapid advances made by our competition."

F) Glossary of words for sounding practical when talking about making and overcoming mistakes

to overlook

to be caught off guard

To catch someone off guard

to be wide of the mark

a rash decision

to get away with

stubborn / stubbornness

to take accountability for

a culture of accountability

to backfire

to make up for

to get complacent

complacency

to pay the price for

to take your eye off the ball

to miss the boat