COFFEE CUP FAMILY

Episode 20

The Courage To Own Your Mistakes

Own It. Learn From It. Move Forward.

A Conversation Worth Having

There are three words that can be surprisingly difficult to say: “That’s on me.” They are short. They require no fancy explanation. Yet they can challenge our pride, expose our vulnerability, and force us to face something we would rather avoid: the possibility that we got it wrong.

Welcome back, Coffee Cup Family. Pull up a chair, grab your coffee, and think about this question: When was the last time you admitted a mistake without adding an excuse? Not “I was wrong, but you made me do it.” Not “I’m sorry if you were offended.” Just a simple, sincere acknowledgment that something you did caused a problem and you are willing to take responsibility for your part.

If you struggle with that, you are in good company. We all make mistakes. We misunderstand people. We speak too quickly. We make decisions without having all the facts. Sometimes we act from fatigue, fear, frustration, or pride. Being human means we will occasionally get things wrong. The real question is what we do afterward.

I have learned that a mistake does not have to become your identity. It can become a lesson. But that transformation rarely happens while we are busy defending ourselves.

The Leadership Lesson

During my thirty years in the military, I saw how much trust matters. A team needs to know that its members will be truthful about what happened, especially when things do not go according to plan. When people hide errors, shift blame, or protect their image at the expense of the mission, the entire team can pay the price.

That lesson extends far beyond military service. It matters in a volunteer organization, a business, a school, a community group, and a family. A leader does not have to know everything or get every decision right. A leader does need the courage to listen, recognize a mistake, and respond honestly.

Imagine two leaders facing the same problem. One immediately points fingers, explains why everyone else failed, and insists there was nothing they could have done differently. The other says, “Here is the decision I made. Here is where I got it wrong. Here is what I am doing to correct it.” Which leader would you trust with the next difficult decision?

The second leader has not magically erased the error. But that leader has demonstrated something important: integrity matters more than appearances. Accountability can build confidence because people know they are getting the truth.

This is not a call to take responsibility for every problem around you. Good leadership also means identifying what was outside your control, protecting people from unfair blame, and asking what the team can improve

together. Accountability is about owning your part, not carrying everybody else's burden.

Why Three Words Can Be So Hard

Why is "That's on me" so uncomfortable? Sometimes the answer is pride. We want others to think we are competent, thoughtful, and dependable. Admitting a mistake can feel like surrendering that image.

Sometimes the answer is fear. We worry about losing respect, facing consequences, or reopening a painful conversation. Sometimes we are simply embarrassed. We know better, and we wish we had done better.

But defending ourselves at all costs comes with its own price. The more energy we spend protecting an excuse, the less energy we have available to fix the situation. We can become so focused on proving we were right that we stop asking what is right.

Humility changes the question. Instead of "How do I make myself look better?" we ask, "What can I learn, and what would help make this better?" That shift is not weakness. It is maturity.

The People Closest to Us

Accountability may be most difficult at home. With the people we love, our words carry weight. A sharp response after a long day, a promise we failed to keep, or a moment when we refused to listen can linger longer than we intended.

Sometimes the most powerful thing we can offer a spouse, friend, child, or family member is an apology that does not come with a defense attached. "I interrupted you. I should have listened." "I made a promise and did not follow through." "I spoke out of anger, and I am sorry."

Notice what those statements do. They name the behavior. They acknowledge its impact. They do not demand immediate forgiveness. A sincere apology is not a transaction where we say the right words and expect the other person to move on instantly.

Trust may need time. Someone may need space. In some relationships, healthy boundaries are necessary. Owning our part is worthwhile even when the other person is not ready to respond the way we hope.

And let us remember that accountability is not the same as accepting mistreatment. If another person is blaming you unfairly, manipulating you, or making you responsible for their choices, you can acknowledge your own actions without agreeing to a false story about what happened.

The Spilled Coffee Lesson

Picture yourself sitting down with a fresh cup of coffee. You reach across the table, bump the mug, and coffee spills everywhere. You can blame the cup. You can blame the table. You can complain that someone distracted you. You can spend ten minutes explaining how it happened.

But the coffee is still on the table.

Eventually, somebody has to grab a towel and start cleaning up. Life is not much different. We cannot always undo the spill. We cannot take back every word, reverse every decision, or erase every consequence. But we can stop arguing about the mess and begin doing what is possible to repair it.

Sometimes repair means an apology. Sometimes it means replacing something we damaged, correcting misinformation, following through on a neglected responsibility, or changing a habit. Sometimes the most meaningful repair is quietly demonstrating, over time, that we learned the lesson.

An apology is a beginning, not a substitute for changed behavior. The towel matters more than the explanation of how the coffee spilled.

From Guilt to Growth

There is a difference between healthy responsibility and endless self-punishment. Healthy responsibility says, “I made a mistake, and I can choose a better response.” Shame can say, “I made a mistake, therefore I am a failure.” Those are not the same message.

If you spend your life replaying yesterday, you can miss the opportunity standing in front of you today. Reflection is useful when it leads to learning. It becomes less useful when it traps us in a loop of regret without any plan for change.

Try asking yourself three questions. What happened, without exaggeration or excuses? What was my part, and what was outside my control? What is one specific action I can take now?

That last question is where momentum begins. A small action can be more meaningful than a grand promise. Make the phone call. Send the correction. Ask for feedback. Put a reminder on your calendar. Practice listening before responding. Seek help if the pattern is bigger than you can manage alone.

You do not need to transform your entire life by Friday. You need to take an honest next step.

The Strength to Say “I Was Wrong”

In a world where people often feel pressured to have an immediate opinion, it takes courage to say, “I need to learn more.” It takes confidence to say, “I changed my mind after hearing the facts.” And it takes character to say, “I was wrong.”

Those statements do not erase your experience or your convictions. They show that you value truth more than winning every argument. The best conversations leave room for people to grow, including us.

As we talk about leadership, I also want us to remember the difference between “I” and “we.” Accountability starts with the part I own, but improvement often happens when we work together. We can ask how our communication broke down, what support was missing, and how we can prevent the same problem next time. There is room for both personal responsibility and shared learning.

That is how a mistake can become more than a painful memory. It can become a turning point.

Your Coffee Cup Challenge

This week, identify one situation where you could practice accountability. It does not need to be dramatic. Maybe you owe someone a conversation. Maybe you need to correct an assumption. Maybe you have been postponing a responsibility because admitting the problem feels uncomfortable.

First, write down the facts. Second, identify the part that belongs to you. Third, decide what a respectful repair would look like. Finally, take one practical step. If an apology is appropriate, make it specific and

sincere. If the other person needs time, respect that. If you need to change a behavior, make a plan you can actually follow.

And if the situation was not your fault, your challenge may be different: stop carrying blame that does not belong to you. Learning to distinguish responsibility from misplaced guilt is part of growing stronger, too.

One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.

Coffee Cup Family, none of us has a perfect record. I certainly do not. We are people learning as we go, doing our best, sometimes falling short, and getting another opportunity to make a better choice.

The goal is not to become someone who never makes a mistake. The goal is to become someone who can face the truth, learn from it, and keep moving forward with humility and integrity.

Remember this: Your mistakes are part of your story. They do not have to become your identity.

The next time you get something wrong, do not let pride write the ending. Own your part. Learn the lesson. Take the next right step.

God bless you, Coffee Cup Family. One person. One conversation. One cup.

Eric Dudash | Coffee Cup Family | ericdudash.com

Own your part. Learn the lesson. Take the next right step.

One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.

REFLECTION WORKBOOK

Episode 20

THE COURAGE TO OWN YOUR MISTAKES

Own It. Learn From It. Move Forward.

Your mistakes are part of your story. They don’t have to become your identity.

Name: _____

Date: _____

How to Use This Workbook

Set aside 15–20 quiet minutes and a cup of coffee. Answer honestly, without judging yourself. You may work through the pages alone or with a trusted friend. Choose a situation that feels safe to reflect on. You do not have to contact anyone who has harmed you or place yourself in an unsafe situation.

Page 1 — Notice the Moment

Think of a recent situation you wish you had handled differently. Describe what happened using facts rather than labels or accusations.

What happened?

What was I feeling at the time?

What did I say or do that I would change?

What facts might I still be missing?

Coffee Cup Thought

> **"Awareness is the beginning of accountability."**

Page 2 — Own Your Part

Being accountable does not mean accepting blame for everything. Separate your actions from circumstances and other people’s choices.

What was within my control?

What was outside my control?

What responsibility can I fairly accept?

Am I blaming someone else for my choice—or blaming myself for theirs?

Complete this sentence: “The part I can own is…”

Coffee Cup Thought

> **"Own your part. Do not carry what is not yours."**

Page 3 — Learn the Lesson

The purpose of reflection is growth, not endless guilt.

What did this experience teach me about my habits or reactions?

What warning sign could I notice sooner next time?

What would a wiser response look like?

Who could offer honest, constructive feedback?

Complete this sentence: “Next time, I will…”

Coffee Cup Thought

> **"A lesson matters when it changes the next decision."**

Page 4 — Make It Right

Choose a realistic repair step. Not every situation calls for contacting another person, and forgiveness cannot be demanded.

Is an apology or correction appropriate and safe?

What specific behavior do I need to acknowledge?

What action could help repair the harm?

What boundary or expectation should I respect?

Practice an apology:
“I did _____ . I understand it affected you by _____ . I am sorry. I plan to _____ .”

Coffee Cup Thought

> **"An apology begins the repair. Changed behavior helps sustain it."**

Page 5 — Move Forward

Choose one small action you can complete in the next seven days.

My next step:

When I will take it:

What might get in the way?

How I will respond if that happens:

How will I know I am making progress?

One thing I can release from yesterday:

Seven-Day Check-In

What did I do?

What did I learn?

What will I keep practicing?

The Coffee Cup Commitment

I will tell the truth about my actions, learn without defining myself by my mistakes, and take one meaningful step toward making things right. I will also remember that responsibility has boundaries.

Signature:

Date:

> **“Your mistakes are part of your story. They don’t have to become your identity.”**

One person. One conversation. One cup.