

## THAT SINKING FEELING

### How do you respond when a decision has gone wrong?

We've all been there. First comes the sinking feeling, rapidly followed by either self-recrimination or the search for someone to blame. It could be a combination of the two, such as when you were given poor or partial advice but didn't spot the need to challenge it. Colleagues or the media may be asking for instant comment but it's hard to think straight if stress hormones are flooding your body.

Each leader has their own strategies, but we regularly hear about:

- Pausing to notice the physical symptoms: does this need a walk to clear the head, a round of deep breathing, or a safe space to yell in the wind?
- Acceptance of the new reality and focus on how best to deal with it
- Engagement with trusted allies who may bring a different perspective and help to calm your emotions
- Encouragement to teams that the incident is survivable, and that the immediate priority is to put things as right as possible
- Agreement to park the postmortem for later, including the self-examination.

**Facing the music in public, in the Boardroom or with the boss, these leaders think as much about how they come across as what needs to be said.** They know that if they are angry or defensive, that will prompt negative reactions in their listeners. They don't want to share their raw emotions because that could undermine confidence that they are capable of putting things right. They want others to see honest humility about mistakes that have been made, and a firm commitment to addressing any damage.

When it comes to the postmortem, they talk to their teams about the shared learning from the experience, and about better, though still proportionate, risk management. They aim to move everyone forward rather than looking for scapegoats or ruminating on a past that can't be changed.

**One leader who couldn't stop dwelling on an event said: "Remind yourself of all your strengths and achievements. You can't afford to be undermined by this. You have plenty of credit in the bank and the spotlight will quickly shift elsewhere if you let it."**

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