

Learning From Mistakes

How We Can Learn from the Mistakes
of Great Leaders



2018 FCCA Conference



Philadelphia, PA
July 30 - August 2

Liberty & Learning



Rich Marshall

Senior Education Specialist

Federal Judicial Center



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Learning Objectives

By the end of the program, participants will be able to:

- Identify the difference between errors, mistakes, and failures
- Recognize different types of error
- Discuss mistakes of historical figures



Learning Objectives

By the end of the program, participants will be able to:

- Identify lessons one can learn from historical mistakes
- Recognize the perils of “groupthink”
- Analyze a mistake that they have made
- Discuss why and how organizations should encourage failure

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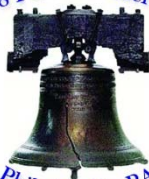
Errors, Mistakes, and Failures



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“Every great mistake
has a halfway
moment, a split
second where it can
be recalled and
perhaps remedied.”

Pearl Buck

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Error

Deviation from accuracy or correctness...

Dictionary.com



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Mistake

An error in action,
calculation, opinion, or
judgment caused by poor
reasoning, carelessness,
insufficient knowledge, etc.

Dictionary.com



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Failure

A deviation from expected and desired results, to include both avoidable errors and unavoidable negative outcomes of experiments or uncertain actions. As such, failure encompasses both mistakes (human error) and problems (obstacles and other deviations that thwart expected work processes).

Amy Edmondson, "Learning from failure in health care: frequent opportunities, pervasive barriers."



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Mistake and Failure

A sure way to ensure failure

Repeat the mistake



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(some) Types of Error

**Errors
of
Omission**

**Errors
of
Commission**



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Exercise 1

Analyze a mistake you
have made



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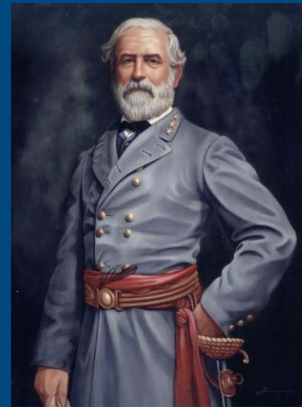
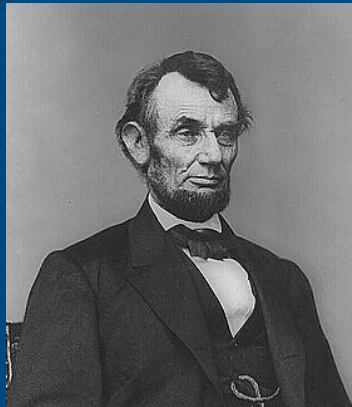
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Historical Figures and their Mistakes



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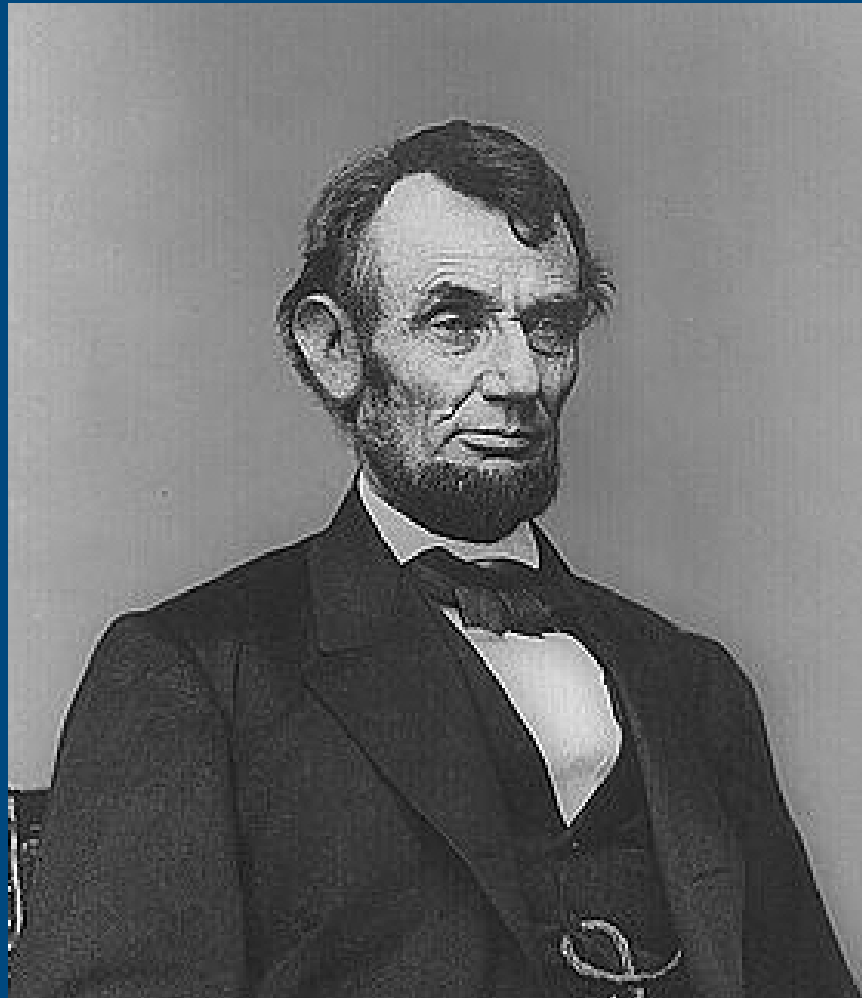
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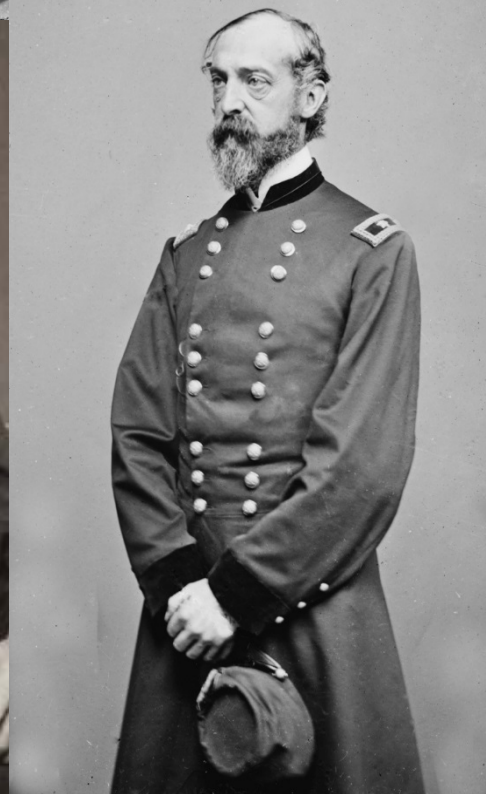
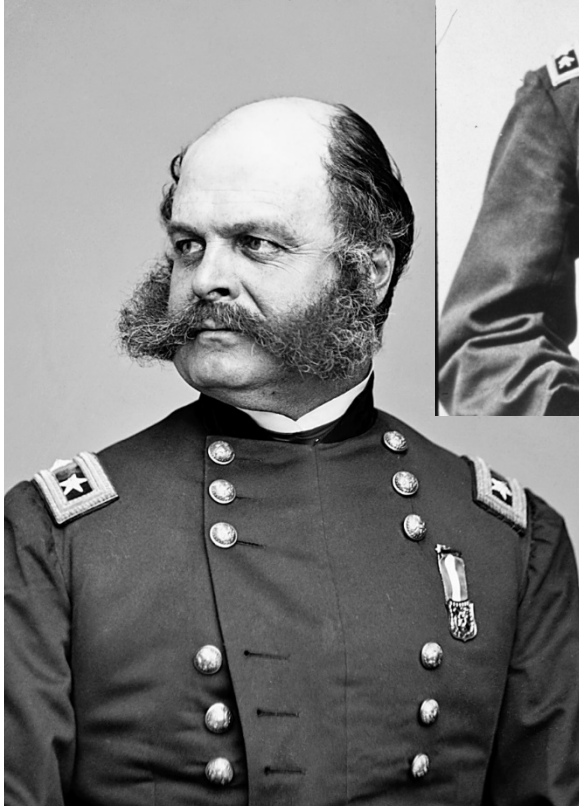
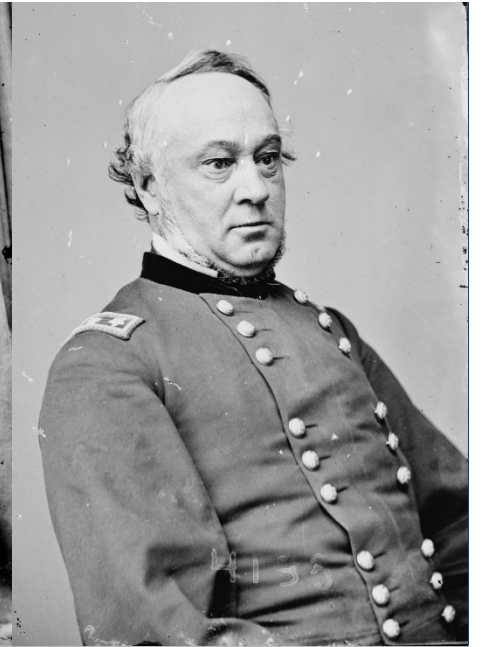


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Lincoln and His Generals





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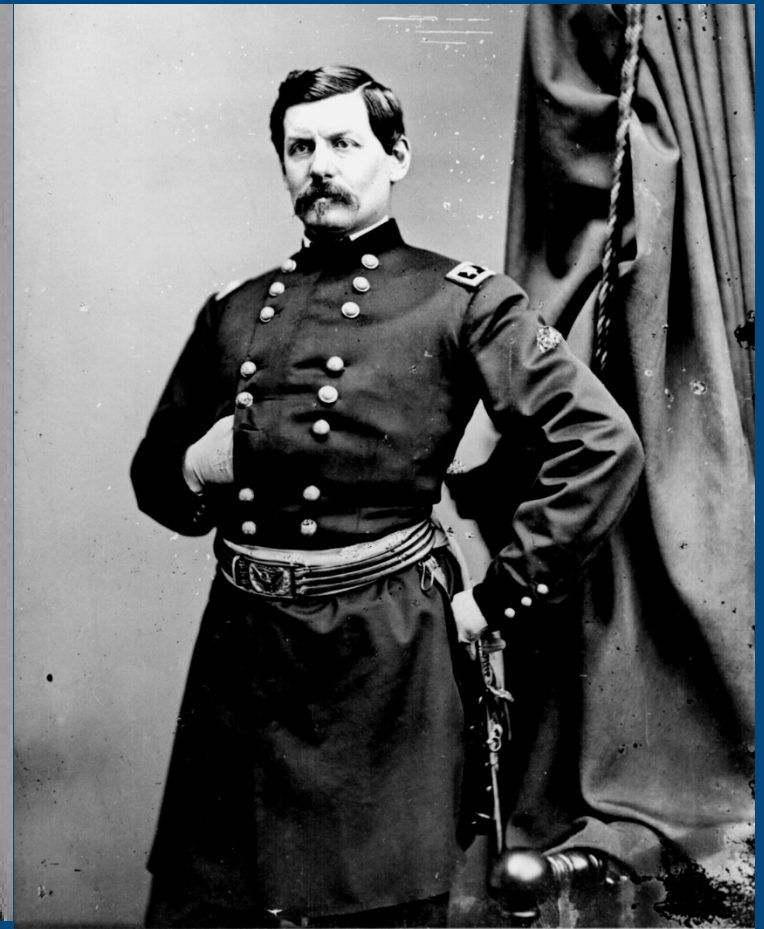
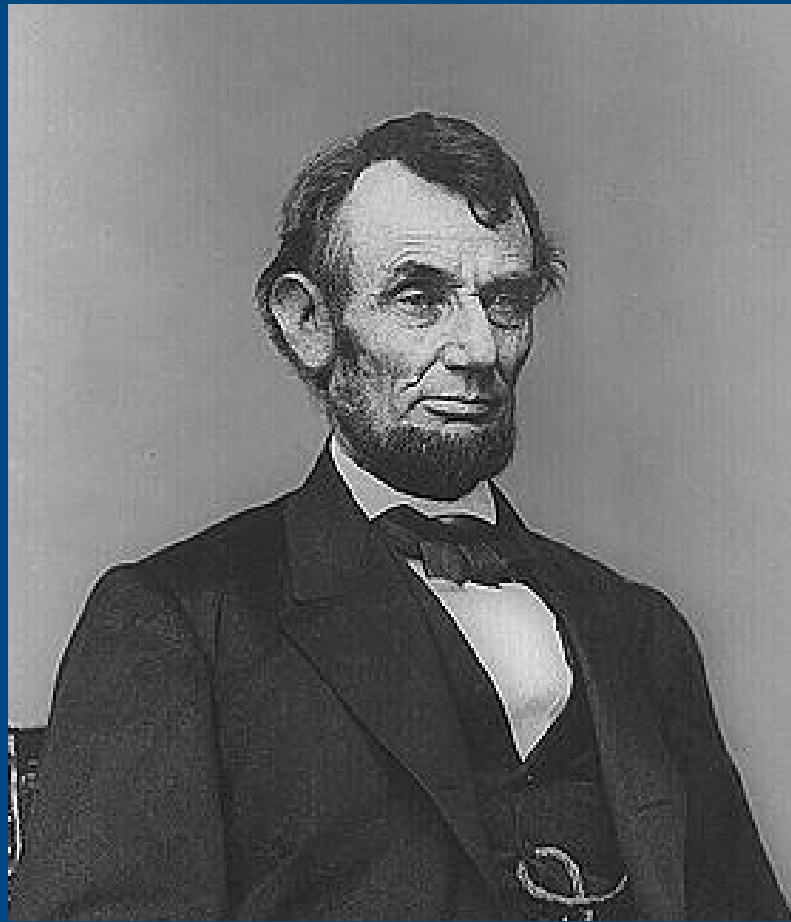


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Lincoln and McClellan



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Lessons

- Have clear expectations
 - Share vision and goals
 - Demand accountability
- Clear, direct communication
 - Speak the same language
 - An order is an order; a request is a request
- Knowledge is power
- Show confidence

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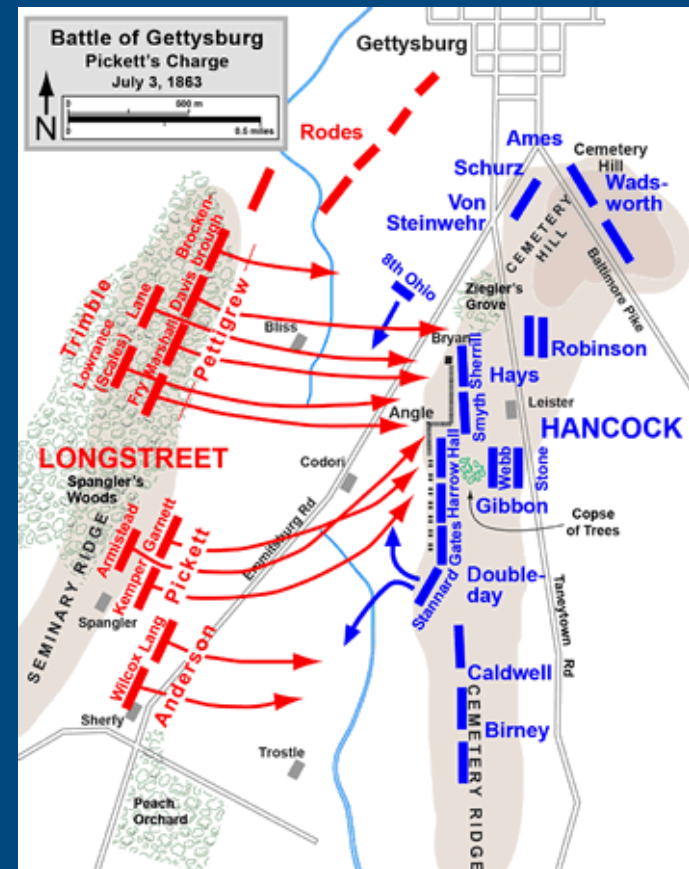
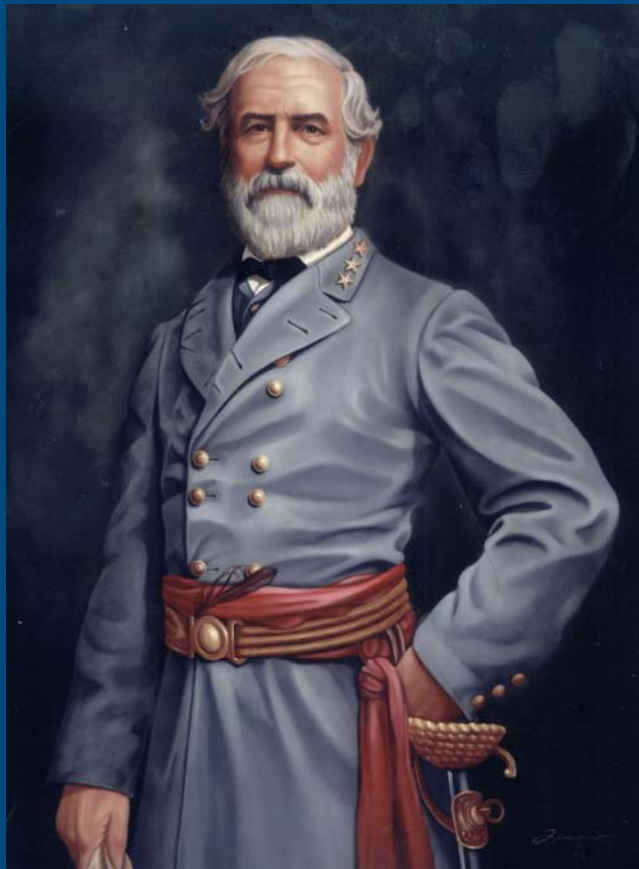


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Robert E. Lee at Gettysburg



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Lessons

- Don't be enamored of prior successes
- Don't rationalize prior failures
- Don't be overly optimistic
- Don't ignore dissenting voices
- Realistically appraise the current situation
- Own/Internalize your mistake



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"It's all my fault. I
thought my men were
invincible."

General Robert E. Lee, the day
after Pickett's Charge



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JFK and the Bay of Pigs





Lessons

- Review existing policies
- Listen critically
- Ask tough questions
- Bring in outside views/ “Devils Advocate”
- Take responsibility for failure
- Use failure as an opportunity to learn



JFK

“Success has 1,000 fathers
and failure is an orphan.
I have failed.”



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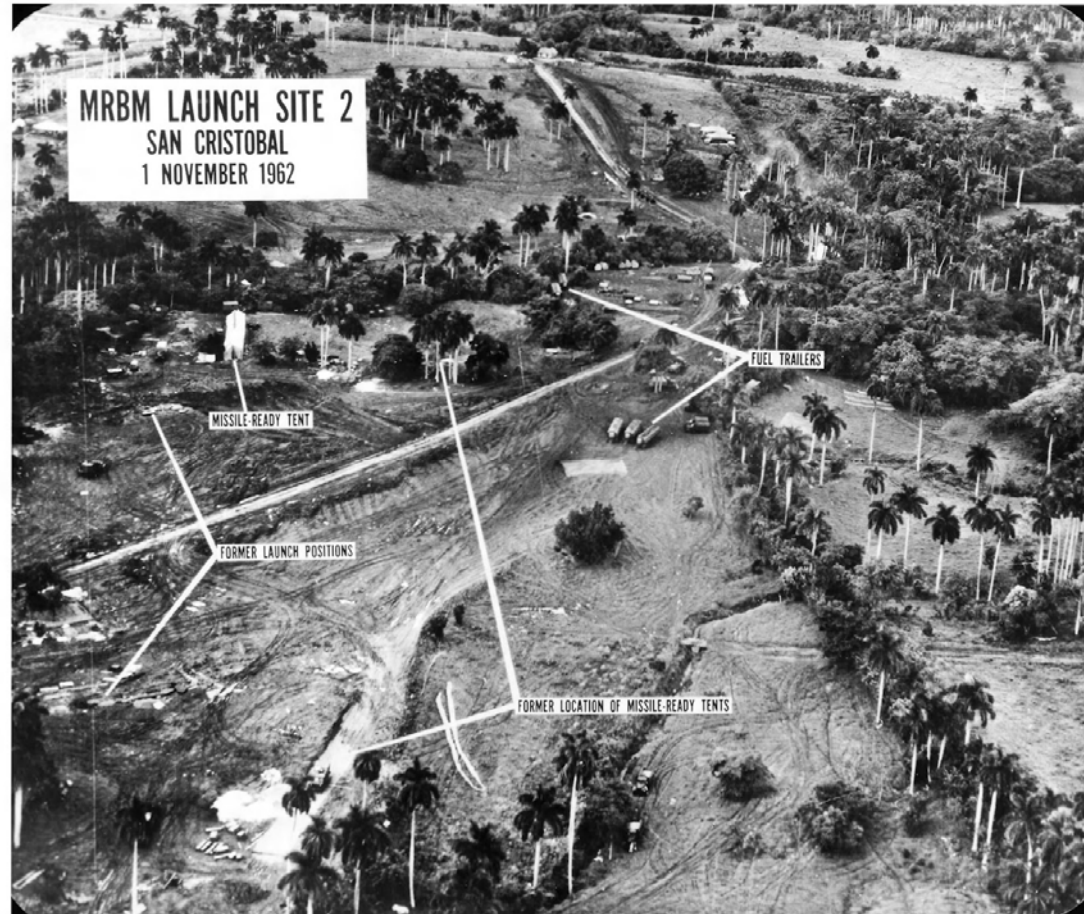


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The Cuban Missile Crisis



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New Coke and the Risk of Change



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Lessons

- Loyalty should not be taken lightly
- Major change requires major analysis
 - The first question should be “Why?”
- Reversal can be a reasonable option





Exercise 1b

Analyze a mistake you
have made

Questions 6-10

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Group/Organization Decision Making

Exercise 2

*Where should we hold FCCA in
2022?*



Choices

Chicago, San Francisco,
New Orleans, New York,
San Antonio, Miami,
Honolulu, Tulsa, Denver,
Washington DC, Boston



Exercise 2

Debrief



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The Challenger Disaster



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The Challenger Disaster Video



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Groupthink

Symptoms

- Illusion of Unanimity
- Collective Rationalization
- Self-Censorship
- Pressure for Conformity



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The Danger of Conformity Video



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Groupthink

Symptoms

- Self-Censorship
- Excessive Stereotyping
- Illusion of Unanimity
- Mindguards



Groupthink

Lessons

- The leader should not show his/her preference initially
- Give high priority to airing objections and doubts, and be accepting of criticism
- Encourage “devil’s advocates” consider unpopular alternatives



Groupthink

Lessons

- Divide the group if possible
- Don't stop at preliminary consensus
- Use outside experts

