

Unforced Errors

Shaqtin a Fool is a segment of the 'Inside the NBA' show that basketball fans love to watch (on YouTube and Instagram as well) but one that professional basketball players wouldn't want to be a part of because it features players, coaches, referees, etc making a fool of themselves during competitive games. The fact that professional players make not just amateurish mistakes but also silly mistakes that are often outrageous and totally unwarranted is hilarious to watch. They are mostly blunders made when there is no pressure from an opponent.

If you watch or are involved in sports, you are likely familiar with the concept of unforced errors. According to Merriam-Webster, an unforced error is a missed shot or lost point that is entirely the result of a player's own error, and not due to his or her opponent's skill or effort. Athletes spend hours training their bodies and conditioning their minds to avoid unforced errors because they believe it is better to be defeated by a better opponent than to lose because of mistakes they can control.

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Unfortunately, unforced errors also happen quite often in corporate settings, as executives sabotage themselves after all the hard work they put in, and as a result remain stuck in their careers despite excellent academic credentials and a promising start. From my experience conducting 360-degree feedback on executive coaching, here are a few examples I recall:

- Being Critical - passing judgement unnecessarily, coming down hard on people unnecessarily or being critical in an out of proportion manner.
- Being Negative - this executive's mind is so closed to new ideas, and he seems so bent on preserving the status quo, that his colleagues think he should work in a museum instead.
- Being Boring - maybe not boring as a person, but instead of radiating energy, this executive could drag you into sleep and cure any insomnia.
- Sitting on the fence - every time you need to make a decision, you wonder if you were speaking with a Zen philosopher, since each con balances out every pro like each is a yin and a yang.
- Being Defensive - you tiptoe around this person and think carefully about your words since you don't know what might trigger their outburst since they are extremely sensitive, much like a wounded person walking with open wounds.

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- Keen Start with a Poor Finish - known to be exuberant about new projects but disappear before mid-point.
- Being Indecisive - even a simple logo design could take a year's worth of deliberations over many meetings, and every decision you ask of him or her is deflected back to you.
- Being Overly Pushy - this person is a cousin to a Narcissist who believes that you should follow his or her instructions to the 'T' as his or her intentions are good (which they usually are). Your initial feelings of being nurtured have already made you wonder whether you are a puppet being manipulated.

The list goes on, and while sometimes they occur as blind spots, they are often issues that executives know about, but hesitate to resolve. A client told me during our first coaching session, "I want to lead and I work hard to position myself to be considered, but every time I am given a leadership opportunity, I stumble.". It turned out that she had the wrong mindset about leading.

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If left unchecked, unforced errors cost sports professionals championships and impede career advancement for executives. Team and organizational culture are also affected by such behaviors, as if they are acceptable.

It can sometimes take a village of coaches, sports psychologists, tacticians, teammates, etc. to help a sportsperson overcome unforced errors. What help are you receiving to reduce your unforced errors? Is this a battle you are fighting against yourself?

Let's work on it together.

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