

The logo for SWE NEXT, with 'swe' in a vertical blue font and 'NEXT' in a large, bold, blue font where the 'E' is yellow.

SWEet Wisdom April 2019

How do you move past obstacles in your work and learn from your mistakes?

Each month we offer some advice from amazing engineers in the Society of Women Engineers (SWE)!

This month, we discuss something that is a reality for all of us. As perfect as we want to be, we are only human, and we sometimes make mistakes. So how do you move past obstacles and learn from your mistakes? Read on for some advice! And then check out the video on the SWENext YouTube Channel for more advice on this topic!

Do you have a question for our engineers? We'd love to hear from you! Send your questions to swenext@swe.org. We'll answer you, and your question may become a future SWEet Wisdom column!

Cathy Meyn

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Corporate Director at Northrop Grumman

It is important to remember that everyone makes mistakes. It's how you handle those mistakes and move forward that helps you grow. Focus on the facts and don't let your emotions block you. Think about what you could have done differently that would have given you a better outcome. Write down the lessons you learned and review them when you are in a similar situation. Every day you'll make more progress.



Julianne Amenta

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First, I try to fully understand why the mistake or obstacle occurred as a way to prevent it from occurring in the future. Second, I try not to beat myself up or take more responsibility than is due. Third, I have a conversation with others involved to smooth things over and come to agreement. Finally, I seek input from mentors, peers, friends and supervisors on tackling challenges or making difficult decisions.



Katrina Malaski

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It depends on the obstacle...



Example 1: A technical obstacle. I am designing an HVAC system I am not that proficient in--for example, an ice storage system. I am in a meeting with a customer, and he asks me questions about the system I can't answer. Don't panic! It is best to admit you are unsure and then go back with the correct answer. It's okay to not know!! My company has a lot of support both locally and on a corporate level where I can go to learn this topic. You are not expected to be proficient in everything your company sells or designs. Lean on support, mentors, etc. Teach yourself that topic well and next time you will have the right answers.

Example 2: A time management obstacle. I am not prepared for this meeting with my boss because I didn't prioritize my time well. Hopefully your boss isn't too hard on you, but you will learn the hard way to prepare in advance for important meetings. I like to categorize my to-do list into four different boxes: important and urgent, urgent and not important, important and not urgent, not urgent and not important. You will learn after some practice how to achieve the best time management schedule for you. Keep in mind this may change a lot throughout the year so you are never quite done learning how to manage this obstacle, but you will get the hang of it.

Example 3: A personal obstacle. I still feel embarrassed from that meeting last week because my design was rejected by the team. Sometimes it may feel discouraging if you find yourself struggling to succeed on a particular project or period in your career. Sometimes you just need to let out a good cry when you get home that day and then move on realizing that you will do better and try harder on the next project. You can't win them all, and that's okay. This lesson is easy: "I am a female engineer and I am awesome!"

And there's more!

Check out this short [SWEet Wisdom video](#) on the [SWENext YouTube Channel](#) to

hear from more women engineers about how to move past obstacles.



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