

Flushed with Wisdom: Leadership Lessons from an Unfortunate Phone Drop

The Drop Heard 'Round the Dinner Table

According to a recent survey (a phone survey, no doubt), 47 percent of all water-damaged mobile phones in the UK have been dropped in the toilet. That means nearly half of all people who've lost their phones to water had the exact same horrifying, slow-motion experience: watching their beloved device take a swan dive into the porcelain abyss.

Well, count me among the 47 percent.

Like most people, I was checking my phone while using the bathroom. I know, I know—there are better times and places. But let's be honest, we all do it. As I finished up and went to put my phone back in my pocket, I fumbled. It was like a scene from a gymnastics routine gone horribly wrong. My phone executed a triple somersault, failed to stick the landing, and splashed down in the toilet.

Now, I was faced with an immediate and deeply existential question: Do I fish it out or leave it there and pretend it never happened?

Spoiler alert: I fished it out. What else was I supposed to do? Just abandon it? Declare it a lost cause and walk away with dignity? I suppose I could have. But no, like any responsible adult (and someone who didn't want to explain why I left a phone in the bathroom), I rolled up my sleeves—figuratively, of course—and retrieved it.

By now, I'd been away from the dinner party for a solid ten minutes. I emerged from the restroom with clean hands—surgery

clean, mind you—but my phone, well, it wasn't so lucky. It flickered. It glitched. It let out a dramatic digital gasp before flatlining right there in my hands.

As I sat back down, someone at the table, oblivious to my recent trauma, smirked and asked, "Did everything come out alright?"

If they only knew.

To make matters worse, it was a company phone. How was I supposed to explain this one? "Yeah, I had a minor workplace accident involving gravity, poor hand-eye coordination, and a bowl of water that wasn't meant for electronics." Not exactly a shining moment in my professional career.

Lessons Learned the Hard Way

But as embarrassing as it was, the whole ordeal got me thinking: What leadership lessons can we take from an ill-fated phone drop? (Besides the obvious one: stop taking your phone into the bathroom.)

1. Own Your Mistakes—Even the Messy Ones

Leadership isn't about being perfect; it's about being accountable. I could have blamed gravity, my pants pocket, or the cruel and unusual design of modern toilets. But at the end of the day, I had to own it. Great leaders do the same. When you mess up, acknowledge it, clean it up (literally and figuratively), and move on.

2. Some Things Can't Be Fixed—Know When to Let Go

I tried everything to save my phone. Rice, hairdryers, whispered prayers—it was all in vain. Some situations just can't be salvaged. In leadership, the same applies. Sometimes a project, a strategy, or even an employee relationship is beyond repair. Knowing when to let go can be just as important as knowing when to fight for something.

3. Prepare for the Unexpected

I never thought I'd be the guy fishing his phone out of a toilet. But here we are. Leadership is full of unexpected moments. The key is staying calm, thinking through your options, and responding with a level head. If you panic, you'll only make things worse (and in this case, much messier).

4. Laugh at Yourself—Because Everyone Else Will

If you don't have a sense of humor about your own blunders, trust me, someone else will. The best leaders don't take themselves too seriously. They embrace their humanity, learn from their missteps, and share those lessons with others. Plus, if nothing else, your mistakes make for great storytelling later.

So, do I still check my phone in the bathroom?

Of course I do. I bet you do too. ☐

Cheers,

Preston