

Breakdown

Breakdown: any situation that presents uncertainty fulfilling your commitment.

This can take many forms

- Threatens progress, encountering obstacles
- Stops effective action
- Violates an explicit agreement



Thinking about breakdowns impacts response.

Complaining about how X event shouldn't have happened does not change the fact that the event *has* happened. What is helpful is to face the event and the results as they are and to declare the breakdown, then have a productive conversation to learn from the experience.

Breakdowns can lead to Breakthroughs... when handled well.

Breakthroughs occur when we find new ways to approach work and achieve results. Handled poorly, a breakdown can result in minimizing or ignoring problems, which leads to blaming others and eroding teamwork, trust, and effectiveness. Handled well, breakdowns create learning and greater knowledge.

Breakdowns – The Basics

1. You should expect surprises, including both breakdowns and the beneficial moments of breakthrough and success.
 - All large commitments will have breakdowns.
 - Without commitment there is no breakdown.
 - The greater your commitment, the more frequent breakdowns will be.
2. Often one person will notice a breakdown before others.
3. The people involved can work together to create understanding about the breakdown and how to respond to the breakdown together. Then, they can find a way to break through the breakdown. Very effective teams have an *active practice of breakdown conversations*; all members initiate these conversations.

Guide for a Breakdown Conversation

Objective: Create shared understanding and agreement to action.

1. **What was the breakdown?** Briefly describe what happened.
2. **What were you committed to?** Describe the commitment of you and/or your team.
3. **What was missing that caused the breakdown to occur?**
4. **What did you learn?**
5. **What actions could you take now?**

Reflection

- Why might people resist declaring a breakdown?
- What is the impact of being in breakdown and not declaring it?
- What is the benefit of declaring, “We are having a breakdown?”
- What things might constitute a breakdown?
- What gets created with a “productive breakdown conversation”?
- What helps/hinders the productivity of a breakdown conversation?

