

# **The Screw-Up**



# The Screw-Up

Copyright © 2026 Blurt Snodgrass

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means — electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise — without the prior written permission of the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This is a work of reflection and encouragement. Names and characters are products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

First Edition: 2026

Published by 321Lumina

[321Lumina.com](https://321Lumina.com)

ISBN (paperback): \_\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_

ISBN (ebook): \_\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_

Printed in the United States of America

Cover and interior design by 321Lumina

# The Screw-Up

*What to Do After  
Everything Goes Wrong*

Blurt Snodgrass

a [321Lumina.com](http://321Lumina.com) book

*For every teenager  
who has ever replayed their worst moment  
at 2am and couldn't make it stop.*



It's 2am and you're awake again.

You're not thinking about tomorrow. You're thinking about *that thing*. The thing you did, or said, or failed to do. The moment that went wrong in front of everyone. The one your brain keeps rewinding — frame by frame, slow motion, full volume — like it's trying to find a version where it ends differently.

It doesn't end differently. It never does.

And somewhere in the dark, a voice says what it always says:

*That's who you are. That's what you do. You're the screw-up. And everyone knows it.*

Here's what I want to tell you about that voice.

It's lying.

Not about the mistake. The mistake happened. You don't get to undo it, unsay it, unfreeze it. That part is real.

But the voice isn't talking about the mistake. It's talking about *you*. And those are two completely different things.



Here is something nobody tells you about shame.

Shame is not the same as guilt.

Guilt says: “I did something bad.”

Shame says: “I am something bad.”

Guilt is useful. Guilt is your conscience doing its job — pointing at a specific thing and saying *that wasn't right, fix it if you can, do better next time*. Guilt has a target. Guilt has an exit.

Shame has neither. Shame takes one moment and turns it into an identity. One bad play and suddenly you're the kid who loses games. One frozen silence on stage and suddenly you're the kid who can't be trusted with anything important. One wrong thing said in a group chat and suddenly you're the reason everything fell apart.

Shame doesn't care about context. It doesn't care that you were nervous, or tired, or new, or scared, or just having the worst day of your life when it happened. Shame takes the worst moment and frames it on the wall and says: *this is the whole picture*.

It is not the whole picture. It is one frame.



There is a word for what your brain does with shame, and the word is *reconstruction*.

Every time you replay that moment, your brain isn't playing back a recording. It's rebuilding it. And every time it rebuilds, it makes it worse — sharper edges, louder silence, more faces turned toward you, more certainty that everyone saw and everyone judged and nobody forgot.

The memory you're torturing yourself with at 2am is not exactly what happened. It's what happened, filtered through every bad feeling you've had since, rebuilt by a brain that is trying — in its own clumsy, painful way — to protect you from ever feeling that way again.

Your brain thinks that if it can just make you feel bad enough about the mistake, you'll never make it again.

What it actually does is make you afraid to try anything.



So let's talk about what you actually *do*. After everything goes wrong.

Not the inspirational version. The real version.



## THE FIRST THING

# Name what actually happened



Not the shame spiral. Not the 2am reconstruction. The actual thing.

Say it plainly, the way you'd say it to someone you trusted. Not "*I completely destroyed everything and proved I'm worthless.*" Just: what happened.

*I froze on stage.*

*I said something cruel.*

*I let my team down.*

*I made the wrong call.*

That's it. That's the whole thing. It happened. It was real. It was bad. And it was one moment, not a life sentence.

The moment you can say it plainly — without the spiral attached — is the moment it starts to lose its grip.



Caleb spent three weeks telling people the group chat thing “wasn’t a big deal.” He had explanations. Context. Reasons why it wasn’t *really* his fault, or at least not entirely. He rehearsed the explanations so many times they started to feel true.

Then one night he stopped. Just said it out loud to himself, alone in his room.

*I shared something I was trusted with. I shouldn't have. People got hurt.*

That was it. No spiral. No excuses. Just the plain thing.

He said it three times until it stopped feeling like the end of the world and started feeling like something that had actually happened: something real, with edges he could see clearly enough to eventually walk around.

## THE SECOND THING

# Own it without destroying yourself



This is the hardest move there is. And almost nobody does it right.

Most people do one of two things with their mistakes. They either run from them — deflect, blame, minimize, explain it away until the moment is buried under so many excuses it can't breathe. Or they collapse into them — punish themselves so completely that the shame becomes a kind of identity, something to hide behind, a reason to never try again.

Neither of those is ownership.

Real ownership sounds like this: *That was on me. I'm not going to pretend it wasn't. And I'm going to figure out what comes next.*

That's it. No dramatic confession. No endless self-flagellation. No blaming everyone else while secretly knowing it was you.

Just: *that was on me. And now what?*

Here's why this works. When you blame other people for your mistakes, you protect your ego but you lose your power. Because if it was their fault, then the fix is also theirs. You're stuck waiting for someone else to make it right.

But when you own it — fully, cleanly, without destroying yourself — you get something back. You get agency. You get to decide what happens next. The mistake happened to you, but what you do about it is yours.



Becca's team lost the game. And it wasn't entirely her fault — the defense had been leaking all season, the coach had made a call that didn't work, three other players had bad nights.

But there was a moment in the second half that was hers. A clear chance she didn't take. And she knew it, and

everyone knew it, and nobody was saying it out loud.

After the game she walked up to her coach.

“That second-half chance was on me. I hesitated and I shouldn’t have. I’m going to work on that.”

The coach looked at her for a moment. Then nodded.

Nobody blamed her after that. Not because she’d confessed, but because she’d closed the gap between what everyone was thinking and what anyone was willing to say. There was nothing left to whisper about.

She still felt awful. But she felt awful with her power back.

## THE THIRD THING

# Separate the mistake from the meaning



The mistake happened. That's done.

But the *meaning* you give it — that part isn't done. That part is still being written. And right now, shame is doing the writing.

Shame is a terrible author. It only knows one story: *you were always going to fail, you will always fail, this is who you are, this is how it ends.*

But that's not a story. It's a loop.

You are not a loop. You are a person who made a mistake. Those are not the same thing.

Think about the people you admire most. Not the ones who never fail — those people don't exist. The ones who actually matter to you. The ones who feel real. Every single

one of them has a version of your worst moment. A thing they did that they wish they could undo. A silence that went on too long. A choice that went wrong in public.

The difference between them and someone who got stuck isn't that they stopped making mistakes. It's that they stopped letting one mistake write the whole story.



Marcus had been in the robotics competition when the whole thing fell apart. Their machine jammed in the final round. In front of judges. In front of the other schools. Marcus had been the one running the controls.

For two months after, he called himself the reason they lost. His friends stopped correcting him because they'd corrected him so many times.

Then one night his older sister sat down next to him and said, "Tell me exactly what happened. Just the facts."

He did. Haltingly. The jam. The controls. The silence from the judges.

“Okay,” she said. “That’s what happened. Now tell me what that means about who you *are*.”

He opened his mouth. Then closed it.

Because when he tried to connect those two things — the jammed machine and his whole identity — the connection didn’t actually hold. It was a story he’d been telling.

Not a fact.

## THE FOURTH THING

# Show up anyway



This is the part nobody wants to hear.

You have to go back. Back to the stage, the team, the room, the group, the relationship — wherever the mistake happened. Not because it won't be uncomfortable. It will be. Not because nobody remembers. They might. But because staying away is just shame winning.

And here is the thing about showing up after you've failed: it is one of the most quietly powerful things a person can do.

Not loud. Not dramatic. Just — there. Again. Prepared this time. Ready to try again. Willing to be seen by people who watched you fall.

That kind of showing up doesn't go unnoticed. It doesn't have to be announced. It just changes something — in the room, and in you.

A great goalkeeper doesn't retire after missing a penalty kick. She goes back to training the next morning. Not because she's forgotten. But because she's decided the miss doesn't get to be the last word.

The same is true for you.



Eli had frozen on stage the previous spring. Not briefly. Long enough that the audience shifted in their seats. Long enough that the girl next to him had to improvise two whole lines to cover him. Long enough that he still heard about it in the hallways six months later.

He almost didn't come back for the fall production.

He came back anyway. Not because he felt ready. Because he decided that staying home was just the freeze happening again — slower this time, in private, where nobody could see it but him.

He took a small role. Three lines. He learned them so well he could say them backwards. On opening night his hands shook the whole time.

He didn't freeze.

Nobody made a big deal of it. That was the thing he hadn't expected. He'd imagined some dramatic moment of redemption. Instead it was just — he showed up, he did the thing, he walked offstage.

And somewhere in that ordinary moment something shifted.

He came back the following spring for a bigger role.

## THE FIFTH THING

# Be honest with someone



Not everyone. You don't owe anyone your whole story.

But one person. Someone you trust enough to say the actual thing out loud. Not the performance of being fine. Not the carefully managed version. The real one.

*I froze. I failed. I don't know if I can do this again. And I'm trying anyway.*

There is something that happens when you say the true thing out loud to another person. The shame gets smaller. Not gone — but smaller. Because shame lives in secrecy. It feeds on the gap between who you pretend to be and who you actually are. The moment you close that gap, even a little, even with just one person — the shame has less room to operate.

This is not weakness. This is one of the hardest, bravest things a person can do.

Saying *I'm struggling* to someone who might judge you is more courageous than pretending you're fine to a room full of people who already believe you.



Sophie had been fine for months. She'd perfected fine. Fine in the hallways, fine at practice, fine at dinner. She'd gotten so good at fine that she'd half convinced herself.

Then her best friend Maya said, "You don't have to be fine with me."

Just that. No pressure. No follow-up question.

Sophie looked at her for a long moment.

Then she said the actual thing. Not the managed version. The real one — the mistake, the shame, the 2am replays, all of it. It took about four minutes and she cried for two of them.

Maya didn't fix it. She didn't say the right thing or solve anything.

But when Sophie walked home that night the thing felt different. Smaller. Like it had been living in a sealed room

and someone had finally opened a window.

## THE SIXTH THING

# Treat yourself like someone worth showing up for



Not when you've earned it. Not after you've proven yourself. Now.

This one is about discipline — but not the punishment kind. Not the kind that says *I have to do this or I'm worthless*. The kind that says *I'm going to do this because I'm worth doing it for*.

Show up to the thing prepared. Not to impress anyone. Because you decided you matter enough to prepare.

Get enough sleep. Not because someone told you to. Because the version of you that runs on empty makes worse decisions and then feels worse about them, and you've had enough of that.

Do the thing you've been avoiding. Not to prove anything to anyone watching. But because the longer you avoid it, the more power the fear gets.

Every small act of self-respect is a vote for the version of you that isn't the screw-up.

You don't need a majority right away. You just need to start voting.



Jordan had a system after the failure. He called it damage control. It looked like this: do the minimum. Stay invisible. Don't volunteer for anything that could go wrong. Get through the day without anyone noticing you.

He'd been running damage control for four months when he realized it wasn't protecting him.

It was just making him smaller.

One Monday morning he decided to do one thing differently. He showed up to practice fifteen minutes early and ran drills by himself before anyone else arrived.

Nobody saw it. Nobody gave him a point for it. It didn't fix anything.

But he felt different walking into school that day. Not confident exactly. Just — like someone who had done something. Like someone who had decided, quietly, that he was worth the fifteen minutes.

He came back early the next day too.

## THE SEVENTH THING

# Let it make you wiser, not more careful



There is a wrong lesson and a right lesson in every mistake.

The wrong lesson is: *don't do that again. Be more careful. Take fewer risks. Stay smaller. Don't put yourself in a position where you can fail publicly.*

The right lesson is: *now I know something I didn't know before.*

Wisdom isn't something that arrives automatically with age. It's something you build deliberately — by doing something, by noticing what happened, by asking honestly what you'd do differently, and then by trying again with that knowledge in your hands.

The mistake is the tuition. What you learn from it is the education.

If you only take the wrong lesson — shrink, avoid, protect — you paid the tuition and skipped the class.



Rena's wrong lesson from her mistake was: *never speak first. Never put herself out there. Wait until she was sure before she said anything.*

She took the wrong lesson for about a semester. She got very good at being quiet. She stopped making mistakes.

She also stopped making anything else.

Her drama teacher noticed. Pulled her aside one day and said, "You've gotten careful. Careful isn't what you're best at."

Rena thought about that for a long time.

The mistake she'd made hadn't come from being too bold. It had come from being unprepared and not listening. Those were fixable things. Specific things. Things she could actually work on.

Shrinking wasn't working on them. Shrinking was just paying the tuition and skipping the class.

She started speaking up again. Carefully, at first. Then less carefully.

She made new mistakes. Smaller ones. Different ones.

She was getting wiser.

## THE EIGHTH THING

# Be your own best friend



Think about what you would say to someone you love if they came to you with your exact situation. Your best friend. Your little brother or sister. Someone who mattered to you and was sitting across from you, telling you the same story you've been telling yourself at 2am.

You wouldn't say *you're pathetic. You always do this. Everyone thinks you're a joke.*

You'd say something like: *of course that hurt. Of course you're struggling. That was hard. You're allowed to be human.*

Now ask yourself why you get a different conversation than everyone else you care about.

Here's something worth knowing: when you're in the middle of something that really matters — a friendship, a relationship, a team, a dream — your brain makes it genuinely harder to think clearly. Not because you're

stupid. Because that's what brains do when the stakes are high. The chemicals get involved. The emotions take up more space. The rational part goes quieter.

Which means some of your mistakes weren't failures of character. They were just you being human in a high-stakes moment. Everyone fails those. Everyone.

The harshest judge of your worst moment is the version of you that wasn't there — the calm, clear, wise version that exists only in hindsight. That version never had to actually live through it.

Be as kind to yourself as you would be to someone you love.

Not as an excuse. Not to avoid accountability. But because nobody heals in a courtroom where they're always the defendant.



Her name was Lily. And she'd handled the breakup badly.

Not cry-in-your-room badly. Loudly badly. She'd sent messages she wished she could take back. She'd said

things to mutual friends she couldn't unsay. She'd made it messy in ways that were now permanent.

For weeks afterward she put herself on trial every morning. Replaying each message. Each conversation. Each moment where she could have done it differently.

Then her older cousin sat her down and said something simple: "Would you talk to me like that if I'd done what you did?"

Lily thought about it. "No," she said. "Of course not."

"Then why do you get to talk to yourself like that?"

Lily didn't have an answer.

She started trying — not perfectly, not immediately — to give herself the same voice she'd give someone she loved. Not the prosecutor's voice. The friend's voice.

It didn't fix what she'd done. But it gave her enough ground to stand on to actually start fixing it.

## THE NINTH THING

# Build what comes next



Here is the thing about recovering from a mistake that nobody says clearly enough:

Recovery is not the destination.

Getting back to where you were before the mistake — that's not the goal. You can't get back there. The mistake happened. The timeline doesn't rewind.

But here's what's actually available to you, and it's better than going back:

You get to decide who you are *next*.

Not who you were before. Not the screw-up the mistake made you feel like. Who you are *choosing to become* — starting now, from exactly where you are, with everything you now know that you didn't know before.

That means setting a direction. Not a vague wish — an actual direction. Something you're moving *toward* rather than just something you're running away from. A goal. A version of yourself you're building, piece by piece, one small decision at a time.

This is different from pretending the mistake didn't happen. It's *using* it. The mistake taught you something — about yourself, about other people, about what matters to you and what doesn't. That knowledge is yours now. It cost you something real to get it.

Use it to build something real.

The next version of you isn't the person the mistake made you feel like. It's the person who lived through it, learned from it, and decided — quietly, privately, without needing anyone else to see — to become someone worth being.

That person is already in there.

You're just building toward them.



For six months after the incident, Ryan had no idea what he was moving toward. He knew what he was moving *away from* — the shame, the nickname, the look people got when they saw him coming. But away from isn't a direction.

His coach noticed. Pulled him aside one day after practice and asked him one question: "Who do you want to be by the end of this year? Not what do you want to fix. Who do you want to *be*?"

Ryan didn't have an answer. But the question stayed with him.

He started small. He decided he wanted to be someone who showed up prepared. That was it — just that one thing. Not "a better person" or "someone who doesn't screw up." Just: prepared.

He started preparing — for practice, for class, for conversations he'd been avoiding.

And something strange happened. The prepared version of him started making different decisions. Started showing up differently. Started feeling, slowly, like someone he actually recognized.

The mistake was still there. He hadn't erased it.

But he wasn't building toward it anymore. He was building *away* from it — and more importantly, *toward* something.

That made all the difference.

So here you are. Still awake. Still replaying it.

The voice is still there. It still says what it always says.

But now you have something you didn't have before.

You have a question you can ask it back.

*Is that the whole story? Or is that just one moment?*

Because here is the truth about screw-ups:

Everyone is one. The people who seem like they have it together — they have their version of your worst moment. They have their 2am. They have the thing they wish they could undo.

The difference isn't that they don't fail.

It's that they decided — quietly, privately, without anyone watching — that the failure doesn't get to write what comes next.

That decision is available to you right now. Tonight. At 2am, in the dark, with the voice still going.

You don't have to feel ready to make it. You just have to make it.



*Own the mistake.*

*Show up anyway.*

*Treat yourself like someone worth showing up for.*

*Be your own best friend.*

*Build toward who you want to be next.*

*Let it make you wiser.*

*And keep going.*

*That's not just the screw-up's story.*

*That's everyone's story.*



***The End***

*Keep going.*

Discover more books at  
[321Lumina.com](https://321Lumina.com)