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## Axios Finish Line: Owing your mistakes

- [Hans Nichols](#)

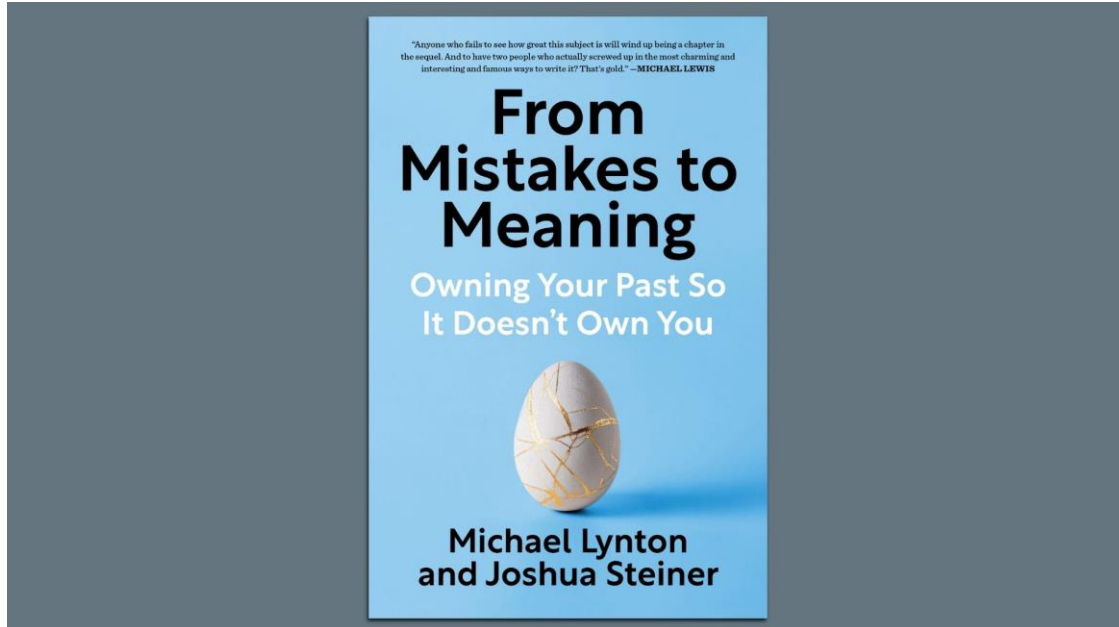


Photo: Book cover courtesy of authors

Chances are you're still stewing over some mistake in your past.

**Why it matters:** The new book "From Mistakes to Meaning" offers a framework for processing your missteps, large or small, and letting them go.

- Co-authors Michael Lynton and Joshua Steiner have laid bare their own highly public missteps, and interviewed others about theirs.

**Zoom in:** For Lynton, the former head of Sony Pictures Entertainment, his big mistake was green-lighting "The Interview," a comedy starring Seth Rogen and James Franco about a plot to assassinate Kim Jong Un.

**What followed was anything but comedic.**

- Instead, Sony was hit by a cyberattack attributed to North Korea, one of the most destructive corporate hacks at the time.
- Executives' private emails spilled into public view, along with other sensitive company data.
- Racial jokes surfaced. Reputations were damaged.



**As Lynton recounts,** President Obama asked him: "What were you thinking when you made killing the leader of a hostile foreign nation a plot point?" *Ouch.*

**Steiner's mistake** [centers on a diary](#) he kept during the [Clinton administration](#)-era Whitewater affair, when he was a young Treasury official.

- The diary was subpoenaed, made public — and became the talk of Washington.

**If that doesn't sound** so bad, read [Maureen Dowd's acidic](#) piece about it.

- Imagine yourself as a bright-eyed 28-year-old Yale graduate testifying before Congress. Then facing your friends and mentors afterward.
- (Disclosure: Josh is a friend and I have known about his diary for years, but never dreamed of asking him about it.)

**Steiner focuses more** on why he avoided his mistake for so long — what the authors call "Act III."

- Only when he directly excavated it with Lynton did the embarrassment and shame begin to fade.
- "It also allowed me to forgive myself," he writes.

**Between the lines:** Your biggest mistakes are often set in motion long before the offending act. Lynton and Steiner call this your "schema" — the deeper pattern driving your choices.

- For Lynton, it was a desire to belong, to seem cool around Rogen and Franco. "My middle school self took over," he writes.

**Reality check:** Not every mistake in the book will resonate equally.

- I was intrigued by author Malcolm Gladwell's big regret: quitting competitive running as teenager when he might have been an Olympian.
- For Gladwell, the *schema* behind his mistake has even bigger implications. In unpacking an old track decision, he realized he was afraid of anything where failure might be an option.
- I don't want to spoil too much, but it led Gladwell to delay starting a family.

**At its core,** this is a self-help book. And Lynton and Steiner have a handy acronym to confront — and conquer — your mistakes: **DUET.**

1. **Disclose:** Find a trusted friend and talk it through. Start small — not with your biggest blunder.

# AXIOS

2. **Unpack:** Examine what led to the mistake, both the immediate trigger and the longer-term patterns behind it. Identify how you felt afterward. Understand the *schema*.
3. **Empathize:** Don't be too hard on yourself. Extend that same grace when others share their mistake(s).
4. **Trust:** In yourself — and the person you're confiding in.

**The bottom line:** Confront your mistakes, however embarrassing. The people closest to you know they don't define you.