

Mistakes

by Mike Tucker *

If you've ever watched football on TV, you've probably seen Referee Ed Hochuli. He's easy to spot; he's the one with the big arms.

He's also one of the most accurate referees ever to work the game. Each week, the NFL invests 8 hours per game analyzing each official's performance on each play. Every play earns a grade; the highest scoring officials work the post season; the consistently low-scoring officials don't last long in the league. Ed has always scored among the top.

However, a few years ago Ed made the mistake of his professional refereeing career. In the final minutes of a game between the Denver Broncos and the San Diego Chargers, Hochuli made a terrible call. When Denver quarterback Jay Cutler fumbled the ball, Hochuli blew the whistle and called it an incomplete pass. He knew it was a mistake the minute he made it, but there was nothing he could do; an inadvertent whistle is a non-reviewable, non-reversible call. Instead of San Diego getting the ball, Denver was allowed to keep it. They scored a couple of plays later and won the game.

Needless to say, the San Diego fans were furious. They all but called for Ed Hochuli's head on a platter. Many wanted him fired and banned forever from the NFL. His office in Phoenix was flooded with angry calls. His Blackberry was jammed with angry emails.

Ed's response to the mistake, first of all, was to admit it immediately to San Diego coach Norv Turner. He walked to the Charger sideline, told Turner that he had made a bad call, apologized, and explained that there was nothing he could do about it.

Ed also told the San Diego Union-Tribune that week, "Affecting the outcome of a game is a devastating feeling. Officials strive for perfection -- I failed miserably."

And then, Ed began responding to those angry emails, one by one. His response amazed people, resulting in even more emails -- upwards of 20,000 -- many from fans thanking him for owning up to his mistake. Ed said, "People were saying how great it was that I admitted I made a mistake. Obviously, I was wrong. Obviously, I felt terrible about it. What's so surprising about it?"

The best thing a leader can do is own up to a mistake. It's the best thing a father or mother, a coach or a boss can do. It's the only way to earn back credibility. It's also the best way to build accountability.

James said, *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* (James 5:16)

With love,
Mike

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