4 Feedback

Past modals (regrets and speculation)

1 Study the table about how to form modals in the past then do the exercise below.

can do	could have done couldn't have done
may/might do	may/might have done may/might not have done
must do	must have done mustn't have done
ought to do	ought to have done ought not to have done
should do	should have done shouldn't have done
will do	would have done wouldn't have done

A manager is talking about a project team he set up last month. Fill in the gaps using a form of the modal and main verb in brackets. Sometimes a negative is necessary.

'The team isn't working well, and it's my fault. If I had done things differently, we (1) *might not have reached* (might/reach) the situation we are in today. The basic problem is my choice of team leader. I gave the job to Sonia, but I (2) _____ (should/do) that. She doesn't have enough experience. It (3) _____ (will/be) better to give the job to Angela. Yes, that's right, I can see that now – I definitely (4) _____ (ought/give) the job to Angela. What was I thinking at the time? I (5) _____ (must/be) crazy or something. But maybe I'm blaming myself too much. I know I took a risk, but at the time it seemed justified. I (6) _____ (can/know) that things would go so wrong.'

2 In each of 1–5, read the first sentence then complete the sentences with the phrases from the box so that the meaning is the same. Be very careful!

could have been (x2) might have been
must have been ought to have been
should have been would have been

1 I made a mistake when I appointed Sonia. My strong opinion now is that Angela was better for the job of team leader.
Angela _____ team leader.
OR
Angela _____ team leader.
2 Yes, I made a bad choice. Angela, not Sonia, had the real ability to be a good team leader.
Angela _____ a good team leader.
3 I wonder why I made that mistake. Perhaps I was focused on another project at the time.
I _____ focused on another project.
OR
I _____ focused on another project.
4 I wonder why I made that mistake. Almost certainly I was focused on another project at the time. I _____ focused on another project.
5 Yes, I'm certain. Sonia was a terrible choice and Angela was definitely the best choice.
Angela _____ better than Sonia.

Before you check your answers, read the information in the box below. Then go back and make any necessary changes in the exercise.

- ☐ For past regrets – when we are sorry about what happened – use *should have done, ought to have done* and *could have done*.
- ☐ These modals keep their normal meanings, so: *should/ought to* are used for strong opinions; *can* (*could* in the past) is used for ability.
- ☐ For past speculation – when we are wondering or guessing about what happened – use *may have done, might have done, could have done, must have done* and *would have done*.
- ☐ These modals also keep their normal meanings, so: *may/might/could* are used for possibility and uncertainty; *must* is used for very strong possibility, almost certainty; *will* (*would* in the past) is used for certainty.

3 Complete the sentences with an appropriate past modal + a form of the verb in brackets. Sometimes more than one modal is possible (e.g. *could* and *might*).

1 I did an MBA course but I was lazy and got a bad grade. It was a pity. I know I *could have got* (get) a better grade.
2 My parents persuaded me to do business administration at college. But I regret it – I always wanted to be a firefighter. I _____ (listen) to them.
3 Imagine that I had decided to travel around the world instead of going to university. I _____ (get) a job anywhere.
4 Who was that in the cinema with Alex last night? No, it wasn't Joelle. Joelle is in Brussels at the moment. It _____ (be) Joelle.
5 Well, if it wasn't Joelle – who was it? You think it was Sandra? Yes, I think you're probably right. It _____ (be) Sandra.
6 Wait a minute! Alex already has a girlfriend, doesn't he? Her name is Ana. Ana _____ (be) very happy if she had seen Alex and Sandra together last night.

4 Make the question forms of past modals using the words in brackets.

1 You say that Angela would have been a better team leader. I'm not so sure. *Would she have consulted* (would/consult) with the rest of the group before taking decisions?
2 I don't think this restaurant is very good. What do you think? _____ (should/go) somewhere else instead?
3 Mike and Sue aren't here yet. I wonder what's happened to them. _____ (could/get) lost?
4 I've made a few mistakes. But _____ (would/do) anything differently if I had another chance? No, I don't think so.