

If You Make a Mistake, Own It!

As human beings, each of us is prone to make mistakes. Some mistakes are so obvious that there's no way to hide them. For example, on October 21st, 2009, Northwest Airlines flight 188 from San Diego to Minneapolis remained at 37,000 feet as it flew 150 miles *beyond* the destination airport. The pilots, whose licenses were eventually revoked, claimed that they were using their laptops to check work schedules.

But for most of us workplace mistakes are much less dramatic and we thus may be tempted to remain silent and hope that no one notices. However, cover-ups rarely succeed and can severely compromise one's reputation and job security. Some suggestions:

- **Inform your supervisor not only of the problem but your plan to fix it:** While we may suffer some initial embarrassment, the focus will soon change to taking corrective action thus sparing us the stress of worrying about eventual discovery of the mistake – which will surely occur. It's much better that the bad news come directly from you rather than from another.
- **Avoid blaming and alibis:** While it may be tempting to blame others or conjure up a creative excuse for the error, if it's really your fault just admit it. Doing so will actually elevate your stature and showcase your integrity.
- **Don't dwell on the mistake:** Sure, mistakes can make us feel foolish or even incompetent. But take heart in realizing that everyone makes them and try mightily to not "replay" the mistake over and over in your mind.



- **Put together a “lessons learned” document:** Particularly if your mistake compromises quality or safety, it's important to commit to writing a description of the error including the cause and the steps you took to resolve the problem. This is primarily a document for your own benefit but it won't hurt to share it with your supervisor as well.
- **Comebacks from mistakes are entirely possible:** Pro golfer Rory McIlroy was leading the 2011 Masters tournament by four shots when a badly hooked tee shot resulted in a triple bogey 7 on the 10th hole. His final round score of 80 could have sent him into a deep depression. But weeks later, he not only won the U.S. Open championship but set the record for the lowest winning score in the history of this major tournament. Today's mistake is probably next week's “old news.”
- **If the pain persists, turn to your EAP:** In order for healing to take place it's important to “talk it out” with a non-judgmental listener. If there's no one in your workplace or circle of friends with whom you are comfortable having this discussion, we invite you to contact your Employee Assistance Program. Professional, caring counselors are available 24/7 and will provide valuable counseling assistance right over the phone.