



NY Regional Office:
Box #24617*Westgate
Rochester, NY 14624-0617
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Need a "do-over" at work? How to recover from stupid mistakes !

By Judy Carter

We all mess up sometimes -- a meeting falls flat, you lose your temper with a co-worker, you step on the gas instead of the brake and smash into someone's house. Well, some mistakes are bigger than others. But whether you are a salesperson who lost an account, or an employee who just told off the boss, don't start looking in the want ads yet. If you play your cards right you too can get a second chance for a do-over using something as simple of your sense of humor. Laughter breaks tension, changes the mood and creates an opening for a do-over. And a little light-hearted self-deprecating humor makes you appear more human and likeable.

There are some simple techniques that will work to give anyone a second chance with their boss.

Four tips on how to get a do-over at work.

1. When caught, admit the mistake immediately.

If your mistake is obvious, rather than pretending it didn't happen, diminishing its importance or defending it, admit it without excuses and ask for the chance to rectify it. Lying about what you did will probably get you in more hot water than the mistake itself. "I didn't know that was company policy." "I didn't say that."

If you have already made a mistake, don't make another one by lying. It will come back to haunt you. You don't want to end up with a story that ends in "Officegate," or have to wear a security ankle bracelet preventing you from decorating cakes on your TV show, or have Oprah really mad at you for lying in your book. A good boss knows that everyone makes mistakes, but a trustworthy employee fesses up.

2. Exaggerate your mistake

What? Shouldn't I make my mistake smaller? No! Take your boss's words out of his or her mouth and exaggerate your mistake. For instance, if your mistake cost your boss a few hundred dollars, try saying,

"What a huge mistake I made. I'm worse than Michael Jackson's plastic surgeon. This is not good. You shouldn't have people like me working for you."

Don't go overboard looking for a laugh. Be sincere. Taking an exaggerated view of your mistake will very often prompt your boss to put it in a more realistic perspective. "Well, what you did wasn't that bad. If you just do this..." And she or he may even tell you how to do your do-over.

3. Do a preemptive strike

When you know your boss is going to find out about your mistake, figure out a solution (which is your do-over) and then march in and say to your boss, "Boy I really screwed up. It's a good thing that I haven't totally lost my brains, because I figured out how to fix it." Then tell the boss what your do-over is. Catching your mistake before the boss finds out prevents your boss from having time to think about how stupid you really are.

4. Keep your sense of humor about yourself.

This is where the power of humor can help you with a do-over. Here is something that happened to me. A prospective corporate client, Chubb Insurance, asked me to write up a proposal of how my corporate comedy training would work for their company. I erroneously thought they were a weight loss company and wrote my proposal accordingly. They said, "I can see by your proposal that you are a complete idiot." Well, they weren't exactly that harsh, but they said something to that extent. So, rather than defending myself or making excuses, I used a comedy technique - validate and exaggerate. It sounds something like this:

"You are so right about that. And you are so smart, you figured out I was an idiot in three minutes. It usually takes people three months to figure that out about me."

She laughed and that broke the tension as well as gave me some time to figure out how I was going to fix my mistake. "Now that my Internetconnection is back up, let me do some research about your company and I'm sure I can rise from idiot to mildly stupid." Not only did I end up getting the job, but they referred me to other divisions of Chubb.

Keeping your sense of humor will help you keep your job.

Judy Carter is a motivational humorist and author of "The Comedy Bible" and of her upcoming book, "The Anti-Self Help Bible: Finding Happiness when you're Fat, Broke and Surrounded by Idiots." Judy has appeared on Oprah, Good Morning America and CNN. She works closely with many large corporations across America developing ways to use comedy in the workplace.
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