

FIVE THINGS: About fixing a mistake

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Everyone makes mistakes. Maybe you sent the wrong merchandise to an important client. Or forgot your spouse's birthday -- for the third year in a row. Or you hit the wrong button and sent a nasty e-mail about your boss to everyone in the office. You feel horrible.

OWN IT

When you realize you've messed up, don't keep quiet and hope nobody notices. And don't make feeble excuses or blame someone else. You'll just call more attention to yourself, and not in a good way.

"Honesty is always the best policy," says Lisa Mininni, president of Excellerate Associates, a consulting and business coaching company in Canton. "You always want to take accountability."

SOLVE IT

Examine the mistake. Why did it happen? How could it have been avoided? What are you going to do about it right this minute?

"You need to identify a solution or solutions," Mininni says. Your gaffe will be more quickly forgotten -- and you'll be more quickly forgiven -- if you've got a plan for fixing what went wrong.

Look at Earl on "My Name is Earl" (9 p.m. tonight, WDIV-TV, Channel 4). He's righting wrongs.

DON'T HIDE

If you made an error at work, take a deep breath and tell your supervisor in person. Yes, it's tempting to send an e-mail instead of talking face-to-face, but it's wimpy, and e-mails can easily be misinterpreted.

If your actions affected a family member or a friend, try to deal with it in person. If that's not possible, call and actually talk to the person -- don't just leave an apologetic voice mail.

REALITY CHECK

You're human -- you're not perfect. Fortunately, most of us aren't public figures (or doctors), and our errors aren't a matter of life or death. These were:



West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin pauses while trying to explain the miscommunication about the deaths of miners trapped in the Sago Mine in Tallmansville, W. Va. Late Tuesday, the miners' families celebrated the rescue of their loved ones, only to learn hours later that 12 of the 13 men had been found dead. (JEFF SWENSEN/Getty Images-Agence France-Presse)

- In West Virginia on Tuesday, the families of 13 trapped miners were told the men were still alive, only to learn a few hours later that there was a communication error, and 12 had died.
- After the World Trade Center's north tower was hit by a plane on 9/11, workers in the south tower heard a PA announcement that the building was safe and they didn't need to evacuate. Five minutes later, the south tower was hit.

MOVE ON

Don't dwell on it. "It's easy for your inner critic to rear its ugly head," says Mininni. "We want to punish ourselves."

If you didn't intend to mess up, learn from it. (If you're a white-collar executive who knowingly defrauded folks, well, that's a whole other story.)

On Tuesday night, millions of people watched Florida State kicker Gary Cismesia miss two field goals and one extra point in the Orange Bowl, giving the victory to Penn State.

"Did he want to perform his best? Of course he did," says Mininni. "But this could be one of the most important character-building events of his life."

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