

# LEADER



**13 Actionable Steps To  
Take If You've Made A  
Disastrous Mistake At  
Work**

**#forbescoaches**

**Every employee makes mistakes at some point in their career.**

**However, some mistakes cause disastrous results that cannot be reversed.**

**Even if you're able to somewhat fix the blunder, the damage has already been done, and unfortunately, you might be at risk for being let go.**

**If you ever find yourself in this situation, you might be wondering what you can do to lessen the blow.**

**Below, a panel of Forbes Coaches Members shared 13 steps you can take to start recovering from even the worst professional mishaps.**

## 13 Actionable Steps To Take If You've Made A Disastrous Mistake At Work



**Members of Forbes Coaches Council discuss ways employees can recover after making a mistake.**

Photos courtesy of the individual members.

## **1. Don't Give In To Stress**

Jobs are lost by giving into stress. Watch out for three types of reactions: Move away (hide/run away), move against (blame/accuse) and move toward (engage/solve). Any of these can lead to derailment, so get stress under control to deal with reality. What's done is done and what will happen remains to be seen. Move to problem-solving. Step forward, take responsibility and participate in recovery efforts. -

**Mitchell Shack, Centauric, LLC**

## **2. Admit It Right Away**

Promptly admit your mistake! This demonstrates humility and personal responsibility, which are critical values that employers look for. If you are a leader, you are role modeling for your team or organization. Then move on to solving the problem, followed by ensuring there is great learning, broadly shared, from the mistake. -

**Lesly Higgins, Lesly Higgins**

### **3. Take Realistic Accountability**

Appraising the situation in a realistic fashion by taking account of one's actions and other external circumstances that led to it ensures a true picture of the situation is painted. Then, offer a solution to mitigate any damages caused. Hopefully, if this isn't a regular blunder, an employee could offer to practice key learnings from the mistake. - [Faisal Khan](#), [1ExtraordinaryLife, LLC](#)

### **4. Learn From Your Mistakes**

Everyone learns more from their mistakes than from what goes right. To ensure that mistakes do not become serious or even irreparable, it is important to compare the actual situation with the target or to have short feedback cycles. Everyone should stand for their mistakes and also get open and quick feedback or tips. Getting stuck and hoping that nothing happens is always fatal. - [Michael Thiemann](#), [Strategy-Lab™](#)

## **5. Keep Showing Up**

After a disastrous mistake, it can be easy to hide out (hello shame and blame!), but that won't help. Continue to show up and take action. People need to see your behavior, not just hear your words. It reminds me of the Stephen Covey's quote, "You can't talk your way out of a problem you behaved yourself into." - [Amy Leneker, Compass Consulting, LLC](#)

## **6. Analyze What Went Wrong**

First, do a deep analysis of what went wrong, what you've learned and what mechanisms you've put in place to ensure something like this won't happen again. It's one thing to do a round of mea culpas throughout your organization (and it's important you do that), but quite another to demonstrate the leadership and strategic thinking that provides the reassurances needed to rebuild trust in you. - [Carol Parker Walsh, Carol Parker Walsh Consulting, LLC](#)

## **7. Discover What You Could Have Done Differently**

Take responsibility, and discover what you could have done differently. You can't go back in the past and undo what's been done, but you can acknowledge the experience as a learning opportunity. Be sure that key stakeholders are aware that you hold yourself accountable and that you have strategies in place in case a similar situation comes up in the future. Nobody will ever be error-free. - [Susan Sadler, Sadler Communications LLC](#)

## **8. Figure Out How To React**

Before you do anything, give yourself a moment to calm down. When you find yourself in a negative situation, you can get stressed very quickly and do something (even more) wrong. Take a moment, take a few deep breaths, relax and think clearly. When you have gathered your thoughts and emotions, you can handle and act in this situation much better. - **Cristian HOFMANN,**

**Empowering Executives | SUPERGROUP LTD**



## **9. Reframe Your Thoughts**

We are human and mistakes happen. The next time you're faced with fear from consequences of your mistake, reset and shift your thinking towards learning in the moment. Each mistake provides you and your organization with an opportunity to activate innovative thinking. By reframing your thoughts from what happened to what was learned, you'll discover new and creative solutions to fuel forward thinking. - [Sheila Carmichael, Transitions D2D, LLC](#)

## **10. Find Viable Course Corrections**

Put some serious thought into alternatives for viable course corrections. Make the rounds to all the key stakeholders, own up to your mistakes, share with them your initial alternatives to make things better and allow them to have a say in how to make things right. Regaining their trust and allowing them to have buy-in on how to make things better may go a long way.

- [Karan Rhodes, Shockingly Different Leadership](#)

## **11. Prepare A Recovery Plan**

It's obvious that being honest and apologetic is a must when you make an error. Still, what makes the difference between declared ownership and genuine ownership is the preparation of the recovery plan and executing it as soon as possible. So when you say "sorry," you might at the same time express what has already been done towards eliminating the mistake. It creates an extra layer of safety. - [Inga Bielińska](#),  
[Inga Arianna Bielinska Coaching Consulting Mentoring](#)

## **12. Show What You And The Company Have Learned**

Demonstrate the potential gain from this high profile mistake. Ask that it be embraced. This may seem like a crazy strategy in a "you cannot make a mistake" world, but in some circumstances, the company can gain if the employee is game. Instead of hiding, admit the mistake and show how the company and the individual have learned from it. Then apply that learning to benefit future stakeholders. - [John M.](#)

[O'Connor, Career Pro Inc.](#)

### **13. Practice Self-Compassion**

Taking ownership of the mistake and its consequences from a place of self-compassion will help an employee be able to more effectively treat this mistake as a learning and growth opportunity. In doing so, an employee will be able to think through how to resolve it more quickly, more clearly and more appropriately than if coming from a place of being overly self-critical.

**Jacqueline Ashley, [WorkLifeHealth.design](http://WorkLifeHealth.design)**



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