

LEADERS & SUCCESS

Fix Gaffes With Grace

6 The recovery — not the mistake — matters. How top performers rebound:

■ **Find bright spots.** For a productive attitude toward foul-ups, “No Excuses” author David Neenan points to architect Buckminster Fuller.

“He called mistakes great moments,” Neenan told IBD.

That’s because you can shine or you can wither.

Neenan chose the former approach when an engineer with his construction firm made errors on some building projects.

“We were forthright. We were truthful. We’re fixing them,” Neenan said.

■ **Take responsibility.** Apologizing for a misstep? Start with sincere contrition and move toward action. “The end of an apology is the beginning of accountability,” Neenan said. Find out the damage, then rectify it.

■ **Talk about it.** Neenan didn’t sweep the faux pas under the rug. He told employees how he felt about the lapse. “We will finish what we started,” he said. “Making this right for our clients is making it right for ourselves.”

■ **Have faith.** Second chances are in order, as long as the blunder isn’t rooted in a person’s lack of integrity. “You trust them, but you have to verify: Hey, this can’t happen again,” Neenan said.

■ **Choose your direction.** Accountability counts. That’s why Neenan carries a business card listing common excuses people make, including: “I didn’t start this” and “Everyone else was doing it.”

Handing someone the excuse card is Neenan’s version of a wake-up call. “I only do it when I think they’ll learn from it,” he said.

■ **Handle with care.** Have tech tools made us more faux pas prone? Consider these responses to staffing firm Robert Half International’s survey about missteps: “A person took a cellphone into the

restroom while still talking.” “Someone thought he put a customer on hold and then used inappropriate language within earshot.”

Bill Driscoll, Robert Half district president, advises taking extra care. “With the advent of technology, there’re opportunities for more office blunders,” he said.

■ **Polish those manners.** It matters how you conduct business. Asked if being courteous to coworkers positively affects career prospects, 48% of those survey respondents said yes, greatly. Only 10% said no, not at all.

■ **Get in front.** If you’ve made a serious error, don’t let others bring it to light. Speak up first.

“The worst thing you can do is hide it,” Driscoll said. “Managers are human too. They know mistakes are going to happen.”

■ **Show your stuff.** What do superiors hope is revealed after a slip-up? “Honesty, sincerity and willingness to do what’s necessary to remedy the situation,” Driscoll said. “You get a view into an employee’s character.”

■ **Strike a balance.** Want to add insult to injury? “Only provide feedback on the negative things.”

So says Derek Irvine, vice president of employee recognition firm Globoforce.

Focusing solely on snafus sucks the wind out of workers’ sails.

“It’s demotivating and it’s disengaging,” Irvine said.

■ **Seize the moment.** The best time to address employee behavior — good or bad?

“Shortly after the fact, after the mistake or the item of celebration,” Irvine said.

Don’t wait for the yearly performance review. Workers need direction in private on areas to improve, and public props when they’re getting it right.

Globoforce taps social media and mobile tools to help clients create a steady stream of internal applause.

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