

# Soar through a work snafu

Uh-oh, you've screwed up royally on the job. It happens to all of us. Instead of hiding in your office, follow this action plan to fix the flub, gain valuable lessons and come out the other side stronger and more confident—and still on the company payroll! **By Amanda Woerner**

**START HERE:**

**1. First, fess up.** If you led a project and things didn't work out, own up to it. We know it's not fun, but it's the responsible, adult thing to do. Approach your boss ASAP, and let her know you're on damage control, says Rom Brafman, Ph.D., author of *Succeeding When You're Supposed to Fail*. Then plan a meeting for the next week to discuss solutions.

**2. Nix the obsessing.**

You're likely feeling low about your error. But dwelling is counterproductive. "Beating yourself up sends more oxygen to the brain region that processes emotional pain," says life and executive coach Relly Nadler, Psy.D., of Santa Barbara, California. "That means less oxygen goes to the brain's prefrontal cortex, which controls reasoning." In other words, you have to calm down (try taking a walk with a pal) before you can devise a turnaround plan.

**3. Write a happier ending.**

The best way to learn from a mistake is to ask yourself, How would I handle things differently in the future? "Think of what you could do *more* of rather than what not to do," Nadler says. Could you have asked for more help? More feedback? Or additional time to refine ideas? People who tend to take a positive, forward-thinking approach to criticism are less emotionally affected when things go awry, a study from Duke University notes.

**5. Make the loss a win.**

Now it's time to face your boss at a follow-up meeting. Use your prior brainstorming to let her know exactly what went wrong in each phase of the project. Then tell her what you'll do differently next time. To demonstrate you're taking responsibility for the mess-up, use "I" statements ("I'll send you weekly progress reports"), Brafman says. Assure her that you'll set up regular check-ins with your team to uncover possible problems before they snowball. You'll show her what you've learned from the experience and walk away knowing what it takes to get the job done right.

**BACK ON TRACK!**

**4. Call in backup.**

Grab a mentor or cubemate for coffee, fill her in on your fiasco, then pick her brain for ideas. It's OK to seek reassurance that you're not the world's worst worker (and that you won't get the ax!), but you'll glean more from the meetup by shifting quickly into brainstorming mode. "An insightful friend can offer fresh perspective and help you find practical solutions for remedying the gaffe and moving on," Brafman says.

