Pippa's Guide to Bouncing Back from Mistakes

Mistakes, we all make them. In fact the odd one here and there is inevitable because we're only human. It's true, even the most seasoned and professional Executive will, at one time or another, run late for something, make a wrong judgment call, or come to a bad decision. And this is probably worth bearing in mind next time you or I make a work faux pas.

You see it really isn't just juniors and over worked, beleaguered PA's who make mistakes in the work place. It's just that the bosses are lucky enough to have offices with doors which they can firmly shut before banging their heads slowly on the desk when they know they've committed a major workplace blunder.

But like I said, we're all only human so next time you hear a low moan coming from within one of those offices, try to have empathy for the person inside. And then see how they deal with the situation because what does mark someone out as a true success or not isn't whether or not they make mistakes in the first place but how they choose to come back from them. That's what counts people!

So now, be honest. Have you ever messed up at work and suddenly been caught out or proved wrong? Have you ever experienced that horrible sick, sinking feeling in your belly which indicates that you've been rumbled. I'm not going to lie. I have.

Years ago when starting out as a PA my boss asked me to pick up her husband's birthday cake from what must be the most expensive cake shop in London. It was a beautiful creamy affair, a cake with many layers which lay beneath the most intricate tapestry of icing, chocolate and fondant. My instructions were to collect it then bring it straight back to the office and put it in the fridge, the idea being that she would collect the cake first thing in the morning and take it home and surprise him. Only I got asked out for a spontaneous drink by a friend. By this point I'd already picked up the cake but rather than head back to the office I decided that the cake could come out with me for a bit.

I'd have one, I said to myself, and then I'd bring it into the office. One drink turned to twelve though (you know how it is) and that cake got to see quite

how much fun two single girls in London are capable of having when three sheets to the wind on vodka cocktails.

The next day I woke up only to discover that at some point in the night I had got up and managed to stand on the cake box, which sadly I had deposited not at the office, or even into my own fridge at home, but onto the middle of my bedroom floor.

I'd love to tell you that the cake survived and looked fine. But it didn't. It had a footprint in it.

The sick feeling of shame, guilt and burning fear I experienced in that moment was so intense I hardly knew what to do with myself.

There was only one thing for it………and so it was that I joined the foreign legion and was never seen again…..I'm joking obviously. I told the truth. It was horrific, awful in fact, but there wasn't much my boss could do other than be cross for a bit and then concentrate on finding a solution. This consisted of me racing round London to find a decent enough replacement which I obviously paid for out of my wages. She said I shouldn't but I think my absolute insistence went some way toward being forgiven, even if it did mean I had to subsist on tuna and pasta till the next pay day. Who knew cake could cost so much? It wasn't the best morning of my life but I'm so glad I didn't waste any more of her time by coming up with some ridiculous story that frankly she wouldn't have believed anyway. In time she was even gracious enough to laugh about it and admitted that what had saved me was my instant honesty.

And so here begins my guide…….

1. Don't lie
   If you have made a mistake, forgotten to book a meeting room, not written something in the diary or double booked a taxi, no matter how tempting it may be, don't try to get out of it by lying. If faced with a stressed boss who is anxious to know what's going on, the best thing you can do is fess up. Why am I saying that? Well, I'd love to tell you that this first piece of advice has purely come about because I am so moral and a true paragon of virtue. But I'm not really and if I thought a good old fashioned lie would get you out of the situation I would say go for it. But

in my experience (see above #cakegate) one lie always ends up leading to another and creates all sorts of problems. You've got to remember what you've lied about for starters. Also, people aren't stupid and can usually tell if you are telling fibs to get out of something. At this point the lie will probably annoy them far more than the original mistake has. For example, you can do this…… 'I'm so unbelievably sorry. I totally forgot to book a meeting room. My fault entirely and it won't happen again. And in the meantime let me think of a solution…..' which is so much less awkward than 'I don't know why you haven't got a meeting room because I definitely booked one so they must have made a mistake…'

To which your boss could reply 'Well I'll go and yell at them then…' Leaving you to panic and say 'No don't do that. I can yell at them tomorrow.'

Cue boss 'No I will definitely shout at them because this has happened before and they can throw someone out of a room if it's their mistake…..' Etc.

Meaning at some point it's going to come to light that the mistake was yours and that now you've blamed someone else to boot. Egg. On. Face. So when you make a mistake, admit to it, apologise and once that's been said you'll find there isn't a huge amount of point to people dwelling on it. With a bit of luck you can all move on.

2. Fix it

As already touched on, the best thing you can do in a bad situation is to be pro- active and try to sort it out. If you've messed up there's no point dwelling on what's happened, feeling sorry for yourself or reproachful toward others, you may as well concentrate on making things better instead.

3. Building back trust

Learn from your mistakes. That's key. If you make a mistake once, your boss finds out, you say sorry and promise that it won't happen again, that's fine. Unless it does happen again…..at which point you may start to look a bit useless, so make sure it doesn't. Your professional image is

so important. You want to be someone people can rely on to do what you say you will and to get things right. So, reflect on what's happened with a clear head and implement some sort of plan or system to ensure mistakes aren't repeated. Make some different ones. Variety is the spice of life and all that…..

4. <u>What type of mistakes are you making?</u>
There are certain things within our control such as whether or not we're punctual, what we write down and how we schedule our day. These are things we can easily take personal responsibility for. However, some mistakes can come about not through a lack of planning but maybe just because things haven't gone well. For example, if you've been chosen to perform a pitch or presentation it can be quite nerve wracking. Maybe you'll do a bad job and feel like you've let people down? But these are precisely the kinds of mistakes which you can play a part in controlling if you have the right mind-set. Talk to people. Admit you struggled and ask for help or support. That way next time you can improve.

And lastly keep that mojo intact. You're doing a brilliant job!

Lots of love
Pippa x