# How to Recover From a Big Mistake at Work



Everyone makes mistakes. However, when you make a mistake at work, the impact is magnified. It’s not always enough to just say you’re sorry and move on. A work mistake often involves much more than that. It’s also necessary to do damage control so that you don’t end up [losing your job](http://www.cheatsheet.com/money-career/fight-boss-without-losing-job.html/). This is why so many American workers are afraid of making a mistake at work. More than one in four respondents in an Accountemps [survey](http://accountemps.rhi.mediaroom.com/workplace-fears) said that making a mistake on the job is their top work-related fear.

However, Harold “Max” Messmer, Accountemps chairman and CEO, and author of [*Managing Your Career for Dummies*](https://www.amazon.com/Managing-Career-Dummies-Lifestyles-Paperback/dp/0764552538), said the fear of making a mistake at work can sometimes be a good thing. “Mistakes will happen from time to time, and a healthy concern for avoiding them improves job performance — as long as that concern doesn’t undermine one’s confidence,” [said](http://accountemps.rhi.mediaroom.com/workplace-fears) Messmer in an Accountemps statement.

Did you make a huge mistake at work? Here’s how to recover.

## Offer an apology

If you make a mistake, apologize. Resist the urge to drag your feet and find ways to get out of the apology or think of reasons why you aren’t wrong. Offer an apology as soon as you realize you made a mistake. You may want to make a phone call or send an email, but it’s best to pull yourself together and apologize in person. It’s more difficult to gauge how the person you’re apologizing to is receiving your apology if you’re not face-to-face.

## Don’t make excuses

Your apology will come off as insincere if it comes with a million excuses. Career expert Alison Doyle said an apology is not your chance to [offer an excuse](https://www.thebalance.com/when-and-how-to-apologize-at-work-2062679) for what you did:

To avoid giving excuses, speak in the first person (“I am very sorry”). Avoid phrases with the words “but” and/or “if” (phrases like, “I’m sorry if I you think I hurt your feelings, but…” are not apologies, but excuses). Be sure to actually say the words “I am sorry” or “I apologize” in order to clearly express your remorse.

**Don’t play the blame game**

Although it might be tempting, don’t pass blame on someone else. [Throwing a colleague under the bus](http://www.cheatsheet.com/money-career/what-to-do-when-your-co-worker-throws-you-under-the-bus.html/) will only cause you to make office enemies. It’s also unfair to try to escape blame when you know you are the one responsible. And if you’re caught in a lie, you could end up getting canned, so fess up.

## Find ways to fix the work mistake

## Don’t say you’re sorry and then just walk away. Part of owning your portion of the mistake is to find a solution. Let your boss know that you’re aware you did something wrong but that you will do whatever you can to make it right. Showing that you are not only sorry but also willing to correct your misstep could change your boss’s mind if she was thinking of letting you go.

## Engage in risk management

While it’s true that mistakes happen, you need to do everything in your power to make sure whatever you did doesn’t happen again. Next time, your supervisor may not be so understanding. Work on getting more organized; double checking everything you submit, or sharpening your social skills. Take a hard look at where you need improvement and start making progress.

**Repair your reputation**

If you made a big mistake, your reputation may now be on the line. Consequently, it will be important for you to engage in some reputation management both in real-time and digitally. A good work reputation can be ruined in an instant, so take care to repair this as soon as possible if necessary. How do you do that? We’re glad you asked. Take a look at our handy guide, [How to Fix a Bad Reputation at Work](http://www.cheatsheet.com/money-career/job-advice-how-to-fix-a-bad-reputation-at-work.html/).

**Get some sleep**

Are you getting [enough sleep](http://www.cheatsheet.com/money-career/cant-sleep-ways-insomnia-costs-you.html/)? If you’re like most American workers, the answer is likely “no.”  Roughly 63% of Americans said their sleep needs [are not being met](https://sleepfoundation.org/media-center/press-release/annual-sleep-america-poll-exploring-connections-communications-technology-use-) during the week, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Many mistakes on the job are made because workers are tired. You’re also a lot less productive when you’re running on little sleep. Research conducted by health and life insurance company Vitality found that employees who slept for six hours or less each night were a lot [less productive](http://www.healthyperformance.co.uk/lack-of-sleep-does-affect-productivity-at-work/) than employees who slept for at least seven hours a night. So if you’re not getting enough shut-eye (at least seven hours a night), you’ll need to start getting to bed earlier. Set a strict sleep schedule if you have to; you might just save your job.

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VOCABULARY WORDS:

**1**. gauge (v.)

- to appraise, estimate, or**judge.**

**2.** remorse (n)

**-** deep and painful regret for wrongdoing

**3**. [Throwing a colleague (someone) under the bus](http://www.cheatsheet.com/money-career/what-to-do-when-your-co-worker-throws-you-under-the-bus.html/)**(**idiomatic phrase)

**-** to sacrifice a friend or ally for selfish reasons

4. fess up (v. phrase)

- to admit or concede, especially freely

QUESTIONS for DISCUSSION

1. How do you recover from a big mistake at work?

2. What do you do to keep yourself continuously improving?

3. Do you know someone who keeps blaming others for a mistake? If yes, how do you deal with this kind of people?

4. Can you give examples on how you can repair a ruined reputation?

5. How important it is to recover from a big mistake for you?