

By: Elizabeth Freedman, **WisconsinJobs.com** contributing author



Elizabeth Freedman, MBA, is an award-winning speaker and business columnist, and is the author of, "Work 101: Learning the Ropes of the Workplace Without Hanging Yourself," (Random House, April 2007) and "The MBA Student's Job-Seeking Bible." She was a 2005 finalist for College Speaker of the Year, awarded by the Association for the Promotion of Campus Activities, and is the founder of a Boston-based communications and career development firm that helps corporations help their New Professionals look sharp, sound smart, and succeed on the job. For more information, please visit Elizabeth online at ElizabethFreedman.com.

Avoid the Three Mistakes that Hurt New Employees on the Job

Don't Ruin a Good Thing:

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to ruin a good thing? If you've ever spilled coffee on a new shirt, added just a bit too much salt to a recipe, or thought that anchovies would make a great pizza topping (sorry, I hate anchovies), you've experienced the speed at which a good thing can become bad. In fact, this good-to-bad transition can happen so quickly, you're not even sure what happened – all you know is that you're staring at a large, brown coffee stain and a shirt you'll never wear again.

Whether it's a big mistake or a small one, it's all too easy to let your relationship get off track with the boss. Fortunately, our bosses have made a mistake or two themselves along the way, and they're usually pretty forgiving of our gaffes. Still, forewarned is forearmed: There are some mistakes that you don't want to make on the job, forgiving boss or not. Read on to learn which to avoid, and why.

Mistake #1: Not Showing Patience and Humility

"Nothing is more annoying than when a new intern or hire out of college comes in...and immediately starts telling us about his 'great' ideas, or about how we can improve such-and-such a thing. Meanwhile, he's been working for a grand total of 4 months and really has no clue about how our business really operates. It's just plain arrogant."

Ouch! Could this manager at a large accounting firm be talking about you? Consider the number of times that any of us is given unsolicited advice, "helpful" opinions, or other ideas that we didn't ask for, didn't want, and quite frankly, aren't always so useful and helpful in the first place. Irritating, isn't it?

Does this mean that we shouldn't offer our ideas or suggestions for improvement to the boss? After all, isn't that why they hired us?

Well, actually, no, that probably wasn't why you were hired. In fact, you were probably hired to help the team run a few yards, rather than score the touchdown. You were hired to do your job, at least for the time being - not the job of your boss, the CEO, or anyone in-between. And when people try to do that, even when they have the best intentions, it bugs the folks at work. Especially your boss.

This isn't to suggest that your efforts, initiative, and go-getter attitude aren't appreciated. In fact, New Professionals are hired precisely because organizations love their energy, enthusiasm, and fresh approach to work...but organizations also tend to reward humility, patience, and a respect for their process, no matter how slow, annoying, or just plain wrong you think their process might be.



Mistake #2: Feeling Entitled

What really bugs managers of New Professionals? Above and beyond everything else, it's the feeling of entitlement that new employees walk in with. Not sure if this could be you? Ask yourself the following questions below:

Do you think you deserve a raise, promotion, or more responsibilities and does your boss agree?

Do you often find yourself thinking, "They aren't letting me work to my full potential!" or "They aren't using my talents" at work?

Did you try to negotiate your salary before you started your very first job out of college?

Do you think you're smarter than your boss? What about other people you work with?

Do you often find yourself interrupting or planning what you're going to say next inside your head while someone else is still talking?

Did you find yourself planning for your next promotion soon after you started your current job?

Do you find yourself wanting to quit a job within a couple of months of starting?

If you answered yes to most of the questions above, you may need to put the brakes on your expectations, and get comfortable with the slower process inside your workplace. This isn't to suggest that you don't deserve a promotion, for instance, but only to consider that things on the job happen slower – often, much slower – than we think they should. Overnight success, instant celebrity, and other reality TV moments don't usually happen at work.

Mistake #3: Lacking Confidence and Courage

Are you confused yet? We've been saying, over and over, how important it is to eat a bit of humble pie from time to time...and now we're suggesting that a lack of confidence is a no-no on the job? What's the deal?

If you've ever wondered why the bozo three cubes down from you just landed the juicy promotion that you were convinced you deserved...but didn't manage to snag yourself...you may want to do a quick confidence comparison and find out whether bozo comes out ahead. Over and over, studies show that those of us that are able to convey our own confidence and belief in our abilities and skills have a far greater chance of landing jobs, promotions, and even higher salaries than those of us who don't. After all, if you don't really believe in yourself, why should anyone else?

So what does it mean to convey confidence on the job – and how do we portray a strong sense of self without coming across as some kind of egotistical blowhard?



Here are a few suggestions:

Confidence isn't arrogance. It's simply a belief in the value of your contribution at work, so don't hesitate to reflect that belief in what you say and do. When you hand off a report to the boss, add: "John, I think you're really going to be pleased with what I've enclosed – the data really shows some improvement in our customer service area." This isn't bragging about you, per se, ("Did I mention I graduated with a 4.0?") but the value of the work you created – and you're not shy about saying so.

Resist the urge to ask for constant feedback or validation from your boss. Sure, feedback is important, and we all want to know that we're on the right track. But asking for too much feedback from the boss makes us appear needy and insecure, not to mention time-consuming. It would be great if we knew we were getting an 'A' or a 'D' on the job, but work isn't like that. Trust that you're doing a fine job – if you aren't, chances are you'll be clued in soon enough, anyway.

If you're feeling shaky in the confidence area, remember, nobody has to know that but you. Embrace the expression, "Fake it 'till you make it," and act the part, even if you're not 100% sure you're the greatest thing since sliced bread (which you are, trust me). How to get more comfortable showing confidence? Practice! Don't be embarrassed to stand in front of your best friend, husband, or a mirror and practice a few choice phrases you can use on your boss. Try: "John, I've taken a look at all of the data, and the information supports what I already know to be true." Or: "I'm so glad you asked me that question, John. To tell you the truth, I've been doing some research on this very issue, and I'd love to share my thoughts with you." Practice doing those things that are tough for you, so when you're hit with a tricky question, you'll be able to rise to the occasion like a pro.

Above all, confidence is an attitude, a state of mind. When you show up to work, look sharp, keep your head up, and smile. Look your boss in the eye when you speak, don't be afraid to pause in between sentences, and if you're not sure about something, simply say, "John, I'm going to need to get back to you on that. I'll have the answer for you by the end of the day."

For a host of other great career articles specially tailored to recent college graduates and entry-level professionals, please visit WisconsinJobs.com.

