

# Business Bloopers: The Worst Experience Is Often The Best Teacher

We all make mistakes. Sometimes they are funny and lead to nice anecdotes at cocktail parties, and, other times, a mistake can reveal a more serious professional or personal shortcoming in ourselves or others.

This month, we feature some of our readers' best business bloopers. Some of them are funny, so feel free to steal them and pass them off as your own for your next cocktail party. Some of them are more serious, and reflect some deeper issues. Most importantly, all of them offer a lesson—a nugget of golden knowledge that can only be learned by bitter experience.

Also, so many of these were received this month that a "Part 2" will be featured next month, so send in your business blooper to Jeremy Nulik ([jeremy@sbmon.com](mailto:jeremy@sbmon.com)) before June 13.

## Hey, Baby

I was dating a co-worker (who is now my husband) and my office phone rang. I could tell from the ring tone that it was an inside call, but I didn't have caller ID. I answered it, and the caller just said "Hey," sounding just like my boyfriend. I responded, "Hi, Baby." It was not my boyfriend, but a guy from the promotion mail department returning my business call. I was mortified. Both of us acted like I didn't say it, conducted our business and moved on. At the time, I wondered if he thought I greeted everyone that way.

—Mary C. Kutheis, *Open Spaces, LLC*

## Management

### Don't Make An A.S.S. Of Yourself

Administrative Support Associates started as an administrative support and staffing solutions company in 2001. After months of brainstorming, struggling, and reading numerous "how to" books on choosing a business name, I chose a name that was distinctive, concise, and at the top of the alphabetical list: Administrative Support Services.

I had business cards printed and landed my first client! When the client looked at my business card she chuckled, "Your acronym is ASS. Glad to have your ASS aboard." Embarrassed in sheer disbelief of the blooper, I laughed heartily and changed the company's name the next day. I was the tail-end of jokes for a day.

As fate would have it, my company's core competency today is business etiquette training. We help businesses and individuals gain a competitive edge by strengthening their professional and global image to create a positive first impression. Customers' perceptions mean everything to your corporate image.

—Shawn E. Gilleylen,  
*Administrative Support Associates*

### Confronted With Ugly Truth

In late 1998, I made the mistake of not clearly identifying myself to a human resources representative of a major St.

Louis corporation in a telephone conversation. The rep actually assumed he was speaking with someone else on staff. The person was seeking a specific type of skill for staff augmentation. He said, "Please make sure you don't send over any minorities or ex-military officers." Needless to say, I was shocked because (1) I did not realize this still happened or was something that people would do, and (2) I was surprised that anyone felt comfortable enough to say such a thing to anyone especially over the telephone. He did go ahead and provide his rationale once he realized what happened, but we both knew that no explanation was sufficient. Needless to say, I did not pursue any further business with that organization.

—Surprised in St. Louis

### Here's Your Badge, Dummy

We took an idea from where we used to work called the "dumb badge." Basically, it works like this: The dumb badge is always in someone's possession and consists of a funny certificate with a "tail" made of cutout paper listing each blooper in a funny way. Anytime someone in the company commits a "blooper," it goes on the dumb badge, and the badge hangs in that person's office until they discover or uncover something equally as worthy that someone else has done. A few highlights are: a service engineer telling a client he loved him as he was hanging up his cell phone (typical call-ender when speaking to his wife), another guy locked himself in a

work van at the client's site and had to call them to get him out, the list goes on and on. We typically review the dumb badge at each year's Christmas party highlighting and talking about the funniest ones. It has become a badge of honor around Acropolis and really does a great job of letting everyone know that we all make funny mistakes. We have been doing it for 11 years and the "tail" now stretches from floor to ceiling. When you have 25 people, it is amazing how quickly the dumb badge circulates, especially when many of the 25 are IT network administrators.

—Tracy Butler,  
*Acropolis Technology Group*

### Mr. Ear, Meet Mr. Nose

I was calling on a potential new client, and the gentleman that I was meeting with was impeccably dressed, articulate...but had the largest nose I had ever seen on a man in my life! During our meeting, I kept thinking about why he was so well dressed, in obviously a very expensive suite, watch, shoes, etc. Yet, he had not chosen to do anything about this nose that was so large. It was almost like a caricature! As I was wrapping up the meeting, I shook his hand, and closed with "Thank you, Mr. Nose, I appreciate your time." I about died and of course, we did *not* get the business. Lesson here? Stay focused on the reason for the sales call and don't allow distractions to interfere with your message.

—Surprised in St. Louis