

How to Correct Your Boss Without Embarrassment

“To err is human; to forgive, divine” — Alexander Pope, “Essay on Criticism”

Everyone, no matter who they are, makes mistakes. It's human. It's natural. And it's not a bad thing - we can learn great lessons from our mistakes. They occur in all aspects of life, including professionally. Sometimes, even our bosses make mistakes.

Most people don't like to be wrong and like being corrected even less. Especially in front of others. There are a lot of reasons why correcting someone (or being corrected) can quickly become unpleasant, but in truth, how the correction is approached often dictates the outcome.

For many, correcting someone else's mistake can quickly turn into a slippery slope enflamed by our ego and pride. Most people don't particularly enjoy being corrected, but at the same time, don't want to be wrong either. If a person is wrong about something, they generally want to know they've made a mistake and want to correct it immediately.

So what happens when you encounter a situation where your boss has made a mistake about something? Do you let them continue forward, unaware of their error, or do you speak up? Will your boss appreciate your correction or will they resent you for it?

Honestly, the timing and tact of your approach are two factors you should not only consider thoroughly, but must strategically navigate if you want your input to be absorbed as positive and helpful...instead of as negative.

How To Strategically Inform Your Boss Of A Mistake

Let's say that your boss is giving a presentation in front of key stakeholders and makes a mistake about some piece of information - let's say it's an important mistake that could lead to a misunderstanding and perhaps harm the audience's perception of the company's image.

What do you do? Do you speak up right away and correct them in front of the entire audience to ensure that no one has the wrong impression? Do you say something to your boss right after the meeting, interrupting them while they are talking with a smaller group? Or do you make note of the error and find a strategic time and place to discuss their mistake behind closed doors?

The answer seems obvious, but in the heat of the moment, another factor comes into play that can cause us to speak up a bit too soon. This type of scenario leaves us vulnerable to our own basic desire to be “right,” a desire fueled by our egos and pride. And there’s nothing worse than giving into that temptation, only to regret it an instant later.

So how do we avoid embarrassing our bosses while simultaneously keeping our feet out of our own mouths?

By Being Mindful, Respectful, Empathetic and Discrete.

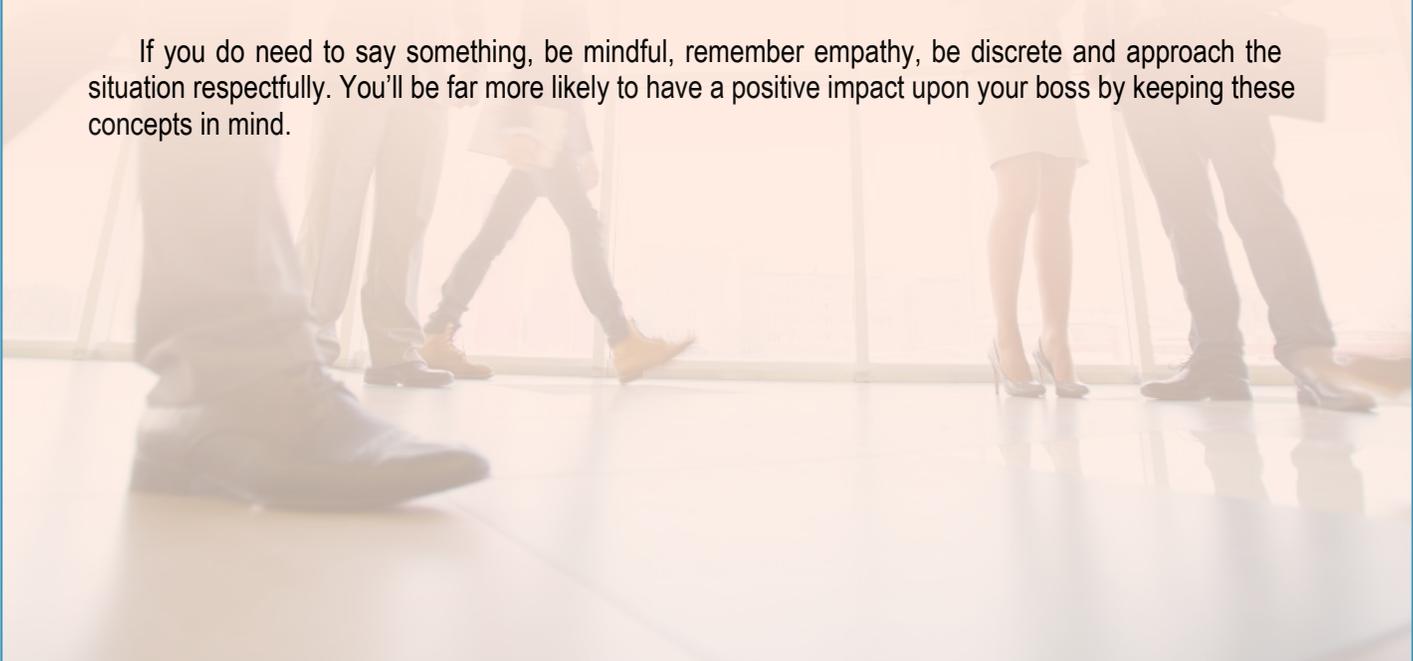
Keep in mind that everyone makes mistakes, and a mistake is not an opportunity to put someone else down. Doing this is at best embarrassing, and at worst, petty and cruel.

Yet, this type of situation does present opportunities that can greatly benefit both your boss and your relationship with them. Timing really is everything. Take some time to think and reflect upon your boss's mistake - or any other coworker for that matter. Take this time to gather your thoughts and arrange them into productive and useful feedback.

Once you think you’re ready to discuss the mistake with your boss, be sure to wait until they’re ready. Be discrete as well. No matter how well thought out your presentation may be, if you do it in front of other people, you’ll most likely embarrass them. Try to schedule a private meeting (depending upon how important the mistake was), ask for a moment of their time and close the office door, or talk with them away from other people. Sending an email might be effective, but tone is rarely conveyed correctly in non-verbal forms of communication and could easily lead to a misunderstanding. If it’s possible, try to talk with your boss face-to-face and in private.

Learning how to successfully navigate this type of sensitive situation is a critical skill - both professionally and personally - that everyone should spend some time becoming fluent in. Try to keep in mind that everyone makes mistakes, and it’s up to you to use good discretion. If it’s something minor, it’s probably not worth saying anything at all, just to be “right.”

If you do need to say something, be mindful, remember empathy, be discrete and approach the situation respectfully. You’ll be far more likely to have a positive impact upon your boss by keeping these concepts in mind.



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