

**Admitting when you're wrong: telling colleagues you've made a mistake is sometimes the best course of action**

***By Tamara E. Holmes - Black Enterprise Magazine***

AT SOME POINT IN THEIR CAREERS, MOST PEOPLE WILL have to figure out how to salvage a work-related decision that, in hindsight, led to a wrong choice. Whether it had to do with personnel, the direction of a project, or accepting or rejecting a new position, wrong choices are something just about everyone can relate to. However, the way you handle such a situation can determine whether you learn a valuable business lesson or suffer a setback.

When Joseph L. Davis, 58, principal of Washington, D.C.-based financial services firm Davis Planning Associates Inc., realized that the company's focus on selling investment and insurance products was not working as well as he would have liked, he started looking at ways the company could change its strategy to attract more customers.

"The realization was that people don't want to be sold a whole series of financial products," Davis says. "They want some basic answers about their resources and whether they're going to be able to support their lifestyle. When our practice started helping people focus on answering those questions, we had a really big increase in business."

However, before Davis could get to the point of making a change, he first had to admit to himself that a change was needed. "It was a realization that the whole industry should have come to a long time ago," he says. Once you realize it's time to cut your losses, the next step is admitting to colleagues that the current plan of action is no longer working.

When doing so, be honest. "One way you might approach the situation is to say, 'This is what I thought at the time, this is why I made the decision that I did, and now based on current information, I think we should have done X, Y, and Z,'" suggests Rhoda Smackum, founder of Laurel, Maryland-based career coaching company Career By Design. "When you lay things out and communicate openly with people, they may get a little upset when you do change course, but at least they know you're going to try to make decisions based on honesty and based on what you do know."

If you have to tell your boss you think something you've implemented is not working, ask him or her for feedback, says L'esa Guilian, director of diversity and human resources at the California Institute of Integral Studies. "Say, 'I know I was for this, I fought for this, but now I'm really wondering if this was the right approach.'"

Also, refrain from making excuses and placing blame on others. Focus on your own responsibility for the failure when presenting it. "Even if other people are making mistakes, it could very well be the directions you gave weren't as clear as they could have been, so admit that," says Guilian.

Although it is important to acknowledge your role in creating the situation that you'd like to change, emphasize to your boss and colleagues that you're ready to do whatever it takes to move the company in a new and better direction. "The worst thing you can do is dwell on it for too long," says Guilian. "Note what you've learned from it then take those lessons and move on, applying the lessons in the future."