

# What is the best mistake you ever made? essay sample

[Experience](#), [Failure](#)



One of my most challenging roles at Exxon was as coordinator for an internally resourced improvement program focused on cost, throughput and quality. The project had multiple objectives: establishing performance baselines, setting stretch targets, ensuring robust end products and developing an implementation plan. Yet my greatest challenge was convincing the combined team and their supporting plant personnel to review the current working practices and develop the best, unbiased business solutions.

Inspired by the challenge, I initially didn't understand the reluctance of senior staff to objectively evaluate their current practices. In their minds, any improvement we identified was a criticism of the current system, rather than an opportunity for progress. My challenge was further complicated by the directive to properly adjust headcount, which plant personnel flatly refused to consider. They considered my presence as "another greedy corporate ploy to generate cash" and "an excuse to cut numbers". The project was in danger of failing, along with our corporate success. Despite my best efforts to gain plant support, the presiding mantra became, "Why should we recommend ideas that will either make us work harder or even cost us our jobs?"

As project coordinator, I needed to properly communicate the importance of the initiative and the potentially dire consequences of our failure. Since I couldn't gain the necessary support using my original strategy, I quickly revamped my approach. I developed a new message that focused on plant-specific issues. My discussions addressed what the results meant to each

worker, his family and his community, rather than the general effect to the shareholders. I positioned our project as a mutual initiative to prevent a potentially dismal outcome. My new message, personalized for my plant audience, began to alter their mindset and generate inventive ideas for improvement. I still had to use careful and reasoned persuasion to move the team out of their comfort zone, but I finally felt we were all on the same team.

This project taught me that effective communication skills can mean the difference between success and failure. The plant's strong resistance challenged my managerial and interpersonal skills. At the outset, I became frustrated by the audience and responded too aggressively. Yet my confrontational style was ineffective and didn't help my audience understand the needs of the business. By placing myself in the worker's shoes, I found a better approach. I listened, empathized with their concerns and gave positive feedback when we made progress. My project was easier, more satisfying and more effective when I had people working with me, rather than against me.

I apply the lessons I learned from this project to all of my professional objectives. Corporate visions, strategic briefings, restructuring programs and all other methods of generating improvement will fail in the implementation stage unless the "doers" are personally stimulated to perform. This requires empathy for those most affected, to place myself in their position to understand their concerns and motivations. Only with the support of the workers can a corporate directive succeed.