

# ● Ask America's Ultimate Experts

## Q "Help! I'm mortified!"

Ever get caught gossiping? Sent an e-mail to the wrong person? Regifted—and got found out? Who hasn't! Sure, it's embarrassing, yet knowing how to put those cringe-worthy episodes behind you curbs stress and helps rebuild relationships! Luckily, with advice from psychologist Andrea Bonior, Ph.D., communications expert Joseph Grenny and etiquette guru Diane Gottsman, you can easily bounce back from any "oops!" moment!



### How to get past . . . A friendly faux pas!

Whether you got busted by your boss, your mother-in-law or your best friend, the right words can smooth over any awkwardness!

#### "I was busted gossiping!"

We all do it, but if the "gossipee" finds out, it can throw a wrench in your relationship: "The fear of the person being gossiped about is that you've always felt negatively toward her and you're not to be trusted," Bonior says. "Apologize by saying: 'I let my mouth get the better of me, and I want you to know I respect you, and this isn't how I normally behave.'"

#### "I got caught in a white lie!"

Our experts agree: The only way to recover from a lie, even a little white one, is to own it. "Handle it directly, and clear the air immediately," says Bonior. Grenny suggests this three-step approach: First, tell yourself it's okay. If you're angry with yourself, you're more likely to feel so ashamed that you'll avoid dealing with the issue. Second, don't feel you need to defend yourself to the other person. This will allow you to offer a more sincere and rational apology, because you won't be as concerned with protecting yourself. Third, apologize!

### How to get past . . . Techno gaffes!

Between e-mail, texts and social networks, there are hundreds of opportunities to put our feet in our mouths with a wayward click. Luckily, a few proactive steps are all it takes to recover!

#### "I sent an e-mail to the wrong person!"

The best way to handle it? Contact the recipient right away, says Grenny. If it's someone you know personally, explain the situation over the phone. (If the e-mail includes something negative about that person, follow the apology steps listed previously.) If it's an innocent mistake and you don't know the person well, an e-mailed "Oops! I meant to send this to the other Jane Doe in my address book" will suffice.

#### "My boss saw a mortifying Facebook photo!"

Take the photo down immediately, then be upfront with your boss. "Show that you've learned your lesson and you're no longer that person," says Gottsman—i.e., the one with the lampshade on her head at the party! Gottsman suggests saying something like: "I put some things online that I shouldn't have, but the person

I am today is not the one in that picture."

### How to get past . . . Social slip-ups!

For these types of blunders, honesty really is the best policy, say our experts.

#### "I forgot a VIP's name at a party!"

Many people are terrible at remembering names, says Bonior. "It's not because we mean any disrespect, it's because we're simply not registering them," she says. In social situations, we're often so busy handling multiple mental

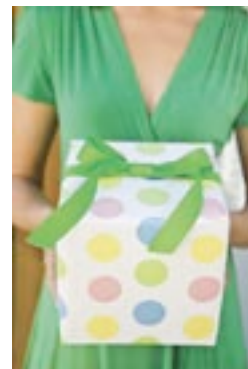


Don't worry—honesty, directness and a few well-chosen phrases can ease awkwardness and embarrassment!

tasks—we're trying to remember a person's name while listening to what they're saying, while also taking note of who else is in the room—that the brain doesn't process names properly. Just be direct and admit a brain lapse! Simply say: "I'm so sorry, I know we've met, and your name is on the tip of my tongue. Will you remind me of it again?"

#### "I got caught regifting!"

The one main rule for regifting, says Gottsman, is to double-check that the item isn't still in packaging that's addressed to you or doesn't have any engravings. If you are caught, offer the specifics of why you regifted, so the recipient understands your reasoning. Say: "I received this for my birthday, but I already have three just like it! I know red is your favorite color, so I instantly thought of you."



—Whitney Joiner

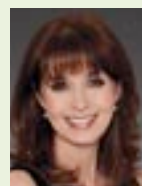
## Our expert panel



Psychologist **Andrea Bonior, Ph.D.**, is the author of the *Washington Post's* mental-health column "Baggage Check." Her first book, *The Friendship Fix*, will be published this winter.



**Joseph Grenny** is a communications expert and *The New York Times* bestselling author of *Crucial Conversations*. He has also appeared as an expert on *Today*, as well as on CNN, MSNBC and CNBC.



Etiquette expert **Diane Gottsman** founded The Protocol School of Texas and is the author of *Pearls of Polish: An Etiquette Guide for Today's Busy Woman*. She has offered her advice in numerous newspapers and other publications.