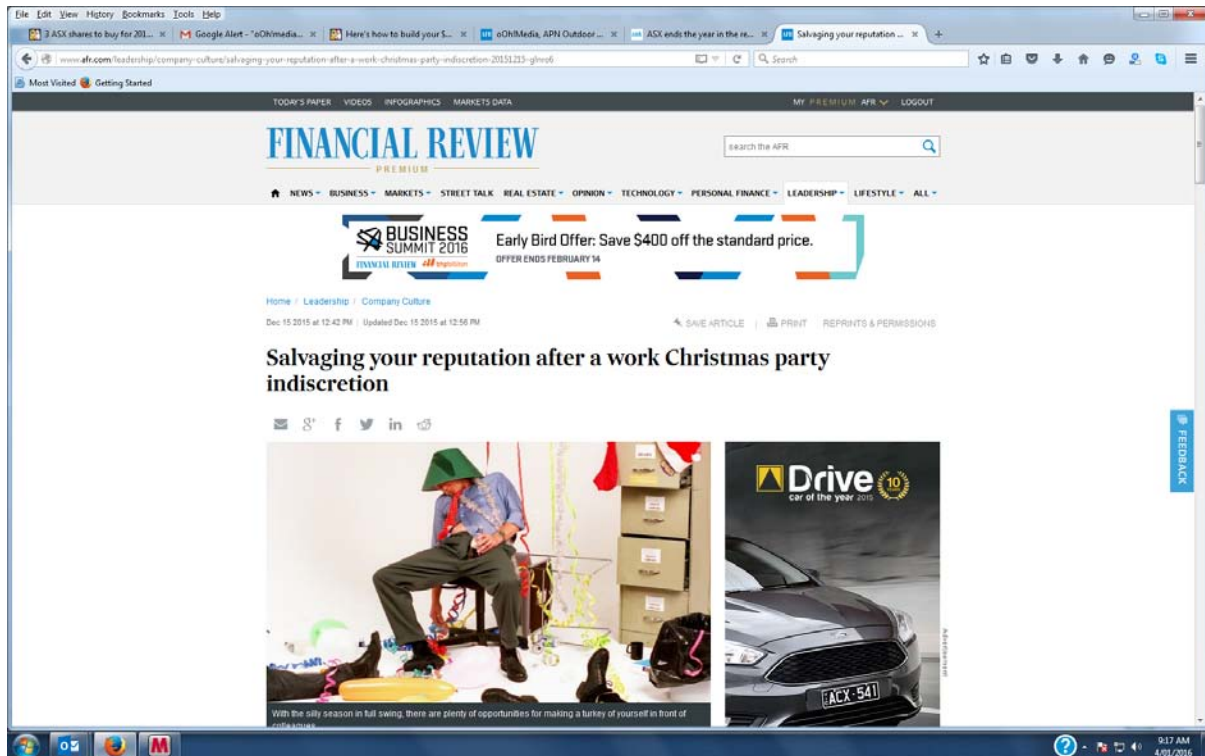


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Salvaging your reputation after a work Christmas party indiscretion

With the silly season in full swing, there are plenty of opportunities for making a turkey of yourself in front of colleagues.

by **Sylvia Pennington**

That sinking feeling when you wake up with a throbbing head and begin having flashbacks to the night before, when the alcohol was flowing, hi-jinks were happening – and you got what could be described euphemistically as "carried away".

All good if it had been a rowdy night out with friends, but it wasn't – it was a business do and it's likely everyone in your organisation or industry had ample opportunity to watch you making an unmitigated, and possibly offensive, turkey of yourself.

With the silly season in full swing, there are plenty of opportunities for doing so over the next few weeks.

John d'oh

Bad form: The Facebook post of Andrew Johns asleep in Toowoomba Airport. *Facebook / Helen Wright*

So what's next if you've performed some sort of corporate variation of an Andrew Johns or John Singleton?

The rugby league legend hit the headlines in October after [making lewd remarks to a stranger at an airport, following a heavy drinking session](#), and was stood down from a grand final commentary gig by employer Channel Nine.

Meanwhile veteran ad man and radio station owner John Singleton garnered plenty of publicity for himself back in May after [lunging at his dining companion](#), investor Jack Cowin, with a broken glass at the end of a boozy lunch.

Must you kiss goodbye to your opportunity to make the executive management team, as a result of one indiscretion committed whilst 'tired and emotional'? Or can a bit of reputation rehabilitation see your professional image restored to its former unblemished glory?

What should you do if you've performed some sort of corporate variation of a John Singleton after a boozy get together? *Jesse Marlow*

You said what?

It depends on the precise nature of your bad behaviour, according to Ogilvy Public Relations chief executive Kieran Moore, who's an old hand at helping companies that have experienced public humiliation present their chastened faces to the world.

Funny, happy drunks may be excused – although those who have a few too many once too often can probably forget about scoring a spot in the C suite – but their more belligerent brethren are likely to face harsher sanctions.

Sexist, racist or homophobic behaviour might result in you looking for other employment sooner rather than later, while those who are loose-lipped about company business or colleagues' personal lives send a hard-to-retract signal that their discretion is limited, Moore says.

OMG moment

The severity of judgment also depends on how much your usual persona is reflected in your moment of ingloriousness, according to Paul Findlay, managing director of professional development firm PD Training.

"If you are always edging close to the line of inappropriate your indiscretion cements the questions people have – 'yes, you are inappropriate' will be their resolve and will never be forgotten," Findlay says.

"If, on the other hand, you were harmless but had a real 'OMG can you believe he or she did that [moment]', most people will let a mistake slip by without it being career limiting. In reality, most of us have moments we aren't exactly proud of!"

Je regrette

What to do if this is you? Start by saying sorry to anyone you may have offended, Findlay advises. "People respect the intestinal fortitude it takes to make a sincere apology," he says.

"Make it genuine – they'll believe you, unless it was just a confirmation of the behaviour you edge towards regularly."

After you've done so, let the subject drop and resolve not react if others bring it up, Findlay says. Bite and you'll regret it, he warns.

Words and deeds

Having a major reaction will result in people revisiting the matter regularly to watch you squirm, or provide a weapon for manipulation "as they know they have something over you that can bring you down a peg or two anytime they like".

Once you've said sorry, you need to act sorry, Moore says.

This doesn't mean developing a dreaded lurgy or family emergency next time there's a company or industry function – it means showing up and behaving in an exemplary fashion.

Others will view your past behaviour as a reflection of your character and may be sceptical about your commitment to change until they've seen you spend a few decorous evenings sipping spritzers and heading home on time.

"You need to convince them, through action, that you really have changed," Moore says.

The new you

If you've been fortunate enough to survive your own Andrew Johns moment, taking it as a salutary lesson to be more sedate in the future may be wise.

Resolve to avoid sleazy talk at all costs – "that undermines respect forever more" – and count your drinks, Findlay advises.

"My motto is, 'if you start to slur, get a cab'," he says.

Remember the mantra of sports coaches throughout the world, Moore adds: "Nothing good ever happens after 2am. And drink should never be mixed with Twitter."

This story first appeared on [Executive Style](#).

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