



Valuable Mistakes

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Not many people like to talk about their mistakes. One exception is John DeCiantis, owner of DeCiantis Construction in Stonington, Connecticut. He figures that his company can learn and profit from the mistakes employees make. Each month DeCiantis pays \$100 to the person on his field staff who made the biggest blooper. Staff members volunteer their mishaps at the company's monthly three-and-a-half hour meeting, held in a conference room at a local hotel. The one with the biggest, most expensive mistake gets rewarded.

DeCiantis initiated the reward system early last year to encourage employees to be open and to learn from each other's errors. DeCiantis, who designs and sells the company's work, has been free to admit his own errors, one of which involved a \$3,000 order for the wrong Pella windows.

At first DeCiantis says field staff were resistant. "It's a difficult thing for men to talk from the heart about what they think and the mistakes they make," he says. Slowly, workers warmed to the idea. Past award-winning mistakes include improperly measured closet doors and cracked glass from a faulty clerestory window installation.

"I don't think this is something where you make a difference in six months," DeCiantis says. "It's long term. And you have to work on it." He says he's notices a difference already in reduced turnover and employees who more openly and readily communicate with each other.

"It opens the lines of communication, it promotes teamwork, and hopefully it save you money," DeCiantis says. "And we learn from our mistakes."-J.C

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