

How to Mistake Your Way to Success...

Making Mistakes and Being Wrong

Who likes making mistakes? Not you? Well, you might change your mind when you find out that the most successful people in the world flourish at making mistakes. That's right, the most successful people in the world are experts at making mistakes. Sounds really strange, doesn't it? The fact of the matter is that the most successful people in the world succeed because they aren't afraid to make mistakes, which gives them the freedom to try all kinds of crazy things nobody ever dared to try!

Looking back in time, famous inventors like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Edison were the kings of making mistakes. Benjamin Franklin once tried 4,000 different ways of doing something before he arrived at a solution, and we all know that Thomas Edison became intimate friends with failure before he got his light bulb to work. Modern day thought leaders aren't any different. Gordon Moore of Intel and Herb Kelleher of Southwest Airlines encourage their people to make mistakes so that they aren't afraid to take risks. For instance, a Southwest Airlines property manager once made a verbal contract with a city government for \$400,000 to study plans for developing an airport, not realizing that Southwest Airlines had no intention of developing an airport in that city. When Kelleher heard about it, he honored the contract – even though legally he could have backed out of it. He wanted the city to know that Southwest stood behind every employee, even if the employee had just made a \$400,000 mistake! Was the employee banished from the airline? Nope! Kelleher just told him, "Hey pal! That's a \$400,000 mistake – hope you learned something from it!"

Most of us are afraid to make mistakes because when we were growing up we weren't surrounded by people like Herb Kelleher. In school, we were rewarded for correct answers and punished for making mistakes. Culturally, we're rewarded for "not rocking the boat" and "playing it safe." In families, we're taught to be good kids, to obey and to "do what I say, not what I do." We are basically programmed to play it straight and safe, and we're embarrassed, if not mortified, when we do make mistakes. We spend a lot of times making sure that we are right, or at least appear right.

While being right and not making mistakes gives us a safe life, it doesn't offer a lot of opportunity for adventure, fun and creating something truly wonderful in this world. If we really want to be alive and live our dreams, we must learn how to make mistakes. In his book, "Business School For People Who Like Helping Other People," Robert Kiyosaki talks about how nature's learning curve encourages mistakes. He uses the example of a bird learning to fly. When the young bird is learning to fly, it launches from a tree limb and falls for the first 50% of the curve. At the bottom of the curve, it figures out how to use its wings and begins to fly upward. Let me rephrase that: For the first 50% of the learning curve, the bird is making mistakes. In other words, the bird tries all kinds of ways to use its wings, and for the first 50% of the trip, nothing works! And then all of sudden the bird figures it out and can fly.

Being that nature often produces more perfect models than humans, isn't this a great model of

learning? We humans often think that the learning curve looks like a perpetually upward curve, but nature's learning curve seems to be more accurate. More importantly, nature's learning curve tells us that we **MUST** make mistakes before we can succeed. That makes sense. After all, if we could do everything perfect right away, we'd already be doing it. Robert Kiyosaki gives himself five years to make as many mistakes as he can for any new endeavor. What a great yardstick for those of us who are hard on ourselves when we make mistakes. If a best selling author and multi-millionaire can give himself five years to make all the mistakes he possibly can, shouldn't we cut ourselves a little slack?

One of the great ways to get used to making mistakes is to surround yourself with people who are non-judgmental about making mistakes, and who make plenty of mistakes themselves. There are lots of places to find these people – Toastmaster organizations and 12 step programs of all kinds. Most of these people have seen and done it all, and have sunk lower than you ever contemplated going. When you make mistakes in front of these people they tend to congratulate you because they know the rewards that come from making mistakes. They have learned how making mistakes frees them up to truly live a wonderful life. Once you surround yourself with these kinds of people you'll feel much more at ease making mistakes, and soon it won't seem like a big deal at all!

Just remember, nature's learning curve and the top people in the world tell us that we have to make tons of mistakes before we can succeed. If this is the path, hadn't you better get started making mistakes? The more you make, and the sooner you make them, the sooner you'll get the success you want. Just make sure that you learn from your mistakes and you make different mistakes all the time. Making the same mistakes over and over is not only boring, it's a waste of time. Have fun trying all kinds of new ways to make mistakes!