

# Ooops...

*I shouldn't have done that!*  
*(What I Learned the **HARD** Way)*



*“Show me a person who has never made a mistake and I’ll show you someone who has never achieved much.”*  
– Joan Collins

## **2013 National Conference on Student Activities**

*Omni Austin Downtown – Austin, Texas*

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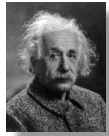
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### **Lou Miller**

*Student Activities Coordinator, Brooklawn Middle School, Parsippany NJ*

*Executive Director, New Jersey Association of Student Councils*

## ***On life and making mistakes...***



*“Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.”*

– Albert Einstein



*“We learn from our failures, not from our successes.”*

– Bram Stoker



*“Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment.”*

– Rita Mae Brown



*“A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.”*

– George Bernard Shaw



*“Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning.”*

– Bill Gates



*“I have learned all kinds of things from my many mistakes. The one thing I never learn is to stop making them.”*

– Joe Abercrombie



*“Mistakes are the foundations of truth; if a man does not know what a thing is, it is at least an increase in knowledge if he knows what it is not.”* – Carl Gustav Jung



*“As long as the world is turning and spinning, we’re gonna’ be dizzy and we’re gonna’ make mistakes.”*

– Mel Brooks



*“The 50-50-90 rule: Anytime you have a 50-50 chance of getting something right, there’s a 90% probability you’ll get it wrong.”*

– Andy Rooney



*“A step backward, after making a wrong turn, is a step in the right direction.”*

– Kurt Vonnegut



*“Mistakes are part of being human; precious life lessons that can only be learned the hard way. Unless it’s a fatal mistake, which at least others can learn from.” – Al Franken*



*“You’re afraid of making mistakes. Don’t be. Mistakes can be profited by. If you hide your ignorance, no one will hit you and you’ll never learn.” – Ray Bradbury*



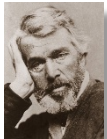
*“Mistakes are the usual bridge between inexperience and wisdom” – Phyllis Theroux*



*“Wise is the one who learns from another’s mistakes. Less wise is the one who learns only from his own mistakes. Fools make the same mistakes and never learn from them.” – Ravi Shankar*



*“You have to learn from the mistakes of others. You won’t live long enough to make them all yourself.”  
– Hyman Rickover*



*“The greatest of faults, I should say, is to be conscious of none.”  
– Thomas Carlyle*



*“I’ve made so many mistakes, so many corrections. I’m so far from perfect, so many imperfections.”  
– 50 Cent*



*“We make our discoveries through mistakes; we watch one another’s success and where there is freedom to experiment there is hope to improve.” – Arthur Quiller Couch*



*“I’ve missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.” – Michael Jordan*



*“Screwing up is hardly a major mistake. Sometimes your wrong choices will bring you to the right places.”  
– Shannon L. Alder*



*“The important thing is that the mistakes you make with your kids are the same ones your parents made with you. At least you know how those turn out.” – Stephen Colbert*

# ***You need to make mistakes to get ahead***

by **Alina Tugend**

We live in a culture that sends out very mixed messages about mistakes: We're told we learn by making them, but we work mightily to avoid them; that no one's perfect, but goofing up is bad. So the result is most of us know that we as parents, spouses, employers and employees are going to make mistakes, but deep down, we feel we shouldn't.

But since, as the old saw goes, "to err is human," how do we work toward accepting mistakes and learn from them, rather than avoiding and denying them? Well, the good news is that there are upsides to making mistakes.

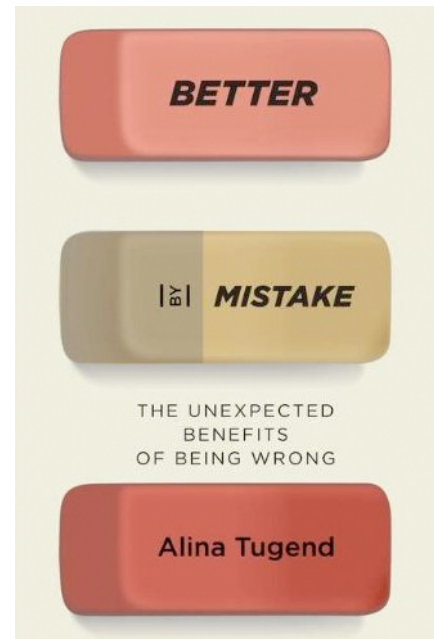
One of the definitions of "to err" is "to wander or stray." Often we make mistakes because we try new things; we stray from accepted paths. Teflon and penicillin are examples of great discoveries made by mistake. Take a page from Albert Einstein who said, "Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new."

We don't move out of our comfort zone if we're afraid of mistakes. Experiments with school children who did well on a given test show that those who were praised for being smart and then offered a more challenging or less challenging task afterward usually chose the easier one. On the other hand, children praised for trying hard – rather than being smart – far more often selected the more difficult task. When we fear looking dumb, when we emphasize results over process and effort because we're afraid of messing up, then we're going to miss a lot of what's fun and stimulating in life.

If we try hard to avoid mistakes, we aren't open to getting the information we need in order to do better. Experiments showed that those who are so scared to make mistakes, perfectionists for example, perform worse in writing tasks than those who aren't as worried about being flawless. Experts theorize such "super-perfectionists" are afraid to practice writing, because to practice means to make mistakes. More importantly, they fear receiving any kind of negative feedback, so they don't learn where they went wrong and how to get better.

**We don't just learn more when we're open to mistakes, we learn deeper.** Research tells us that if we're only concerned about getting the right answer, we don't always learn the underlying concepts that help us truly understand whatever we're trying to figure out. Mistakes need to be seen not as a failure to learn, but as a guide to what still needs to be learned. As Thomas Edison said, "I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward."

Mistakes can help us change deeply embedded norms. It was discovered in aviation, for example, that accidents sometimes occurred because junior pilots were afraid to correct more senior pilots when they mishandled problems; the same is true in fields such as medicine. By



examining why those accidents happened, experts figured out ways to develop more flexible hierarchies, which creates better work environments overall.

Mistakes keep us humble, and that's important. When we think we're above making mistakes, or that others are, we stop questioning and challenging. That can lead to complacency, and really bad decisions. To quote Bill Gates: "Success makes a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose." Overconfidence leads us to be blind to the limits of our expertise. Remember our most recent financial crisis?

When we make mistakes – and gain insight from them – we have more empathy for others. Research has shown that men in particular tend to become more understanding of others' screw-ups when they're asked to remember a time they messed up in a similar manner.

We learn to bounce back. This upside to mistakes should not be underestimated. **Knowing how to fail, err, come back, work harder, fall down, and get up again is crucial to succeeding – in all areas.** It's called resilience and everyone, from child development experts to employers, knows that it is probably the single most important difference between those who accomplish their goals and those who don't.

Accepting mistakes is not the same as loving them. Few people are happy when they mess up, whether it's a small or large blunder and accepting imperfection is certainly not about being lazy or careless – quite the opposite. We need to believe in our gut, not just acknowledge in our mind, that it's all right to stumble and screw up and try again. In fact, it's not just OK, it's necessary.

We're all going to make mistakes, it's just a question of choosing how we approach them. Are we going to finger point or pretend they didn't happen? Or are we going to take responsibility, try to learn from them and forgive ourselves and others? We have the choice. The only option we don't have is perfection.

*Alina Tugend, author of **Better By Mistake: The Unexpected Benefits of Being Wrong**, has been a journalist for nearly 30 years. She lives outside New York City with her husband and their two sons.*

# ***Embrace mistakes as opportunities to grow***

by Harvey Mackay



I've often said the greatest mistake a person can make is to be afraid to make one. To be successful, you must come to terms with the notion that you will make mistakes. In fact, you often need to increase your failures to become more successful. Mistakes don't make you a failure. I always say, if you want to triple your success ratio, you might have to triple your failure rate.

Mistakes are okay as long as you learn from them and don't repeat them. As Confucius

said, "A man who has made a mistake and doesn't correct it is making another mistake." I say it a little differently: **One mistake will never kill you. The same mistake over and over will.**

This concept is perfectly illustrated in the story of the fellow who was explaining to his neighbor how he got a burn on his right ear. "I was getting ready to iron my shirts and the phone rang. I picked up the iron by mistake."

The neighbor replied, "Well, then, how did you burn your left ear?"

"The same guy called back five minutes later."

Tom Watson Jr. was the CEO of IBM from 1956-1971. A senior executive made a large mistake costing the company a bunch of money. When Watson called him into his office, the executive said something like, "I suppose you're going to fire me." Watson replied, "Not at all, young man, we have just spent a fortune educating you."

The great inventor Thomas Edison said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." When Edison's factory burned down with much of his life's work inside, he said, "There is great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Thank God we can start anew."

Both business legends saw mistakes as investments in learning. They recognized the value of real-life lessons. When you mess up, seize the opportunity to get educated! Unfortunately, many people don't learn from their mistakes because they are consumed with trying to place the blame on someone else.

In today's business climate, it seems people are making decisions faster than ever. That creates more opportunity for mistakes. Don't misunderstand, I am not advocating making mistakes on purpose. But haste, as they say, makes waste. Wasting time is a mistake in itself. Stop and think before you act – avoid the mistakes that are so obvious that you can predict their occurrence.

Just keep in mind that if you're not making mistakes, you're not taking any risks – and that could mean you're not making progress.

Here's advice on turning around your mistakes:

- **Be honest.** Never try to cover up mistakes. The earlier you 'fess up, the faster you'll be able to correct the problem while maintaining your credibility.
- **Take responsibility.** Your bosses and your customers don't want to hear excuses, and because it's rare for managers to take that kind of responsibility, it's a powerful way to show a sense of accountability for your actions (and those of your team). Then figure out what you can do to fix it.
- **Follow up and follow through.** Sometimes simple mistakes point to more complex problems that need to be corrected. A thorough evaluation can reveal something about your habits or the work processes that need to improve. Schedule a meeting, if necessary, to explore what went wrong and how to avert similar errors. Insight from others can often shed light on where things went wrong.
- **Use the opportunity to turn around a situation.** Mistakes often are prime times for people to turn bad situations into positive ones. Any customer service guru will tell you that a lost ticket can be the perfect time to provide the best customer service you have to offer.

Everyone makes plenty of mistakes. You learn from them. You change. And you move forward. Stumbling is not falling. As the great comedian Charlie Chaplin said: "No matter how desperate the predicament is, I am always very much in earnest about clutching my cane, straightening my derby hat and fixing my tie, even though I may have just landed on my head."

Consider the Hammer. It keeps its head. It doesn't fly off the handle. It keeps pounding away. It finds the point and then drives it home. It looks at the other side, too, and this often clinches the matter. It makes mistakes, but when it does it starts all over.

*Harvey Mackay has authored some of the best-selling business books in publishing history including **Swim With The Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive**, with more than 10 million copies sold worldwide. They have been translated into 37 languages and sold in 80 countries.*

***Oooops...I Shouldn't Have Done That!  
(What I Learned the HARD Way)***

## **Skin The Snake**

*A game that we used for Brooklawn's Intense Games (also called B.I.G. Night) in 2011; the idea came from one of our State Officers who played this game in a similar event at a summer Field Hockey camp. Always looking for a new event to add each year, I jumped on it and excited my kids about the idea – before doing my homework ([VIDEO 1](#) and [VIDEO 2](#) from YouTube, showing this game as part of high school Spirit competitions). Some kids really liked it, others did not, but when B.I.G. Night rolled around it was the PARENTS who protested the loudest...*

### **Screw-ups:**

**FIRST**

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**SECOND**

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**THIRD**

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### **Lessons Learned:**

**BIG**

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**BIGGER**

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**BIGGEST**

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## **Rewriting Our Constitution**

*As a first-year advisor, I decided to rewrite our (circa 1966) Student Council Constitution together with our elected Executive Board. The eight members of the Board and I worked hard on this task, producing a brand new Constitution after a few months. After completing this task, we brought it to our General Assembly (homeroom representatives) and it passed quite easily. Then we decided to hold nine "team assemblies" prior to a school wide ratification vote, giving each academic team the chance to ask questions – and boy did they!!!*

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## **Last Minute Candidate**

*Rumors were rampant that a young lady was going to run for council president, but she hadn't declared to me. We had nothing in our constitution about submitting names to run for office, but we had a "verbal" rule that all candidate names must be submitted to me at least 24 hours prior so ballots could be made. She came to me the day of the elections and announced she was running; I spoke to the other candidates who agreed to let her run. I would have had mutiny had I not let her run as she was being pushed in by many of the members...*

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## **And The Rockets Red Glare...**

*My Student Council planned a week's worth of patriotic related activities to honor Veterans on our school staff and in our school community. The week culminated with a patriotic assembly: keynote from our US Congresswoman; many veterans from our community; school district and community dignitaries; representatives from the military. The grand finale was a well-rehearsed number with our ROTC cadets, drill team, cheerleaders and band. They ended in three large star shapes diagonal on the gym floor; the gym lights were dimmed as the stars became a glow – one red, one white, one blue as the crowd glowed in a mix of red, white and blue glow sticks while the band finished their medley of tunes. Then...*

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