



FIVE REASONS TO CELEBRATE MISTAKES

Mistakes are no reason for misery. Goof-ups do not need to result in teeth gnashing. Our mistakes can be the most powerful teachers we have.

If we truly realized the value of mistakes, we'd run the world much differently. We'd realize that mistakes are as important as successes. In addition to all the rewards and celebrations involving successes, our society would recognize and celebrate mistakes.

Politicians would wage campaigns by claiming that they made more mistakes than their opponents.

Job applicants would submit "failure résumés"—highlights of their most fascinating slip-ups and what they learned from those experiences. They could save tales of the truly *major* snafus for the job interview.

Marketing executives would brag about all the new products they pioneered—especially those that the public overwhelmingly rejected.

And athletes would fondly recall the times they got trounced by opposing teams.

I admit that this is an unusual attitude to take toward mistakes. And I can suggest at least five reasons for celebrating mistakes.

Mistakes get our attention

Mistakes have a way of focusing our attention and putting crucial problems right in our face. Mistakes light a path for us. When we own up to our mistakes, we often know exactly what's not working and what we can do to fix it.

Permitting mistakes allows us to take risks

There's one sure way to avoid making mistakes, and that's to avoid life. The writer who never finishes a book will never have to worry about getting negative reviews. The would-be center fielder who doesn't try out for the team is safe from making any errors. And the comedian who never performs in front of an audience is sure to avoid telling jokes that fall flat.

When we're comfortable with making mistakes, we're more likely to take risks and tackle projects.

Caution: Celebrating mistakes is not the same as setting out to make them. Celebrating mistakes involves wisdom; setting out to make them involves willful incompetence. Effective people don't set goals with the idea of making mistakes. Instead, they aim to reach those goals while accepting the risk of error.

Noticing mistakes shows our commitment to quality

Imagine working at a company that has no standards—where mistakes are not distinguished from successes and no one is held accountable for errors.

We could turn in the sloppiest, crudest pieces of work we'd ever done, and they would get treated the same as our best work.

We'd never be able to count on having the supplies we needed because no one would complain when vendors failed to deliver.

Projects could go perpetually unfinished, and no one would say anything.

Profit margins could fall through the floor, and no one would flinch.

The point is simple: In an atmosphere where there's no difference between failure and success, the word *mistake* would be without meaning. Mistakes can happen only when people are truly committed to making things work.

We can use mistakes to practice

Celebrating mistakes can enhance every suggestion in this book.

For example, take Success Strategy #1: "Determine what you want." The word *mistake* derives meaning only by comparison to what we desire. Mistakes are possible only when we're committed to lives that are filled with happiness, health, love, financial security, and whatever else we value. Noticing and admitting our mistakes reminds us of what we really want to have, do, and be.

Another example is Success Strategy #2: "Tell the truth." Mistakes offer us an opportunity to practice truth telling. With this act come the rewards of honesty and candor, including self-knowledge and the capacity for change.

Mistakes also offer a chance to apply Success Strategy #3: "Move toward love." As we tell the truth about our mistakes, we can benefit by releasing shame and blame. Fixing the mistake and preventing it from happening again are key goals.

These are just a few examples. You can use mistakes as an occasion to practice each of the Success Strategies.

Mistakes make powerful teachers

Mistakes are usually more instructive than successes—and often far more interesting. The lessons we learn from making mistakes often stick with us for a lifetime. We can translate those lessons into new values and behaviors that make a profound difference.

With all these potential benefits from mistakes, we have plenty of reasons to celebrate them.

Embrace a problem, then dance with it

Choose a current problem in your life. Then, in the space below, describe in detail some ways that you will use the suggestions in this chapter to embrace and dance with that problem.

The problem I discovered is ...

To embrace this problem and dance with it, I could ...



Make mistakes your teacher

Recall a mistake that you've made—the bigger, the better. In the space below, describe specifically what you did and the consequences of the mistake.

I discovered that my mistake was ...

Now interpret this mistake in several contrasting ways. Write three possible interpretations of this event and choose the most empowering one.

For example, if you were driving and ran out of gas, you could say to yourself:

- I'm stupid and forgetful.
- If my boss would give me a raise, I'd be able to put more than a few dollars' worth in at a time.
- I do not have the habit of regularly checking my gas gauge.

Now write three interpretations of your own mistake and circle one that you want to adopt.

Next, choose what you will do differently in the future to avoid making the same mistake. In the example above, for instance, you could decide to tape a note that says "check auto gas" on your car dashboard.

I intend to ...
