

## How Well Do You Learn From Your Mistakes?

Making mistakes is inevitable. We all make them regularly. Nobody is perfect. Therefore, it is best to learn how to handle them well. Handle mistakes poorly and they are remembered as devastating failures, horrible calamities and evidence of your inadequacies. Handle them well and they can teach you what you need to do to improve next time. Mistakes can serve as a warning for you about the future.

Some years ago I had my car in for service and was told that an expensive repair was needed at that mileage. I could have it done now or it could wait until the next regular service appointment. Being a little worried about my finances at that time, I put it off. At the next service appointment I forgot to ask to have the repair done. The service people did not remind me. Two weeks later, while on the highway my engine died and I had to have my car towed. The engine has seized and the cost of replacement was greater than the resale value of the car. I had made some very costly mistakes! They were so costly, that errors required me to get a new car! Ouch!

So, at first, I tried to blame the service people. Why did they not remind me?! Then, they showed me that I had signed a service order declining the recommended service. Confronted with the facts I did not really like, I began to accept my responsibility. Where had I gone wrong? I went through my car maintenance records and saw how I had not paid attention to what needed to be done. Why was I so reluctant to have the repair done when it was recommended? Did I mistrust the service centre's advice? Was I just being cheap? Did I know the risk I was taking? Why had I not reviewed what needed to be done before the second service visit? What is the lesson that I could learn with the maintenance of my new car?

What kind of mistakes have you made in your life? Some may cost you money, others, personal or business opportunities. Perhaps you have declined an invitation for a social or business event because you did not think it would be a good time or interesting opportunity. Then afterwards, you regret your decision when you find out from those who went how much fun you missed and who was there. Some more serious mistakes can damage your relationship. Forgetting your partner's birthday or your anniversary can really hurt your partner. A betrayal of trust such as a one-night-stand is a more serious lapse in judgement and a very serious mistake.

Making mistakes gives us a chance to pause, reflect and examine our short comings. It also teaches us a life lesson that can help us in future by warning us to be more careful and thoughtful. Nothing is gained by obsessing on one's inadequacies and blaming oneself too harshly, nor is there any benefit in ignoring the mistake totally or blaming others for it. Finding the appropriate balance of self assessment and reflection on the facts is an important aspect of learning from mistakes.

### Four Steps to Handle Mistakes

1. Accept that everyone makes mistakes

Think of three people you know, respect and admire. Now, beside each one, list a mistake they have mad

2. Recognize making mistakes is inevitable.

List three mistakes you have made in your life that have made the greatest impact on you. Go back in your mind to the moment you made the decision. Try hard to remember your thoughts and feelings just before you made the choice you did. Did you know what would happen or did you expect a

happier consequence? Recall the strengths of the needs you had at that time that influenced your decision. Now ask yourself a most important question: If you were to return to that time with the same needs, feelings, thoughts and prediction or outcome, would you act differently? Repeat this process for all three mistakes.

3. Forgive yourself no matter how painful the consequences of your mistake.

Why? Given your feelings and thoughts, and the circumstances, you probably made the only decision you could at the time. You have probably paid for your mistakes already. If you try to learn from your mistakes, then some benefit can come from your actions.

4. Reflect on the lesson learned from your mistake.

Look at each of the three mistakes you listed. What lesson did the mistake teach you? Did it serve as a warning for you in future situations? Could it? Beside each mistake listed, take this opportunity to write out the lesson your mistake taught you.

The happiest, wisest people are those who remain curious and keep learning. Wisdom and confidence comes when we are able to accurately understand ourselves and others. Learning from mistakes, rather than repeating them will contribute to this understanding and happiness.