

## **What is a Mistake?**

**By Mel Schwartz**

Many people try to avoid making mistakes and some people actually experience a significant amount of apprehension and anxiety about committing mistakes. These individuals labor over making decisions out of this fear, which tends to paralyze them. Yet, we don't usually stop to consider exactly what constitutes a mistake.

Generally, a mistake is a decision or an action that we come to regret. Mistakes usually cause some degree of pain, loss or struggle. Certainly we might agree that we don't like the consequences and hence we call it a mistake. The irony is that these events that we try so hard to avoid may be precisely what we need to experience.

Many times I have heard people speak of their failed marriages as mistakes as they culminate in divorce. Yet, without such a difficult experience neither person would have had the opportunity to discover deeper truths about themselves. Through the painful experience there is abundant opportunity to learn and grow. These insights borne out of what we call mistakes are necessary for our psychological, emotional and spiritual growth. They are also a fundamental part of our learning process.

*As one door closes, another opens*

The fear of making a mistake impacts not only our personal relations, but our jobs and careers as well. The "mistakes" made in the workplace may result in financial loss or even termination. This undoubtedly causes upheaval and stress. But as surely as a door closes, another one opens. The objective is to not stay mired in the loss, but to look for the new door that is opening. They are always there if we learn to look for them.

The avoidance of pain, and at times, loss or sadness, limits our experience. These travails are necessary to propel us toward greater growth and awareness. Our beliefs about mistakes and failure limit us from moving into a deeper and richer relationship with life. The fear of making such errors keeps us trapped in the very narrow comfort zone of the known. Yet, it's the movement into that unknown that catalyzes our personal evolution.

*A mistake is an event, the full benefit of which we have not come to realize*

The fear of making a mistake is utterly imprisoning. Who gets to be the judge of what constitutes a mistake? From a spiritual perspective it might be argued that there is no such thing as a mistake. The very notion of mistake produces a reaction that induces fear and conformity. In this state we tend to dishonor our intuition as our inner voice becomes stilled, and we choose the safer path.

In such times we defer to the voices and opinions of others. These are the voices that instruct us about the proper choices. When we live in such a manner, our relationships suffer and we lose the creative, joyful spirit that more fully engages life. The concept of a mistake is tied to the larger notion of failure. Just as with the word mistake, I would offer

that there really is no such thing as failure. Imagine watching a toddler struggling to take their first steps, only to fall. How ridiculous would it be for us to proclaim that they failed? They simply haven't yet mastered the skill of walking. Success has not yet been reached. It is altogether human to struggle toward what we're trying to achieve. To refer to this process as failure is very destructive and self-defeating.

It is in our life's purpose to be explorative and to expand outward. If you are excited about new experience and opportunities for growth, then you don't likely pay much attention to the concept of mistake. On the other hand, if avoid such movement you are likely living with the fear of mistake.

When we find ourselves terrorized by thoughts of mistakes, we lose the opportunity to live more fully. There is never a single correct decision or pathway. Constructs such as mistakes and failure block us from the richer and more rewarding texture of life's possibilities. Liberating ourselves from this fear enables our lives to unfold with greater purpose.

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