

## LIVING WITH MISTAKES

Article by: Cheryl Sol

Why is it important to devote a whole article to embracing your mistakes? An earlier article was around the theme of self esteem. What is the relationship between the two? If you have low self esteem, you are likely to be more aware of your mistakes, to be more critical of them and to be more cautious in case you make mistakes.

Generally, if you don't accept that mistakes are a part of life it becomes easy to be **critical** and **judgmental** of yourself when you make them. It is not always easy to see how this wears away at your sense of self and makes you feel less worthwhile.

If you can't tolerate the consequences of your mistakes, fearing either your own or others criticism, you may either strive for **perfection** and become **defensive** or alternatively **avoid** doing things, especially anything new. **Indecisiveness** is another byproduct of the fear of making mistakes. If you don't make decisions you don't have to live with the consequences of the wrong ones.

According to Mackay and Fanning in their book entitled Self Esteem, a rule of thumb is that about one to three decisions in ten are dead wrong for most people and several others are in the grey area. How about that! So perfection is not a reality.

If we look at the major entrepreneurs of the world who are role models for success in business e.g. Richard Branson, they are people who admit that they have made it by being willing to take calculated risks and accept that failures also go with chartering new territory.

What can be useful is to do the following simple exercise. The next time you do something you catch yourself calling yourself "stupid" for what ever it is that you have done, follow the train of thought that goes with this. *It may be that you have quite a time of it telling yourself that you never get it right, you are a failure, can never be trusted to do this or that, that of COURSE it wasn't going to work out because after all it was you that did it.* Or you may identify some other version of a critical or harsh assessment of the situation.

What is useful is to step aside and imagine yourself speaking to someone you know in that same critical way you speak to yourself, and imagine their reaction. If you imagine that they would feel bad, it will probably do the same to you. You may also come to the conclusion that they will not want to hang around with you for because of the way you make them feel about themselves.

### Using Mistakes Constructively

1. Remember that something is only a mistake after you know the outcome. At the time you make a decision based on the information at hand which seems sound.
2. There is a difference between reflecting on mistakes and ruminating about them unproductively.
3. Become aware of why you made the decisions and choices you did rather than punish yourself for them.
4. Give yourself a mistake quota ie recognize that it is inevitable and necessary for growth and learning.
5. Recognize if there is a pattern in this – do you often make similar choices or do things in ways that lead to familiar outcomes.
6. Recognize the things that you did well and can affirm in the process of making that choice.
7. Understand the way that you deal with mistakes.
8. Look at how you deal with others mistakes. Are you equally critical?
9. Do you sabotage yourself by understanding your past mistakes and watch yourself repeat them despite knowing alternative ways to find success and happiness.
10. Reduce the likelihood of making mistakes by researching important and expensive decisions.
11. Separate out big mistakes from small mistakes ie does it matter?

Cheryl Sol  
Clinical Psychologist  
M.A. (Clin. Psych.)

---

What is important is to use past knowledge when making decisions. Think things through, seek the advice of those who have information you need, and learn to distinguish between intuition that is telling you not to do something because it is the wrong thing to do and anxiety that is preventing you from doing something because you are scared to move forward and make a decision for some reason.

Most importantly if it is fear of making the wrong decision, once you have all the facts at hand, **trust** that you can deal with any deviations to your original plan. There are few situations that cannot be rectified in one way or another, even if the situation cannot be reversed.