



Making Mistakes

In the 1970's sitcom Sanford & Son, America met Fred Sanford, a sarcastic, irascible schemer whose frequent get-rich-quick ideas routinely backfired. Although his son, Lamont, longed for independence, he loved his father too much to move out and leave his trouble-prone dad unsupervised. Though each owned an equal share in the business, Lamont often found himself doing all the work and having to compel his father

to do his part. Fred often responded by calling his son a big dummy. Lamont characteristically called his father an old fool. Nevertheless, each show strengthened the bond between the two characters and ended convincing viewers that Sanford & Son couldn't do without each other.

The sitcom was successful because people could relate to it. We all have some Fred and some Lamont in us. After all, "to err is human." The larger lesson, as Sophia Loren once said, is that "mistakes are part of the dues one pays for a full life." Even so, in a survey about human error, ninety percent of the participants agreed that mistakes were contemptible. Consider how they answered the following questions.

What do you think about mistakes?

- they are bad
- they are permanent
- they embarrass you
- they can hurt you
- you shouldn't make mistakes
- personal defects cause mistakes

What kind of people make mistakes?

- bad
- dumb
- lazy
- careless
- inadequate
- failures

What should you do if you make a mistake?

- hide it
- ignore it
- forget about it
- make up an excuse
- blame it on someone else
- avoid the consequences

Well, we won't hold these answers against the participants because we know they responded emotionally. Life is a series of trials and errors, each with the potential to make us stronger, wiser, better, if we take advantage of it.

Unfortunately, every teacher has to work overtime urging students to risk making mistakes to accelerate the learning process. The people quoted below understood this lesson.

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"Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep." —Scott Adams

"An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field." —Niels Bohr

"Mistakes are the portals of discovery." —James Joyce

"If I had to live my life again, I'd make the same mistakes, only sooner." —Tallulah Bankhead

"If you have made mistakes, even serious ones, there is always another chance for you. What we call failure is not the falling down but the staying down." —Mary Pickford

"A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing." —George Bernard Shaw

"While one person hesitates because he feels inferior, the other is busy making mistakes and becoming superior." —Henry C. Link

"To avoid situations in which you might make mistakes may be the biggest mistake of all." —Peter McWilliams

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How should those surveys about human error have responded? Life is too short for worry!

When you make a mistake:

- admit it
- correct it
- learn from it
- if you've got the nerve, laugh at it