

~~Achieve perfection~~

Admit your mistakes

“Failure is success if we learn from it.”

—Malcolm Forbes

As you can see, that quote comes not from a philosopher, but from a successful businessman, Malcolm Forbes.

The total quality management movement gave us a lot of great ideas, but “zero tolerance for errors” wasn’t one of them.

Everyone makes mistakes—including you. Admit them. Fix them. Learn from them. And then move on.

The folks who work with you know you’re human. They’ll have a lot more confidence in you if you show them you know it, too.

If the notion of making a mistake still bothers you, call it something else. Call it learning.

The story of Thomas Alva Edison and the light bulb is worth retelling in this context. Edison tried

hundreds of different materials trying to find a filament that would heat up when an electric current passed through it, giving off light without burning up. After hundreds of disappointments, Edison still had no guarantee that the idea would ever work. And yet he kept trying.

Finally Edison found the magic element—tungsten—and abolished bedtime forever.

When asked how he was able to endure all those failures, Edison reportedly said that he hadn't considered any of his attempts as failures. He was simply learning what wouldn't work.

Mistakes teach us what doesn't work. That's very valuable information.

When you fall short of your goal, learn and go on. You may have to redefine your goal, alter your approach, or get help. But, as long as you continue to try, you can never fail.

Here are the three steps in successfully handling mistakes:

Admit them: Attempts to cover a mistake or to pass the blame for it waste time and energy, engender ill-will, and make the original problem worse. Take the hit.

Fix them: As much as possible, fix any bad feelings or misunderstandings the mistake may have caused.

Learn from them: Is the goal reasonable? Is the approach workable? Is the problem in procedure or execution? Do we need to tinker, press forward, or start over?

“I never get writer’s block. When I get stuck, I just lower my standards.”

—William Stafford