Learning from your Mistakes

I have had to confront a couple of different aspects of people getting things wrong recently. The experience triggered 2 or 3 thoughts……

The first was the advice given last century by (from memory) Fred Daly MP to a new member of parliament 'always leave the back door unlocked' – no matter how sure you are of the correctness of your position in an argument always have a way to back out gracefully.

Every one wants to employ experienced people but very few employers tolerate mistakes…. To quote Denis Waitley: "Mistakes are painful when they happen, but years later a collection of mistakes is what is called experience" and Franklin P. Jones "Experience is that marvellous thing that enables you to recognize a mistake when you make it again". You cannot attempt something new without occasionally making mistakes, and by definition, every project is unique and therefore 'new' – the skill is to use your experience to recognize a pending mistake early and short circuit the error.

Lesson's Learned[1] should be the repository of 'other peoples' mistakes that you can draw on to avoid repeating them yourself – as quoted in *'The Knack'*, "A smart person learns from his or her mistakes. A wise person learns from other people's mistakes."

And then there is the question of what to do about your mistakes. The generally accepted process for getting over a mistake is:

- Acknowledge it ("my mistake")
- Make restitution if needed (eg, apologize)
- Learn from it
- Move on, only people who have never made anything have never made a mistake.

In moving on though, make sure you take your enhanced experience with you.

Most mistakes involve decisions[2] (or failing to decide) but as Helen Keller pointed out: "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. Security does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than exposure." The same applies decisions; every decision you make may be wrong but in the long run no decisions are usually worse than wrong decisions and your decision may be correct (but it helps if you can leave the "back door unlocked").

A final quote from Gerry Riskin: "It doesn't pay to waffle around and procrastinate". From his book **Ready, Fire, Aim**. Doing it is more important then doing it perfectly, you can adjust the aim later, if this involves making a mistake, deal with it! No one is perfect.

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[1] For more on Lessons Learned see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1004_Lessons_Learned.pdf

[2] For more on the types of decision we have to make see:
http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1053_Decision_Making