# *“Mistakes are a necessary evil in the pursuit of excellence”[6]*

*“Mistakes are a necessary evil in the pursuit of excellence”* - We live in a society and culture that heralds’ success and belittles failure without recognizing that the latter begets the former. Mistakes often result in failures[6]. But what exactly is failure? According to the dictionary, failure is defined as a lack of success or the inability to meet an expectation. We have to acknowledge that “failure” is just a concept accepted and agreed upon by the social imaginary to describe abstract feelings, situations, and events, based on definitions that constantly change throughout time. Failure is generally relative. Failure is inevitable. Everyone, even the most successful industrialists or businessmen have experienced failure in their lives. Different people view failures differently. For some it’s a terrible & epic mistake and for some its clean slate and a fresh start. Failure, just like success, is a very fluid concept. It’s relative and requires empathy to understand, and it has consequences.

Failures/mistakes are the stepping stone towards success and excellence. A business can’t develop a breakthrough product or process if it’s not willing to encourage risk taking and learn from subsequent mistakes[3]. For example, Bill Gates, one of the richest men in the world is known for building one of the world’s largest software businesses known as Microsoft. While Gates is famously known for creating a software company worth over $600 billion dollars, he failed miserably when starting up his first company called Traf-O-Data. Gates and business partner Paul Allen created a device that could read traffic tapes and process the data. When Gates and Allen tried to sell it, the product would not even work. They failed miserably. Gates did not give up, however, he said it best “life is not fair, get used to it”[2]. Gates and Allen went on to eventually build the world’s largest software business, known as Microsoft through technological innovation and keen business strategies[2]. From Bill Gates venture, we understand that failure is inevitable. However, we should not let failures overtake our success. Life will knock us down and throw us a curve ball every now and then, but we have to use those setbacks as a motivation to push forward.

Mistakes help us to gain knowledge and all it takes is the willingness to learn from them. We get to know what works and what does not from each error we come across. Without mistakes, we lose countless opportunities to gain valuable knowledge and learn lessons from any software development projects that we embark. For example, In the early 2000s, Levi Strauss introduced its Type 1 Jeans, which had exaggerated features like buttons, stitches, and rivets[1]. The company ran a Super Bowl ad that only confused customers and the style never caught on, forcing Levi`s to walk away from this flop[1]. Fashion is fickle. The lesson learnt from this example would be that in order to avoid confusion we ought to improve internal communications so that the final product has a clear message and is easily understood by end users. Instead of email and spreadsheets, they should have tried an operational system of record to communicate, get status updates and track document versions.

Mistakes help to trigger creativity. When numerous attempts to resolve a problem fail, we tend to explore for new solutions which enables us to think outside the box. Without any mistakes, we lose chances of experiencing the creative side of ourselves. For example, the British inventor James Dyson didn't create the dual cyclone vacuum cleaner in a flash of inspiration. The product, now used by millions, didn't emerge fully formed in his mind. Instead, he did what the group graded for quantity did. He tried and failed, triggering new insights, before trying and failing again and slowly the design improved. In fact, Dyson worked his way through 5,126 failed prototypes before coming up with a design that ultimately transformed household cleaning[5]. As he said "People think of creativity as a mystical process. This model conceives of innovation as something that happens to geniuses. But this could not be more wrong. Creativity is something we can all improve at, by realizing that it has specific characteristics. Above all, it is about daring to learn from our mistakes".

Encouraging mistakes doesn’t mean abandoning supervision, quality control, or respect for sound practices. Managing mistakes requires executives to be more engaged, not less. Although mistakes are inevitable when launching innovation initiatives, management cannot abdicate its responsibility to assess the nature of the failures[4]. Some are excusable errors; others are simply the result of sloppiness. Those willing to take a close look at what happened and why can usually tell the difference. Failure-tolerant leaders identify excusable mistakes and approach them as outcomes to be examined, understood, and built upon[4].

I do agree to the fact that mistakes or failures can cause disappointments, low self-esteem, stress and anxiety. This is where the struggle begins because there are no clear-cut answers to this issue[2]. We must learn to embrace our mistakes and see them for the lessons they offer and the opportunities they provide. This is the approach that will catapult our leadership to success. An experimental approach to life and learning must include using mistakes to our advantage. If we face our failures bravely and take the lessons learnt from our mistakes positively, then we will end up with having achieved greater heights and good results.

In conclusion, mistakes are part of life and that making one relates to an action we have taken, not who we are as a person. In fact, [research has found](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0146167212445599) that having compassionate acceptance of your own mistakes can boost determination to reach goals. The fear of being nothing, achieving nothing and becoming nothing should be much bigger than the fear of making mistakes.

# References

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