



Learning From Your Mistakes

How failure can make you more successful...

by [Andrew Cooke](#), [Blue Sky GPS \(Growth & Profit Solutions\)](#)

We all make mistakes, but do we learn from them?

As children we are often taught not to make mistakes, and that it is important to be right. This is reinforced as we become adults and so we learn to equate mistakes with failure. And when we do this we limit ourselves and our potential to grow.

I view failure as an opportunity to learn and improve, and from this to grow and develop myself further. If I am not making mistakes then I am not pushing my boundaries or myself, and I condemning myself to be average as I cannot grow. The important thing about mistakes is not just to learn, but to *implement* that learning so you don't make the same mistake twice.

I would like to share a story with you about Thomas Watson Sr., the man who founded IBM and oversaw its massive growth from 1914 to 1956. The story goes like this....

"IBM had survived The Great Depression. Gambling on a post war boom, Watson Sr. had maintained IBM's employment levels by increasing inventories when there was little demand. Excess machinery and parts crowded basements and filled every nook-and-cranny of Endicott's warehouses.

Some on the board of directors, because of this, were lobbying to remove Watson as IBM's President. He needed these inventories sold.

A very large government bid, approaching a million dollars, was on the table. The IBM Corporation—no, Thomas J. Watson Sr.—needed every deal. Unfortunately, the salesman failed. IBM lost the bid. That day, the sales rep showed up at Mr. Watson's office. He sat down and rested an envelope with his resignation on the CEO's desk. Without looking, Mr. Watson knew what it was. He was expecting it.

He asked, "What happened?"

The sales rep outlined every step of the deal. He highlighted where mistakes had been made and what he could have done differently. Finally he said, "Thank you, Mr. Watson, for giving me a chance to explain. I know we needed this deal. I know what it meant to us." He rose to leave.

Tom Watson met him at the door, looked him in the eye and handed the envelope back to him saying, "Why would I accept this when I have just invested one million dollars in your education?"

It is that last line – “I have just invested a million dollars in your education” – that brings it home to me. There are two important learnings here:

1. The failure *you* experience and the mistakes *you* make are opportunities for *you* to grow.
2. The failure *others* experience and the mistakes *others* make are opportunities for *them* to grow.

Are you tolerant of and welcome mistakes in yourself? And in others? Currently do you look to learn from your mistakes and failures? And do you help others to learn from their mistakes and failures?

We are living and working in a changing world, and we are finding that what got us here will not get us there. As well as this we are also discovering that what we have always done will no longer get us what we always got. Failures and mistakes do not stem just from doing something new or different, but they can stem from doing that which we have done before and which has previously brought us success. The latter source of failure and mistakes is more insidious and harder to sport, ironically because it is so familiar.

So create an environment where failure and mistakes are seen as an opportunity to learn and grow – individually, as a team, and as an organization. Identify the learnings, share them with others, and determine what you need to implement to prevent the failure or mistake from recurring by raising the bar for both what you do and how you do it.

About Andrew Cooke

Andrew Cooke is the director and founder of Blue Sky GPS and is known for his work with executives, managers and teams in helping them to grow, develop and achieve results. Using a blend of consulting, facilitation and coaching he is noted for his ability in “bringing people potential to life”. Andrew takes the time to understand and assist successful business executives in creating a customized plan that allows them grow and develop their leadership effectiveness. In doing this he guides executives to manage, direct and make change work for them and their stakeholders and teams in an increasing volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous business environment. From this he helps others to become more successful in both what they do and how they do it.

Andrew demonstrates a proactive attitude and empathy that blends enthusiasm, energy and a pragmatic approach in engaging leaders and their stakeholders. He has over thirty years of international business experience and insights on which to draw, and has worked with blue-chip clients and other leading businesses across a range of industries. Andrew is passionate about helping others to be more successful personally and professionally.



Qualifications & Accreditations

Andrew is an experienced international expert in executive coaching, leadership development and business consulting. He has qualifications, certifications and accreditations from recognized leading global organizations, including:

- International executive coach with certifications for Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching and Global Leader of the Future 360⁰ Assessment
- Masters of Business Administration (MBA), London Business School, UK
- Bachelor of Business BA (Hons), University of Plymouth (UK)
- Diploma from the Institute of Marketing (UK)
- Accredited DISC Facilitator & Coach