



Yeshiva University
THE RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS–HERENSTEIN
CENTER FOR VALUES AND LEADERSHIP

Failing Forward: Creating and Embracing a Culture of Mistake Making
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"A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable but more useful than a life spent in doing nothing."
George Bernard Shaw

Defining Mistakes (with the help of the Oxford Dictionary online)

mis·take /mə'stāk/

noun: an action or judgment that is misguided or wrong. "

noun: something, especially a word, figure, or fact, which is not correct; an inaccuracy.

verb: mistake; be wrong about.

Similar: misunderstand, misinterpret, get wrong, put a wrong interpretation on, misconstrue, misapprehend, misread, miss, take amiss, be wrong, be in error, be at fault, be under a misapprehension, be misinformed, be misguided, be wide of the mark, be barking up the wrong tree, get the wrong end of the stick

Circle the kind of mistakes above you most commonly make.

Naming and Owning Mistakes

Following the framework of the confessional at Yom Kippur services, let's take a few minutes to note some of our own mistakes in the spirit of self-improvement. Finish the sentences...

As an Employee:

For the sin of...

For the sin of...

As a Friend:

For the sin of...

For the sin of...

Reflective Questions

Rabbi Zelig Pliskin in his book Gateway to Self-Knowledge presents dozens of questions that can help us rethink our own attitude to failure. Here are a few to stir change. Circle the question that is the easiest for you to answer and answer it. Underline the question that is hardest for you to answer and attempt to answer it:

- 1) Do you tend to make the same mistakes over and over again? What would prevent you from making the same mistakes?
- 2) What is your usual reaction when you make a mistake?
- 3) Do you spend a large amount of time berating yourself for your mistakes? If so, what do you lose out by doing so?
- 4) When other people point out your mistakes to you, are you usually: a) grateful, b) angry at them, c) embarrassed?
- 5) In what ways do you view mistakes as learning experiences to help you grow?
- 6) When you make mistakes do you carefully analyze the reasons for your mistakes?
- 7) Which three mistakes of yours led to very positive outcomes?

Teaching Through Mistakes - Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) on Genesis 12:10

The Torah never hides from us the faults, errors and weaknesses of our great men. Just by that it gives the stamp of veracity to what relates. But in truth, by the knowledge which is given us of their faults and weaknesses, our great men are in no wise made lesser but actually greater and more instructive. If they stood before us as the purest models of perfection we should attribute them as having a different nature, which has been denied to us. Were they without passion without internal struggles, their virtues would seem to us the outcome of some higher nature, hardly a merit and certainly no model that we could hope to emulate.