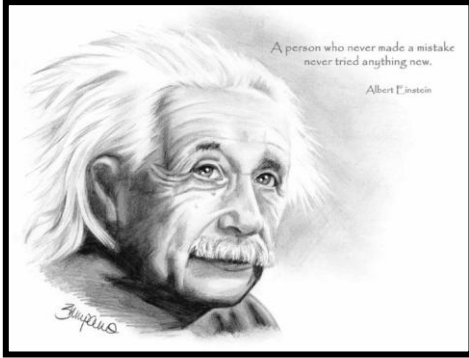


Is it OK to Make a Mistake?

By: Glenn Smith

If you visit my home and take time to read the items that hang on the wall of all that is treasured, the refrigerator door, you will find a sign that says,



“We the Smiths are not interested in blame, shame, fault, regrets or excuses - we are interested in how we are going to fix our mistakes.” I felt thankful that both my colleague Shelley and I hold this belief when we learned about a typo that was viewed by hundreds in our weekly Internet publication, “Thoughts that Ignite”. (Instead of “create,” the message used the word “crate.”) We asked ourselves, “Well, is it really OK to

make a mistake?” In fact, we asked ourselves this again and again because we received several e-mails that pointed out the slip-up.

Ever since I met Diane Gossen, author of *Restitution: Restructuring School Discipline*, I wanted to put into action an idea that I learned from her, that “It’s OK to Make a Mistake.” I made a firm commitment to create the conditions for all the athletes I coached, all the students I taught, my two children, and most importantly myself to adopt the attitude that it is “OK to make a mistake”. This became a guiding principle in the classroom, on baseball fields and basketball courts, in my family’s home, and most importantly in my own life.

I have come to believe that mistakes offer life’s grandest opportunity to learn, grow and become stronger. I invite you to believe that mistakes are a sign that you are trying something new, something challenging, and something that will ultimately make you wiser. In asking you to adopt this belief, I’m asking you to start taking some risks and risks are scary. And I know that there are consequences to falling short. Others may criticize, make fun of, or at times lose confidence in you. Not all risk takers lead successful lives, but I can honestly say that I have never met a successful person who was not a risk taker. Shelley and I have written in our book, *Creating Your Be-Print*, our belief that if you: *“Set a goal, fall short, set another goal, fall short again, set another goal, fall short again, you will be way further than if you had not set a goal at all.”*

As I write this, I remember a conversation I had with my 15-year-old daughter Karlie after she had finished one of her first basketball practices on her high school team. I had coached her from the time she was 7 years old; she was talented, and I was excited to see my protégé use her skills at

the next level. When she got into my car, I realized she was flustered. My heart sank as she told me that she didn't know if she was going to enjoy this experience. Karlie told me that the coach yelled at her and criticized her throughout the session. She said I had always let her know that her mistakes were her opportunity to get better, and her present coach did not seem to believe that mistakes were OK. "Uh-oh," I thought. "Have I taught her something that would not serve her long term?" After considering my answer to her concerns, I asked her, "What do you believe?" She answered without hesitation, "I believe it's OK to make a mistake." "Hmmm...." I replied, "So if you believe that, what's the problem?"

When Shelley and I are working with incarcerated men and women, we believe it is paramount to help them adopt this mind-set. The last thing we need is for these men and women to go back to their families and our communities with their heads hanging low, telling their children, "Don't be like me." Instead, we want them to have the self-assurance to inform everyone they meet, *"I want you to be just like me."* We want them to model the belief that it's OK to make a mistake. We want them to say loud and clear, *"When you make a mistake, I want you to own it, I want you to learn from it, I want you to become stronger through it, and I want you to forgive yourself and let it go. I want you to be just like me! I want you to know that it is OK to make a mistake!"*