Mistakes…leverage for success!

By Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey

"Crisis can often have value because it generates transformation…I have found that I always learn more from my mistakes than from my successes. If you aren't making some mistakes, you aren't taking enough chances."
John Sculley

Like many of you, I hate making mistakes, and worse yet having to admit them and clean up after them. This has often been an area of challenge for me in my growth as a person and in establishing my business. But, I am learning and that is the important thing.

Someone once told me, '*Learn from the mistakes of others, you'll never live long enough to make enough of your own.'* At the time, that sounded ludicrous to me, as I didn't want to admit my own, let alone discuss them with someone else, or hear about theirs.

A couple of years back I read an article while flying to a speaking engagement in the USA about a company who had tackled this *'mistake-itis'* full-on, and had turned it into a value-added training tool for their company. What they did was invite their management and staff to submit their mistakes and each month they voted on the biggest mistake, and gave a decent cash prize for the '*winner.'*

Again, initially I thought, *'What a dumb idea!'* But, as I finished reading the article I saw the wisdom in their process. What they had discovered was needless repetition of mistakes throughout the company, were costing them needless manpower and additional resources. Someone would make a mistake, fix it, and simply continue without talking about it. In fact, the corporate climate was such that mistakes were not openly discussed. Then someone else would repeat the mistake, etc.

'A mistake only proves that someone stopped talking long enough to do something.'
Michael LeBoeuf

The positive results of developing a culture where mistakes were accepted as a '*normal*' part of doing the work and in making progress were amazing. But, the **sharing of the mistakes, and the lessons learned was the key point.** Sharing the mistakes and the lessons, *'leveraged'* the learning curve of their management and their staff. It allowed them to avoid needless repetition of mistakes, and all of the lost time and costly resources that entailed. It allowed the company to grow and expand on a stronger foundation. It encouraged its management and staff to be more open to innovation, and to take *'educated'* risks in developing new business, services and products to serve their changing clientele.

- What was your most recent mistake?
- What did you learn from it?
- Have you shared the lesson you learned with your team?

One of my biggest lessons in life was in learning how to not *'recycle'* my mistakes. To learn from each one, savour the lesson, and move ahead boldly to make some new mistakes. And some new progress!