

## Upper Intermediate – Learn From Your Mistakes

**Aim:** to help students understand how the mistakes we make can be positive and taking risks in our learning can make us better learners

**Lead-in:** Write the following on the board:

*“Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning.” - Bill Gates*

*“Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.” - Robert Kennedy*

*“Whether you think that you can or that you can’t, you are usually right.” - Henry Ford*

*“Take a chance and you may lose. Take not a chance and you have lost already.” - Soren Kierkegaard*

Ask students if they know who said each quote and what they do (did) for a living. (Bill Gates (1955–) is a businessman computer programmer and inventor who set up the company Microsoft; Robert Kennedy (1925–1968) was a politician; Henry Ford (1863–1947) was an industrialist who established the Ford Motor Company; Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) was a philosopher.)

Ask students to work in pairs and discuss with their partner what they think each quote means. Go around listening and monitoring students’ discussion and invite individuals to share their answers with the class.

Discuss with students how making mistakes might be a positive thing for the following people:

- a professional athlete
- a business person
- a scientist
- an inventor
- an artist
- a singer/performer

Ask students how they personally feel about making mistakes. Do they find it easy to accept, or do they always strive for perfection?

Ask students to choose a quote from the board to write in the front of their notebooks to remind them to give themselves the freedom to take risks and make mistakes with their learning.

**Choose A Scenario:** Ask students to work in pairs and choose one of the three scenarios (A–C). Write on the board:

- *What mistake(s) were made?*
- *Who was responsible for the mistake(s)?*
- *How does the person who made the mistake feel?*
- *What lesson can the person learn from this mistake?*
- *What can the person do next?*

Explain to students that they should discuss their answers to the questions in relation to their scenario. Ask students to speculate about the possible reasons the person made the mistake(s) they did. How could they have avoided the situation? Does understanding why you made a mistake make it easier to accept?

Ask students to think about what the person in their scenario should do now. What changes should they make to avoid making the same mistake again?

Encourage students to look at the Reflection Point while they are working.

**Reflection Point:** Write on the board:

*“I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” – Thomas Edison*

Ask students if they know who Thomas Edison was ((1847–1931) a businessman and the inventor of the light bulb)

Explain to students that we all make mistakes, big and small, all the time. Give the example of a child learning to ride a bike. They fall off many times before they finally succeed in mastering the skill of cycling. Similarly, Thomas Edison tried out many different devices that would generate light before he finally came up with the filament design that is still used in many light bulbs today. A fear of making mistakes can mean we are frightened to take risks. Taking risks and trying things out is a vital part of learning.

**Class discussion:** Ask each pair to work with another who chose the same scenario. Ask students to compare the mistake(s) they identified in each person's behaviour. Did they identify the same one(s)? Ask students to compare their ideas for how the person in the scenario could avoid making the same mistake again. Did they have the same ideas?

Ask students if they have ever made a similar mistake to the person in their scenario. What happened? How did they feel?

Ask students the following questions:

- *Why is it important to have the confidence to admit our mistakes?*
- *When should we apologise for our mistakes?*

**Work alone:** Ask students to work alone and choose a second scenario (A–C) and follow the same steps as in Activity 2. Once they have finished, invite volunteers to present their ideas about their scenario to the class.

**Extension:** Write the following on the board:

*The best mistake I ever made was ...*

Ask students to think about how they would complete the sentence and then share with the class their own experience of making a mistake, big or small. Ask them how they came to terms with the mistake and what they learned, either about themselves or about what they could do differently in the future.