The Right to Be Wrong

“Take chances, make mistakes. That’s how you grow.

Pain nourishes your courage. You have to fail in order to practice being brave.”

– Mary Tyler Moore, American actor

The exchange began over lunch and soon escalated. By the time my friend, Ceri and I had begun our walk back to work, the discussion had become a heated debate.

As we walked into the office, Ceri threw up her arms in frustration and announced, “That’s it! End of discussion!” Determined to explain my point, I absentmindedly followed her through a doorway. Ignoring me, Ceri reached into her purse, pulled out a tube of lipstick, leaned toward the mirror, puckered up and began applying her “new mouth.”

A couple women walked by and gasped, then hurriedly left the room. I looked up and saw my reflection in the large rectangular mirror above the sink. Ceri was smiling.

“What’s so funny?” I asked.

“Do you often follow women into the washroom?”

Why do we often make our biggest mistakes in public? Some people can’t avoid it. Former hockey goalie Jacques Plante once said, “How would you like a job where, if you made a mistake, a big red light goes on and 18,000 people boo?”

Embarrassment aside, we should never give up our right to be wrong. Good judgment comes from experience and experience comes from bad judgment. It is your right to be wrong occasionally.

“A life spent making mistakes is not only more honourable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing,” said George Bernard Shaw. Great mistakes are opportunities for great learning and great learning makes for great living.

I’m reminded of story that writer and motivator Steve Goodier shared about a newly appointed clergyman contacted by a local funeral director to hold a graveside service at a small country cemetery. There was to be no funeral, just the committal, because the deceased had no family or friends left in the state.
The young pastor started out early for the cemetery, but soon became lost. After making several wrong turns, he finally arrived a half-hour late. The hearse was nowhere in sight and cemetery workers were relaxing under a nearby tree, eating their lunch.

The pastor went to the open grave and found that the vault lid was already in place. He took out his book and read the service. As he returned to his car, he overheard one of the workers say, “Maybe we’d better tell him it’s a septic tank.”

You have the right to be wrong. If you want to build a great life, you have a duty to make great mistakes — it’s how we learn. If you can, laugh at your mistakes. Always learn from them and try to make sure your next mistake is one you haven’t made before!

There is a lesson in every mistake. Successful people prosper in life because of a tendency to cut their losses, thereby minimizing mistakes. It is only when people refuse to accept that they have made a bad choice or decision and move from acceptance into resistance that a mistake becomes potentially devastating.

When you accept your mistakes, you can deal with circumstances as facts and realities, rather than hoping, wishing, and praying that it would or could be different. Once you stop resisting “what is” you can begin to make wise and informed decisions. It’s the first step in becoming a far more positive, creative, and constructive person.