

*Special Tribute to My Friend, Coach, and Mentor*

# GEORGE DUFF

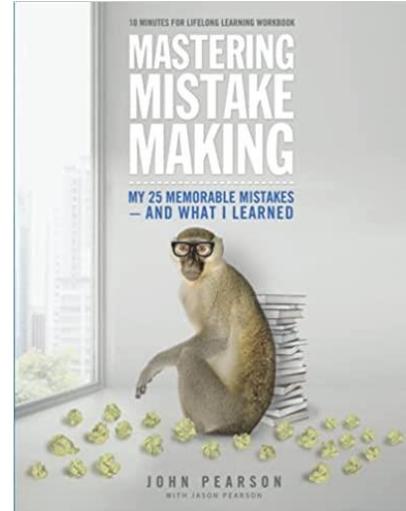
by John Pearson  
January 10, 2023

**In Mistake #13 of *Mastering Mistake-Making***, I write that “Every Leader Needs a Coach—Except Me!” This mistake (and what I learned) is just one example (of many!) when my very special friend, coach, and mentor George Duff came to my rescue!

George Duff was welcomed to his heavenly home on January 1, 2023. He was 91. I’ve been so blessed with rich memories of George this month, including this wisdom:

**“Remember, you are talking not to a crowd but to a parade that is changing all the time.”**

Read the blog I wrote for ECFA on August 30, 2013:  
[“27 Years—27 Board Chairs.”](#)



Read **Mistake #13** (attached).

- A celebration of life service will be held on January 14, 2023, Saturday 2 p.m. PST, at Evergreen Covenant Church, Mercer Island, Wash. It’s possible that the service will be live-streamed on this [website](#).
- George Duff was a volunteer champion of Free Wheelchair Mission. [Visit the website](#) to send a tribute card to the Duff family.
- Fitting tributes have been featured online in local newspapers:
  - [Mercer Island Reporter](#)
  - [Seattle Times](#) (business section)
  - [Seattle Times](#) (editorial section)
- For more wisdom from George Duff, read Chapter 1 (The Results Bucket) and Chapter 2 (The Customer Bucket) in [Mastering the Management Buckets](#).

*Download this Special Tribute to George Duff at:*

[\*\*Mastering Mistake-Making Webpage\*\*](#)

**Mastering Mistake-Making**  
**My 25 Memorable Mistakes—and What I Learned**  
by John Pearson with Jason Pearson

GEORGE DUFF



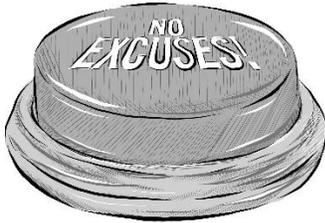
**GEORGE DUFF** served 27 years (1968-1995) as the president of the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce. In retirement, he has served on several for-profit and nonprofit boards, including CRISTA. As the \$1-a-year senior adviser for Christian Management Association (now CLA), George leveraged his deep appreciation for Peter Drucker's wisdom to thousands of ministry leaders. (He re-reads Drucker's *The Effective Executive* once a year.) Jim Gwinn, retired CEO of CRISTA, profiled George's wisdom in Chapter 24 of the book, *A Life Well Lived: 52 Inspiring, Real-Life Stories*. George, and his wife, Marilyn, continue to serve ministries in numerous ways from their home in the Seattle area.

❑ **READ:** *The Effective Executive: The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done (50th Anniversary Edition)*, by Peter F. Drucker (Foreword by Jim Collins)

Note: George Duff is quoted numerous times in *Mastering the Management Buckets*, including the section, "Slough Off Yesterday: When the Horse Is Dead, Dismount" in Chapter 1, "The Results Bucket." (See also the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday tribute to George in the appendix of this book you are now reading.)



## ❑ MISTAKE #13: Every Leader Needs a Coach—Except Me! *I squandered way too many years treading water without a coach.*



### THE HOLY RIPPLE EFFECT OF A GOD-DIRECTED COACH

As I've mentioned, I was pretty good at telling others what to think and what to do—but I frequently failed to follow my own advice and counsel. "This is different," I often rationalized.

During my 11 years at Christian Management Association, we often shoe-horned a board meeting into the national conference schedule. The two months before a national conference are intense. Think Macy's at Christmas. Was I ever fully prepared or mentally and spiritually ready to help our board chair facilitate a robust board meeting? *No.*

One year during that pre-conference marathon, a key team member resigned and accepted a significant position at another organization. At that moment, the timing was very concerning to me (but in looking back, he had all his ducks in a row—and it worked out).

For years, I had coached other CEOs that few team members ever exit on a timetable that is optimal for the organization. The timing always tilts in favor of your employee's circumstances—which is natural. So my counsel: accept this fact of leadership life and move on.

At that pre-conference board meeting, in response to a board member's question about why the team member had resigned, I shared what I thought was a transparent confession.

*"Uh...I'm not sure why he left CMA for another position, but frankly, it appears I'm not great at retaining senior people for the long haul. My direct reports have no upward path on our small team—so career advancement for them is outside of CMA as long as I'm in the CEO role, right?"*

Trust me. That half-baked excuse did not inspire my board! But, gratefully they extended grace. And...I'll never forget the fork-in-the-road counsel later from *my* coach and mentor, George Duff. (Read on!)

When I read *Rumsfeld's Rules* in 2013, it reminded me of another one-liner wisdom machine: George Duff! Heed this wisdom from Donald Rumsfeld's "Picking People" chapter: **"Forward-thinking leaders try to have some names in mind before a key vacancy needs to be filled."**<sup>1</sup>

## THE MISTAKE

**While I often coached others and often encouraged others to have a coach, sadly I neglected my own counsel. I squandered too many leadership years without a coach and mentor.**

I sought the counsel of many gifted people over the years. But I never valued a long-term coaching relationship until the Lord commissioned George Duff to coach the CEO of the Christian Management Association—who, apparently, still had a lot to learn about management!

### ►WHAT I LEARNED:

Now, after comparing my “years-with-a-coach” versus my “years-without-a-coach,” it’s no contest. **Learning leadership and management from a coach is smarter, more effective, and more fun.** And here’s some breaking news: God often spoke to me through George Duff!

George Duff retired in 1995 after serving 27 years as president of the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce. In 1994, I was the new CEO at Christian Management Association and the idea and the potential of CMA captured the imagination of George and Marilyn Duff. Following the lead of some universities, we created a new position for George: \$1-a-Year Senior Adviser. And yes, we presented an actual dollar to George every year. CMA actually doubled the budget and had *two* senior advisers, the second being Ted Engstrom, president emeritus of World Vision.

Over the years, George added value to CMA in dozens of ways: conference workshops, observing board meetings, strategizing, participating in CEO Dialogue roundtables, and much more. Certainly, the greatest value for me—investing full days with me, coaching and mentoring.

George was also gifted at fundraising—and both conceived for CMA and helped launch a unique donor group of for-profit business leaders who had a passion for nonprofit ministries. He often empathized with ministry CEOs and fundraisers by noting that as a chamber of commerce president, he spent his time either fundraising or thinking about fundraising!

So George had my trust, confidence, and appreciation—and every meeting was a learning experience. I had plenty of leadership challenges and so I habitually tuned my mind and heart to hear Heaven’s wisdom through George.

So, about a week after my excuse-making episode at the CMA board meeting, George weighed in—gently—but profoundly in one of our meetings together. I wish I could remember his exact words (I cannot), but I will never forget his wisdom:

- John, every leader has self-doubts about their leadership. You don’t need to verbalize it.
- Appropriate transparency is good. But too much transparency is inappropriate!\*
- Your board appreciates you, but they need leadership from you, not excuses.
- You’re gifted. You can learn and be a more effective leader and you can recruit, coach, and inspire team members around the mission. Skip the excuses.

\*Note: Fast-forward to 2019 when I had the privilege of co-authoring four board governance books with Dan Busby and he introduced leaders to “The Transparency Continuum”—with the goal of finding the “sweet spot” between absolute transparency and no transparency, termed “appropriate transparency.”<sup>2</sup> (I wish I had understood this years ago.)

Gratefully, George Duff never gave up on me nor CMA (now Christian Leadership Alliance). His coaching and mentoring had a holy ripple effect. I just wish I had understood the Kingdom power of coaching and mentoring years earlier.

**“Become wise  
by walking with the wise...”**

Proverbs 13:20a (MSG)

In recent years, I’ve trumpeted the wisdom that “Every leader needs a coach.” According to Soderquist Leadership, “92% of executives who received coaching said they would be willing to be coached again.”<sup>3</sup> I agree—and I should also note here that CMA’s \$1-a-year compensation to George Duff was the bargain of the century! Milestone Leadership, the new name for Soderquist Leadership, offers executive coaching starting at \$750 for a 90-minute session.<sup>4</sup>

**What’s in a name?** George Duff’s family invited us to share a tribute to George on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Joanne and I pictured 10 words that best illustrated our dear friend, coach, and mentor.

**G.E.O.R.G.E.**

- Generosity
- Enjoyment
- Out-of-the-Box Thinking!
- Rigorous Focus
- Goodness
- Excellence

**D.U.F.F.**

- Druckerisms!
- Uniqueness
- Faithfulness
- Fruitfulness

*See the Appendix for the full tribute.*

**10 MINUTES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING WITH YOUR TEAM**

- Yes, every leader needs a coach. Definitely! But...could coaching enrich *your* leadership?
- If you’ve coached or mentored others, describe a “God moment” when truth tumbled out!
- Is there an opportunity for our organization to inspire seasoned leaders to coach and mentor one or more team members? (What might our \$1-a-Year Senior Advisers Program look like?)

**PERSONAL APPLICATION**

<b>I learned this:</b>	
<b>I’m praying about this:</b>	
<b>I will ask _____ to hold me accountable for this:</b>	

- This is a “Top-5 Insight” for me.** (Select only five in this book!)



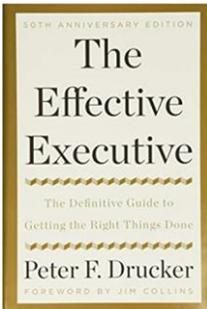
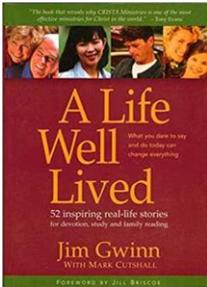
## SPECIAL THANKS TO JOHN'S COACH AND MENTOR

# GEORGE DUFF

**In Mistake #13**, “Every Leader Needs a Coach—Except Me,” I wrote about “the holy ripple effect of a God-directed coach.” I squandered too many years treading water without a coach, but then the Lord sent George Duff to rescue me from the deep end of the pool!

**What I Learned:** Now, after comparing my “years-with-a-coach” versus my “years-without-a-coach,” it’s no contest. **Learning leadership and management from a coach is smarter, more effective, and more fun.** And here’s some breaking news: God often spoke to me through George Duff!

**What’s in a name?** George Duff’s family invited us to share a tribute to George on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Joanne and I pictured 10 words that best illustrated our dear friend, coach, and mentor. (See the next two pages.)



## Do Second Things Not at All!

**George Duff** is profiled in *A Life Well Lived: 52 Inspiring Real Life Stories for Devotion, Study and Family Reading*, by Jim Gwinn with Mark Cutshall.<sup>5</sup> Gwinn served as president of CRISTA Ministries in Seattle from 1987 to 2005, and during that time also chaired the board of directors for several years at Christian Management Association when Duff served as CMA’s \$1-a-year Senior Adviser.

Gwinn notes that every year George would read *The Effective Executive*, by Peter Drucker, and had memorized Drucker’s “Practice #4” of five “habits of the mind that have to be acquired to be an effective executive.”

**“Effective executives concentrate on the few major areas where superior performance will produce outstanding results. They force themselves to set priorities and stay with these priority decisions. They know that they have no choice but to do first things first —and second things not at all.**

**The alternative is to get nothing done.”<sup>6</sup>**

Note: The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (2017) of *The Effective Executive* features a foreword by Jim Collins, “Ten Lessons I Learned from Peter Drucker.”<sup>7</sup>

# Happy Birthday, *George!*

From John & Joanne Pearson

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**Congratulations on 80 years!** When we think of you, dozens of words, stories, and anecdotes come to mind. But...brevity has always been one of your hallmarks, so we'll tone this down to just a few pages—not a *Harvard Business Review* essay! We're blessed that you model and mentor us in...

## **G.E.O.R.G.E.**

**G**enerosity. That is, strategic generosity. Example: scholarships to the CMA conference were offered not just to those who could not afford it, but to denominational leaders who, upon experiencing the conference, would bring (and fund) others the next year.

**E**njoyment. You truly enjoy helping people and figuring out what it will take to help them succeed in the work God has given them. It's not drudgery for you. It's not an obligation. You exude joy in your God-given journey. That alone is enough to say about our hero and mentor (would that be true for all of us)...but we can think of more stuff, so keep reading!

**O**ut-of-the-Box Thinking! According to the *StrengthsFinder* books, "People strong in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues." Bingo—that's you! CMA needed additional funds to supplement the non-dues income areas. You created—and invested in—the CMA President's Leadership Circle.

**R**igorous Focus. Here, from page 36 in *Mastering the Management Buckets*, is one of our favorite George stories on the "Slough Off Yesterday" principle from Peter Drucker:

George Duff, my good friend and management mentor, led his vice presidents in a "Slough Off Yesterday" exercise each year. George served as president of the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce for 27 years (and had 27 different board chairs!), and once a year, he closed the doors to the conference room. Behind closed doors, he asked each VP to hypothetically trim their own budgets and their staff members by 20 percent. "What must we abandon and what must we strengthen in each department?" Then, one by one, his vice presidents reported on this emotionally painful but critically important exercise. It was just a drill—a confidential one—but it helped reveal the winners and the losers.<sup>8</sup>

**G**oodness. Proverbs 10:28a (*MSG*) says, "The aspirations of good people end in celebration." God has gifted you (and Marilyn) with goodness. You think the best of people and help them with their aspirations—demonstrated by the zillions of trips to California. Instead of golf and spa treatments, you fought freeway traffic to visit, encourage and inspire the CMA team, and now the Free Wheelchair Mission team, and so many others. Thank you!

**E**xcellence. Whether in your giving, your allotment of time, or in your strategic focus on priorities, your work and life is measured by excellence. I remember your infectious laugh (not nearly as infectious as Marilyn's laugh—but still very genuine and hearty) when you resonated with the wonderful quote from Elton Trueblood, "Pious shoddy is still shoddy." *You live excellence!*

## **D.U.F.F.**

**D**ruckerisms! Your example of annually reading Peter Drucker’s classic, *The Effective Executive*, has inspired us—and hundreds of others—to be lifelong learners. Thank you! You know—and recite from memory—dozens of Druckerisms, like

*“Follow effective action with quiet reflection.*

*From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action.”<sup>9</sup>*

**U**niqueness. There is only one George Duff! You are God’s unique creation—and a good one! Your thought process is so unique—like a master artist at work. We watch, in amazement, at the sculptures you create out of the most basic of materials. The finished work (an idea, a concept, a fork-in-the-road decision) is both God-honoring and often one-of-a-kind. We remember, fondly, when you would meet with us to talk about CMA in the early days and you and John would go for an end-of-the-day walk and your insights and next steps would brilliantly pop out. John would tell Joanne, “It was amazing! George spoke, but really, God spoke to me. It’s exactly what I needed to hear.”

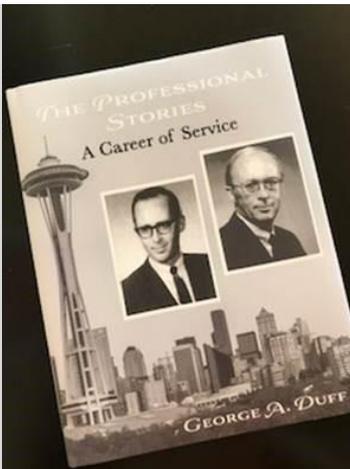
**F**aithfulness. “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” (Matthew 25:21, *NKJV*)

**F**ruitfulness. George, some serve their Lord faithfully, as you have done. End of story. Others serve with faithfulness and fruitfulness. Fruitfulness, as Peter Drucker might say, is about achieving results. In your case, Kingdom results. Fruitfulness is under-rated, but you “get it.” You bless us—and on heaven’s side, we’ll see the results. You are a blessing to us, to our family and to your Lord! *Happy Birthday!*

## **G.E.O.R.G.E. D.U.F.F.**

*“Become wise  
by walking with the wise...”*

Proverb 13:20a (MSG)



**2021 Update!** And now as Paul Harvey used to say, “Here’s the rest of the story!” (Google it!)

In 2021, George Duff’s family honored their father and grandfather with a limited edition book, ***The Professional Stories: A Career of Service***. This wisdom-filled treasure features stories, insights, and one-liners from George’s extraordinary service to for-profit enterprises, nonprofit organizations and ministries, churches, and his community.

They presented the book to George on Jan. 31, 2021, at 5 p.m.—exactly 63 years from the date and time he was invited to begin work at the Detroit Chamber of Commerce—a call that would change the rest of his career!

<sup>1</sup> Donald Rumsfeld, *Rumsfeld's Rules: Leadership Lessons in Business, Politics, War, and Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 47.

<sup>2</sup> “The Transparency Continuum” is described in two books: Dan Busby, *TRUST: The Firm Foundation for Kingdom Fruitfulness* (Winchester, VA: ECFAPress, 2015), 185-190, and Dan Busby and John Pearson, *Lessons From the Church Boardroom: 40 Insights for Exceptional Governance, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Winchester, VA: ECFAPress, 2019), 164-165.

<sup>3</sup> See “Principle 6: Invest in Growing Your Leaders (Every Leader Needs a Coach)” in *ECFA Governance Toolbox Series No. 4: Succession Planning, 11 Principles for Successful Successions*, “Board Member Read-and-Engage Viewing Guide,” (Winchester, VA: ECFAPress, 2017), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Executive coaching rates as of March 3, 2021; source: <https://milestoneleadership.com/executive-coaching>. (Note: Soderquist Leadership was created in 1996 at John Brown University to honor Don Soderquist, then Senior Vice Chairman and COO of Walmart Stores, Inc. The center is now known as Milestone Leadership.)

<sup>5</sup> Jim Gwinn with Mark Cutshall, *A Life Well Lived: 52 Inspiring Real-Life Stories for Devotion, Study and Family Reading* (Seattle: CRISTA Ministries, 2005), 155-161. See “George Duff: the Best Golfer I Ever Met.”

<sup>6</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive: The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 24. (Note: The 50th Anniversary Edition was published in 2017 by HarperBusiness.)

<sup>7</sup> Jim Collins, “Ten Lessons I Learned from Peter Drucker,” Foreword to the *50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition of The Effective Executive*, by Peter Drucker, May 17, 2016. Read the foreword at: [https://www.jimcollins.com/article\\_topics/articles/Ten-Lessons-I-Learned-from-Peter-Drucker.html](https://www.jimcollins.com/article_topics/articles/Ten-Lessons-I-Learned-from-Peter-Drucker.html)

<sup>8</sup> John Pearson, *Mastering the Management Buckets*, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Drucker, Brainy Quote, [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/peter\\_drucker\\_120337](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/peter_drucker_120337).



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