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# MASTERING MISTAKE MAKING

*My 25 Memorable Mistakes  
—and What I Learned*



**JOHN PEARSON**  
with Jason Pearson

A PEARPOD RESOURCE

# MASTERING MISTAKE MAKING

## *My 25 Memorable Mistakes—and What I Learned*

10 MINUTES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING WORKBOOK

Jason Pearson, *Ideation & Illustrations*

John Pearson, *Mistake-Maker*

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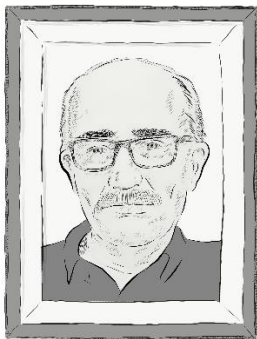
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**NON-DEDICATION.** It would consume 25 pages to thank all of our friends, family, and fellow mistake-makers (*you know who you are!*). So in lieu of a "dedication page," Johnny P. wants to thank **David K.** for enduring endless mistake stories as we tested the efficacy of these chapters while enjoying socially-distanced Taco Tuesdays at the SC Ranch Market & Food Station during COVID. Coming soon: New Testament Tacos with John Baillie in heaven.



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“He finally had time to learn from his mistakes.”

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## INTRODUCTION: Q & A With Son & Pearson

*“You made a lot of mistakes, Dad!”*

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**Jason:** So, Dad...you wrote a book during the COVID marathon. Way to go, but how are you coming on cleaning out the garage?

**John:** LOL. The garage is my next project. But, yes, this book project was an excellent distraction from the COVID news. And—wow—I’ve learned so much about mistake-making.

**Jason:** I noticed. And—wow—back at you...you’ve made a lot of mistakes in your career! I’ve made my mistakes too—but I missed the memo about highlighting them in a book! And why only 25 chapters? Are you saving the best mistakes for your next book?

**John:** Bingo! Several friends (*actually, former friends*) have suggested this book should have at least 200 chapters for my Top-200 mistakes. *They’re probably right.* As you know, your Mom (aka Joanne) was my cheerleader for this book. She also believes that leaders are readers—and kept asking me if every chapter truly connected the dots between the mistake and a book.

**Jason:** Explain that. Is that the big idea in the book?

**John:** Yes. Every chapter (mistake) follows these three bumper sticker points:

- 1) Here’s a mistake I made in my leadership and management years.
- 2) If I had only read a book on that topic, maybe I could have avoided the mistake.
- 3) Here’s what I learned from that mistake. (You can read the book and avoid this mistake.)

**Jason:** *Come on, man!* It can’t be that easy! Just read a book—and you’ll avoid a mistake?

**John:** Nothing’s easy, Jason, as you already know. You and Melinda are the parents of five, including four teenagers. (As I often say in this book, “Yikes!” Four teenagers!) But, the mistake-making literature is crammed with insights, examples, and very specific leadership wisdom that can be immediately applied.

**Jason:** I’ve often wondered...since I was your only child, did that make life easier for you and Mom? (I’d prefer you *not* comment!) Give readers a specific example of a mistake you made—and what you learned from a book later in life.

**John:** Easy! I thought I was above average when coaching others, but in 2016 (way too late in life), I attended a seminar and learned that I was an “advice monster!” Read Mistake #12 to learn how the “AWE Question” (And What Else?) will dramatically change your coaching style. The presenter wrote two books and I named *The Advice Trap* my pick for 2020 book-of-the-year. And, by the way, your idea to create sketches of the 25 authors? Brilliant and nicely done.

**Jason:** Thanks. As you know, my distraction from COVID many evenings was to sketch portraits of interesting people and then post them on Instagram. Now in 2021, your request for 25 sketches pushed me past 400 portraits. (The invoice is in the mail.)

**John:** I love ‘em. (The check’s in the mail.) Our readers will enjoy seeing your gallery at <https://www.instagram.com/pearpodsketchbook/>.

**Jason:** I'll race you to 500, OK? As of press time, you've reviewed 475 books in *Your Weekly Staff Meeting* eNews, and I've sketched over 400 portraits. Winner gets a Starbucks card.

**John:** You're on. I think we've both discovered something about our strengths and styles and what feeds our souls. I write about that in Part 5, "The 3 Powerful S's: Social Styles, Strengths, and Spiritual Gifts." I'm a reader and you're a listener. I wish I had understood that distinction even in my 20s.

**Jason:** You mention spiritual gifts. Did you target this book specifically to Christ-followers or people of faith? Will seekers and non-believers also find it helpful?

**John:** Great question. Oops. (I just made another mistake!) I read an article last year, "That's a Great Question," that said you should never "grade" a question—because then when you don't say "Great question" to the next question, the asker will wonder if it was a bad question! You can also "listen" to the article. Apparently those audio articles are now called "podcasts"?<sup>1</sup>

Anyway, yes—the book is written specifically for Christ-followers—especially those who are CEOs, pastors, senior leaders, managers, and board members of nonprofit Christian organizations, associations, denominations, and churches. When I wrote *Mastering the Management Buckets*, I mansplained why there was no "Jesus Bucket." My view: there should never be a stand-alone "spiritual" category or competency that is unrelated to our real work and our daily lives. Ditto for this mistakes book. Hopefully, the integration of good leadership and good theology will inspire our readers. I believe what the Bible teaches is immensely relevant to Wall Street, Madison Avenue, Silicon Valley, and Wuhan—and that these leadership truths can be helpful to all leaders and managers.

"The worst mistake is to have the best ladder and the wrong wall."<sup>2</sup> (Donald Rumsfeld)

**Jason:** Is there one mistake or one chapter that is your favorite—a must-read?

**John:** That's like asking you and Melinda if you have a favorite child! When I facilitated my two-day Management Buckets workshops—covering the 20 core competencies—I'd introduce each bucket with this: "Now...THIS bucket is the most important bucket!" (Always good for a laugh.) I'd then explain the four levels of competencies and why leadership is a team discipline. No one leader (including me) is highly competent in all 20 buckets. But you must make an honest assessment of yourself and your team. So after reading each mistake chapter, I'd encourage leaders and teams to self-assess based on these four levels:

- Level 1: I don't know what I don't know.
- Level 2: I know what I don't know.
- Level 3: I have an action plan to address what I know I don't know.
- Level 4: I am knowledgeable and effective in this core competency and can mentor others.<sup>3</sup>

I think Mistake #19 might be my favorite chapter. You'll remember the story because you, Melinda, and our five precious grandchildren joined us at Proud Mary's restaurant for our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary breakfast in 2019. That was not a mistake. But the "God moment" we experienced that morning reminded me when I wrote that chapter—that my pace of life, over the years, often precluded the opportunity to experience far more God moments. I hope this will *arrest* the attention of every person who reads this book.

**Jason:** I remember that morning. And I fondly remember the day that Ken Taylor personally wrote that Bible verse in my 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary copy of *The Living Bible*. You've spotlighted some



amazing women and men as authors of your must-read books. While you highlighted 25 books and authors, I noticed you snuck in dozens of other book titles as you journeyed through your 25 mistakes. Why so many books?

**John:** Your question reminds me of a book I recommend in Mistake #3, *The Little Guide to Your Well-Read Life*. (I should have read a book on “how to read a book” 50 years ago. I finally read it in 2020.) Why do I spotlight so many books? Gen. Jim Mattis is very convicting on this topic. He writes, “If you haven’t read hundreds of books, learning from others who went before you, you are functionally illiterate—you can’t coach and you can’t lead.”<sup>4</sup>

And author Steve Leveen wisely adds this, “Do not set out to live a well-read life but rather *your* well-read life. No one can be well-read using someone else’s reading list.”<sup>5</sup> So you’ll note that there’s a box to check at the end of each chapter—and I’m suggesting you check only five boxes in the book: “ This is a Top-5 Insight for me.”

**Jason:** I remember you’ve always quoted Peter Drucker: “If you have more than five goals, you have none.” So you’re suggesting that each reader selects just five mistakes to focus on—and then do a deep dive on those, right?

**John:** Right. At a minimum, I hope each person who reads this book will also read at least one recommended book; and perhaps five books over the next 12 months. Over-achievers can read 25 or more books.

“Never lend books, for no one ever returns them; the only books I have in my library are books that other folk have lent me.”<sup>6</sup> (Anatole France)

**Jason:** You’re calling this a mistake *workbook*. Why the “workbook” concept?

**John:** Many pastors and leaders affirm that life change happens best in small groups. I’m a big fan of weekly staff meetings. (But warning—nor *boring* weekly staff meetings). Every issue of my eNews, *Your Weekly Staff Meeting*, includes two questions for discussion on key leadership and management topics. So to be sure readers engage in learning about effective mistake-making, every chapter includes three questions for a “10 Minutes for Lifelong Learning With Your Team” segment at your weekly staff meeting or department meeting. Each chapter also includes three personal application options.

**Jason:** I remember the axiom from Henrietta Mears, the founder of Gospel Light. “A teacher has not taught until the student has learned.” (You’ll remember I did a summer internship at Gospel Light/Regal Books during my college days.) So, I’m guessing you would encourage a team to buy multiple copies of this mistakes workbook—and rotate the facilitating duties every week. That way at least the week’s leader has gone deep into the mistake topic, right?

**John:** Exactly. (And for the record, asking leaders to buy multiple copies of the book has nothing to do with our sales goals.)

**Jason:** I’ve noticed that you repeat some themes across multiple chapters. Senior moment? Did you forget that you mentioned a book or idea previously? Or is the repetition intentional?

**John:** Probably a senior moment. *Ha ha!* But I’m guessing that few leaders will read this book in one sitting—and so, yes, I intentionally repeated several themes. I learned that principle in the persuasion book by Trey Gowdy. He talks about advertising’s “Rule of Seven” (effective

frequency) in his brilliant chapter, “Repetition, Repetition, Repetition.”<sup>7</sup> As you’ll recall, I named two “books-of-the-year” for 2020, including Gowdy’s gem, *Doesn’t Hurt to Ask: Using the Power of Questions to Communicate, Connect, and Persuade*.

**Jason:** I’m a listener (not a reader), as you know—so I did listen to that helpful book. I’m now making fewer mistakes by using better persuasion techniques with our five kids! And, by the way, Gowdy’s book has some hilarious courtroom scenes. And as a person of faith, he confesses to occasionally using a few “non-church” words!

Dad, can I give you some feedback (per Mistake #15)? In the back of the book, the “Endnotes” section is almost as long as the book! Is this the *War and Peace* of endnotes?

**John:** Funny that you should mention that! I just ordered the book, *Guinness World Records 2021*, to determine what the “World’s Record for Most Endnotes in a Book Under 200 Pages” might be. Along that rabbit hole, I discovered a fascinating article on reading-related world records. You can check out the endnote here.<sup>8</sup> (So...you see how helpful endnotes are?) Are we about done here? No one reads these “Introduction” pages anyway. Any more questions?

**Jason:** “And what else?”

**John:** Great question! (Oops.) In my lifelong learning journey during COVID, I was surprised—shocked, actually—how often my reading and researching opened my eyes to the mistake-making literature. I missed so much. It reminded me of the time I wrote the “Delegation Bucket” chapter in the *Buckets* book. I literally had to get on my knees and confess that I failed to understand—back then—the spiritual issues at the root of effective and ineffective delegation.

I had similar epiphanies when researching the mistake-making literature. There is this intangible holy act of committing your convictions into writing and into a book. I prayed more for wisdom and discernment. My hope is that these pages might be transformational for many leaders.

**Jason:** Great answer. (Oops!). This has been a fun project to work on with you—almost as much fun as the time you wrote the *Faith-Based Leader’s Guide to Rocky Balboa* when I was creating promo pieces for Sylvester Stallone’s film! I, too, am praying for this mistake book.

**John:** Amen. You might remember when growing up that we noticed how the Lord had gifted you with very creative communication skills and competencies. I wondered if we would ever launch a company and call it, “Pearson & Son.” Your branding savvy immediately kicked in with your preferred name for our venture, “Son & Pearson.” LOL!

**Jason:** Speaking of names, I noticed your timeline in the Appendix and your note that every organization (except one) where you previously served has changed its name. *What’s with that?*

**John:** I prefer to think of those organizational name changes as thoughtful responses to the market and customer base—not as a result of the former CEO’s mistakes! That’s an interesting topic, perhaps, for a future mistake book!

**Jason:** Last question: Was it a mistake to write this book?

**John:** Probably!

---

**INTRODUCTION**

<sup>1</sup> Dave Stachowiak, "That's a Great Question," *Coaching for Leaders Podcast*, <https://coachingforleaders.com/podcast/thats-a-great-question/>

<sup>2</sup> Donald Rumsfeld, *Rumsfeld's Rules: Leadership Lessons in Business, Politics, War, and Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 300.

<sup>3</sup> John Pearson, *Mastering the Management Buckets: 20 Critical Competencies for Leading Your Business or Nonprofit* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), 19-21.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Mattis and Bing West, *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead* (New York: Random House, 2019), 237.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Leveen, *The Little Guide to Your Well-Read Life: How to Get More Books in Your Life and More Life from Your Books* (Delray Beach, FL: Levenger Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Charlie "Tremendous" Jones, Editor, *Books Are Tremendous: What They Represent to Some of Those Who Have Written, Read and Loved Them* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Executive Books, 2004), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Trey Gowdy, *Doesn't Hurt to Ask: Using the Power of Questions to Communicate, Connect, and Persuade* (New York: Crown Forum, 2020), 155-164.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Lynch, "World Book Day: Our Top Ten Reading-Related World Records," *Guinness World Records*, March 5, 2015, <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2015/3/world-book-day-our-top-ten-reading-related-world-records-374040>.