

Wrong, wrong, wrong. (But in a good way)

Posted By [Kipp](#) On July 22, 2010 @ 1:21 pm In [Kipp's Blog](#) | [No Comments](#)

A new concept in Paris is demanding children do something almost completely alien to them: Fail on purpose.

After years of top-down school management designed to ensure to-the-test success, high exam results, and uniform standards of education in France, a backlash has begun. The current system, according to its detractors, is stifling mental creativity and leaving children bereft of flexibility of thought. And as a result less creative discoveries are being made.

To counter what they call a culture of "intellectual timorousness" a group of intellectuals is hosting a festival this week to encourage its young participants to make as many mistakes as possible.

"A large part of the French school system is based on the *idée reçue* that errors are negative, when in fact it is by this very process of learning ... that you make progress," said Maëlle Lenoir, of the Association Paris Montagne. "The French system is founded on a strict learning of knowledge, rather than on creativity or innovation. And yet it was Einstein himself who said that 'the only sure way to avoid making mistakes is to have no new ideas'."

And they have a point. Reporting the story, [the Guardian](#) ^[1] points out that some of history's greatest breakthroughs came from mistakes:

- Alexander Fleming forgot to cover up some of his experiments before going on holiday, and returned to find one had grown mould. The bacteria around it were dead, leading him to discover the antibacterial properties of Penicillium.
- Charles Goodyear accidentally dropped india rubber and sulphur onto a hot stove, discovering a vulcanization process which led to the commercial use of rubber.
- Christopher Columbus was looking for Asia when he stumbled on America. He had miscalculated the Earth's circumference, and in the process he redefined the world.

Could the same thinking be applied to business life? Kipp certainly thinks it should be. How many businesses tread the same worn path day after day, snuffing out new ideas in an instant and remaining wedged firmly in the comfort zone? We have certainly worked for far too many companies where the only option was the safe option, and creative, innovative thinking is discouraged in favour of the status quo.

We could do with a backlash of our own, where businesses are encouraged to take a risk. It may lead to success, it may lead to failure, but either way it could unleash the power of creativity and invention so often stifled in the work place.



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[1] the Guardian: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/21/france-paris-festival-of-errors>