

A Checklist for Preventing Mistakes



- ❑ If you are doing whatever you are doing out of desperation, infatuation, or manipulation—stop! Don't do it.
- ❑ Do a right/wrong list. Sort of like a Ben Franklin one-sheet that you fold in half. On one side, list what can go right and on the other side, what can go wrong. Do the risks outweigh the benefits? Can you get to what's right in a way that involves less risk?
- ❑ Get all the evidence. Don't rely on belief, faith, or speculation. Think in terms of *facts*, *documents*, and *witnesses*. Think who, what, when, where, and why. Get background checks, intelligence reports, references, etc.
- ❑ Engage in healthy skepticism. Don't take information or advice on face value. Challenge strategies, opinions, facts, beliefs, etc. Check it out on www.snopes.com.
- ❑ Gain some objectivity. Get your head checked by outsiders and experts. What would Jesus, Buddha, your accountant, lawyer or your mom say to do?
- ❑ Consider all the stakeholders. Family members, partners, vendors, clients, employees, etc. Do they have input? How are their views biased? How can they influence the outcome?
- ❑ Be prepared! Consider all the probabilities. Prepare for the worst case and have a back-up plan. Have a Plan B. Give yourself "outs."
- ❑ Look before you leap. Take safe steps at first. Test it out. Run when it is clear.
- ❑ Did you play the movie out to its very end? Begin with the end in mind?
- ❑ Sleep on it. Let your intuition have some quiet time to feel it through. What feels unfair or scary about it? If it doesn't feel right, don't proceed until you get more information.
- ❑ Don't choke or panic. Where are you going too logical or too emotional?
- ❑ Get any commitment in writing so there's no mistake about the terms of the deal. Hire a lawyer if you need a contract written the right way.
- ❑ Check your ego meter. Is it on full? Is simply "having more" what you are after? Will it be worth it when you get it?
- ❑ Take a checklist approach. Go through an audit.
- ❑ Qualify your statements. Don't overcommit. "I could be wrong here but based on _____, it is possible _____."
- ❑ Look for checks and balances, especially when dealing with money and technology.
- ❑ Remember, if the numbers don't make sense, the numbers don't make sense.





- ❑ Is this part of our “hedgehog” or are we venturing away from our core strengths?
- ❑ If it goes wrong is insurance coverage available?
- ❑ Just because thirty other companies have partnered with someone, doesn’t mean you should.
- ❑ When doing your due diligence, ask for referrals and make sure you get them. Watch out for excuses why you don’t get them.
- ❑ Pull a Dunn and Bradstreet and do background checks on the principals. If it is a privately held company and the principals are unwilling to provide you with their background information then be concerned. Ask yourself, “What are they trying to hide?” In one case, the principal had a felony conviction for fraud. A basic criminal background check would have revealed it.
- ❑ A company can’t just have a great idea, it has to have great execution.
- ❑ Don’t assume they are good at what they are doing. Half of the potential partners are above

average and half of them are below average. Get very clear about their technical staff. Look at some of their resumes. Consider interviewing the people who are going to be working on your team or project.

- ❑ If they say they are going to do something, or you want them to do something, then memorialize the fact. Don’t leave it up to “expectations.” Get all your business commitments in writing. All of them. Hire a lawyer to help you create template agreements.
- ❑ Know when to walk away. As a trial attorney, we had an adage, “Don’t throw good money at bad money.” Sometimes it’s not worth your time, expense, and emotion to be “proven right.” Common sense has no room for pyrrhic victories.
- ❑ If a mistake happens then let go! We all make mistakes. It’s OK. Really. You are a good person. Perhaps they are too. Do the smart thing—apologize and make sure you never do it again. Or, forgive them as you will someday need forgiving.

