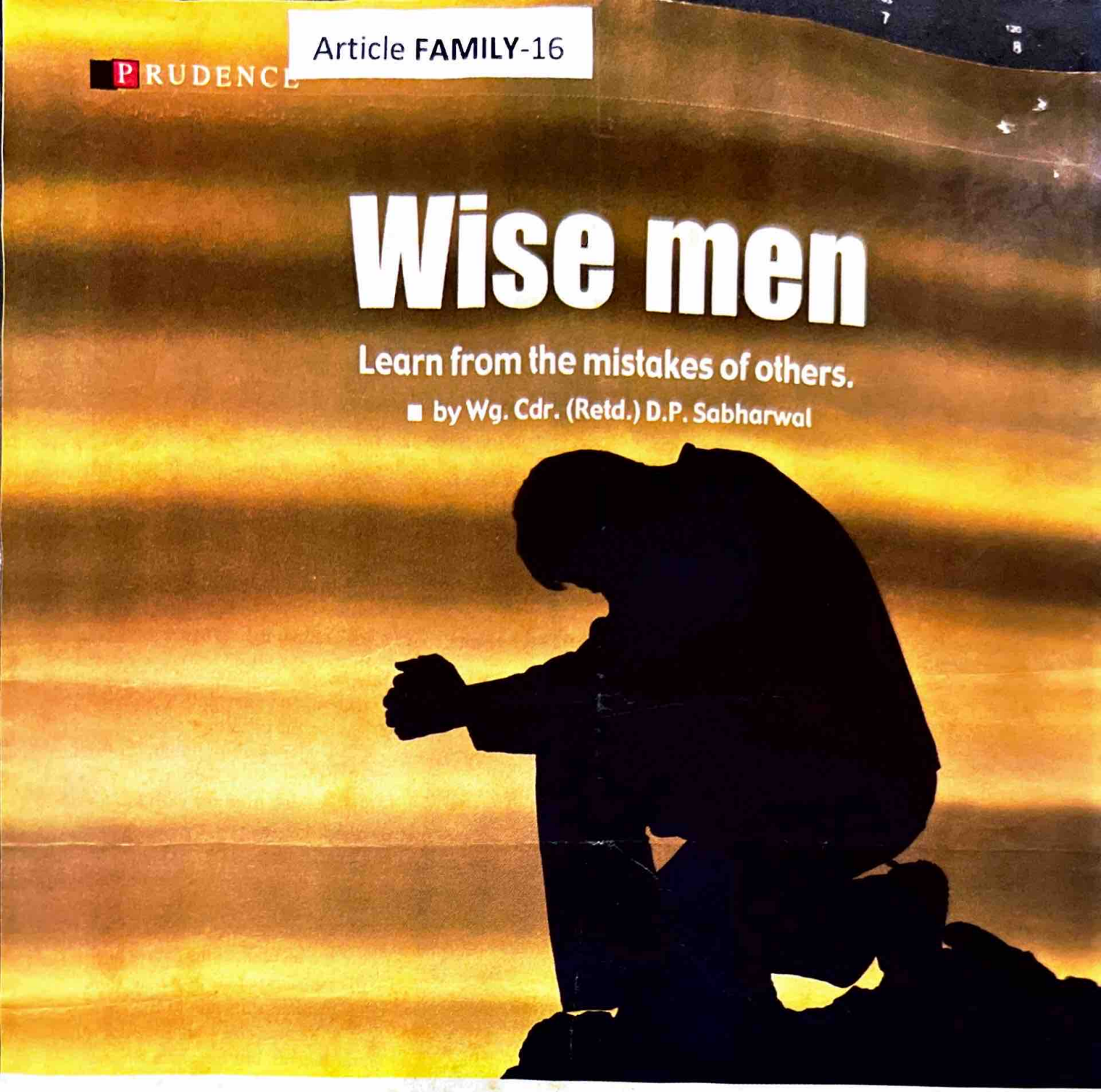
Article FAMILY-16

Wise men

Learn from the mistakes of others.

■ by Wg. Cdr. (Retd.) D.P. Sabharwal



How true! But the million-dollar question is: Who likes the truth these days? And secondly, who likes to learn from others, in any case? More so, about their mistakes!

Well, the plain and simple truth is – hardly anyone. In today's materialistic and cut-throat world, where one wants to be on the top, almost everyone not only prefers but does things his own way. No doubt, many succeed, but a vast majority fails. The failures, of course, can never be eliminated, but their occurrence can definitely be reduced if, and only if, we have the wisdom to learn from the mistakes of others.

Starting that way, the chances of success get multiplied. The whole process of getting into the mould of being wise, without committing and learning through your own mistakes, is a simple, seven-step procedure.

What to speak: There are many things to be learnt in life, at whatever stage an individual might be, but one of the most basic and most important thing is speaking. Not speaking *per se*, but what to speak, when to speak and to whom to speak. When one is not careful and selective about it, instead of making an impression, one can easily make a fool of oneself. 'He looked wise till he opened his mouth' sums up such a situation. Therefore, learn to know what to speak and what not to speak. Remember, 'talking comes by nature and silence by wisdom'.

When you make a mistake: In life, everyone makes mistakes. At times, it concerns and affects you alone; it does no harm to anyone except you. But then, there are times when others are either likely to get hurt or, indeed, do get hurt – bodily, monetarily, psychologically or emotionally.

While you can shrug your shoulders in the first case, you definitely cannot afford to do so in the latter type of mistakes. Then, what should one do in such conditions? Well, the answer is given by Jonathan Swift in this quote, 'A man should never be ashamed to own he has been in the wrong, which is but saying in other words that he is wiser today than he was yesterday'.

After you fail: Everyone experiences failure at some time or the other. At times, there are serious setbacks. There are times when one does not achieve set goals and targets. So, what should one do at such moments? The answer is simple: Listen to and act upon what William Shakespeare has said about such a situation, 'Wise men never sit and wail their loss, but cheerily seek how to redeem their losses'.

When you succeed: There are times, when you succeed – not once, but again and again. At such moments, success is bound to go to the head and one starts thinking highly of oneself. Nothing wrong in it; perhaps, it is good. But the trouble starts when one starts thinking lowly of others.

No doubt, you can pat yourself as being wise for having achieved success, but do not commit the mistake of considering others to be fools. Never be boastful. Even in success, learn to behave like a wise man and always keep in mind this proverb, 'The wise man knows that he knows nothing, the fool thinks he knows all'.

Wise and foolish – the difference: Albert Camus has aptly said, "An intelligent man on one plane can be a fool on others."

The difference between a wise man and a fool is small but subtle. Both the wise and the foolish live and survive. Acts of both types, wise or foolish, lead to some work; but how, when and what type, is what matters.

The fact of the matter is, what matters most is how others understand and interpret you. One would never ever project oneself to be a fool, when one goes by the saying of Antonio De Guevara, "Among wise men, the wisest knows that he knows least. Among fools, the most foolish thinks he knows most".

Learn to be wise: One does not have to pay to learn, except in educational institutes and organised courses. Learning, for the most part of life, is free. The experiences of life can teach you a lot without any cost. But alas, hardly anyone understands this – simply because anything that comes free is never appreciated and never valued! Same goes for experiences, advice and wisdom.

Unless sought from professionals after paying hefty charges, under the guise of consultancy, any other type of advice is generally shrugged off. There is another angle to it, as it is not possible to seek professional advice all the time. Therefore, to be successful in life, one has to learn – and learn you must, as per this saying of Melchior de Santa Cruz, 'The wise man profits more from the fool than the fool from the wise man, for the wise man takes warning by the fool, but the wise man's sense has no value for the fool'.

Look for wise men: 'Wise men in the world are like timber trees in a hedge, here and there one,' says a proverb. This is really true. But then, one has to keep looking around to find out one who is wise, in the real sense. Anyone who keeps his eyes and ears open in general would be lucky. However, never be absolutely sure because, at times, one might not be so lucky as was the experience of Tobias Smolell, who had this to say, 'Some folks are wise and some are otherwise'.

Three final words

Wisdom is a great asset but how does one acquire it? Well, not difficult at all; in fact, it is really simple. It simply comes through observation, and can be acquired by drawing inferences from day-do-day happenings and by learning lessons from one's own and others' mistakes.

To live happily in this materialistic and cut-throat, competitive world, where there are endless worries and mounting pressures, leading to crumbling and crushing of the body, the mind as well as the spirit, one has to be clear about one thing: Come what may, be worldly-wise. And to be so, follow the dictum, 'All human wisdom is summed up in three words: Wait, Learn and Hope!' ■



WAY IN, WAY OUT

Crispy *dosa*

I was at friend's house. She was making crisp *dosas* for breakfast. So she called each of us to the breakfast table, by turn, so that we could have fresh *dosas*. When all of us had finished, she sat down at the table. Before any of us could offer to make her *dosas* instead of eating cold ones, her husband got up, unintended by the fact that we were all there.

He went to the kitchen, and made *dosas*. Only thing, he couldn't get it as fine as the paper thin ones my friend had made. But what did it matter, if the *dosas* happened to be thick? Here was labour of love, that made the dish tasty whatever it looked like and we all enjoyed the *dosa* together.

— *Hyma Bal*

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