

The Art and Science of Mistakes: How to Fail Forward & Create A Culture of Learning

Randall Grayson, Ph.D.

C o n t e n t s a t a g l a n c e

Introduction

- Stand up if . . .
- Mistakes and failure – uncommon word use

Normalize failure

- Common and necessary
- Where do we learn about failure?
- Fear and misunderstanding
- Benefits of failure

Drive

- Take action
- Barriers to action (fear, self-pity, excuses, spinning wheels, lost hope, motivation)
- Put the state before the goal (follow your heart)

Support

- Emotional support
- Skill support

Keep perspective

- Focus on the effort over the end
- Look at whole picture – you, the situation, other people

Find the lessons

- Crisis and opportunity – two sides of the coin
- Looking at the whole picture
- Getting support from a mentor with knowledge and skill

Take responsibility

- Responsibility = power = choices
- Success counseling & internal control
- A safe place for restitution

Apply it to camp

- Espoused values / policies
- Structures
- Activities / processes

Quotes and Snippets

Normalize failure

The increase of suicides, alcoholics, and even some forms of nervous breakdowns is evidence that many people are training for success when they should be training for failure. Failure is far more common than success; poverty is more prevalent than wealth; and disappointment more normal than arrival. J. Wallace Hamilton

The fellow who never makes a mistake takes his orders from one who does. Hebert Brocknow

Failure is really a matter of conceit. People don't work hard because, in their conceit, they imagine they'll succeed without ever making an effort. Most people believe that they'll wake up some day and find themselves rich. Actually, they've got it half right, because eventually they do wake up. Thomas Edison.

Most common question Ann Landers gets from readers amounts to "What's wrong with me? Am I a failure?"

Vincent van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime. Thomas Edison was considered unteachable as a child. Albert Einstein was told by a Munich schoolmaster that he would never amount to much. "Great achievers are given multiple reasons to believe they are failures. But in spite of that, they persevere." John Maxwell

We overestimate the event and underestimate the process. Every fulfilled dream occurred because of dedication to the process. John Maxwell

The person interested in success has to learn to view failures as a healthy, inevitable part of the process of getting to the top. Dr. Joyce Brothers

I can imagine a group of executives 20 years ago discussing a candidate for a top job and saying, 'This guy had a big failure when he was 32.' Everyone else would say, 'Yep, yep, that's a bad sign.' I can imagine that same group considering a candidate today and saying, 'What worries me about this guy is that he's never failed. Dr. John Kotter

The problems we face and overcome prepare our hearts and heads for failure. John Maxwell

[Lab burns to the ground] Thank goodness all our mistakes were burned up. Now we can start again fresh. Thomas Edison

You can't avoid it, you've got to learn to handle it. If you come face to face with your own mistakes once or twice in your life it is bound to be extra painful. I face mine every day -- that way they ain't usually much worse than a dry shave. Larry McMurty, Lonesome Dove

Good people are good because they've come to wisdom through failure. We get very little wisdom from success. [adversity develops maturity] William Saroyan

If you are very, very careful, nothing good or bad will ever happen to you. Dr. Robert Maurer

Specific failure examples:

- ❖ Admiral Peary made it to the North Pole on try number 8
- ❖ Oscar Hammerstein had five flop shows that lasted less than a combined total of six weeks before Oklahoma, which ran for 269 weeks and grossed \$7 million.
- ❖ John Creasey received 743 rejection letters from publishers before one word was ever published – he eventually published over 200 books, which have sold over 60 million copies
- ❖ Albert Einstein, Edgar Allan Poe, and John Shelley were all expelled from school for being mentally slow.
- ❖ When a baby learns to walk, it falls down a lot to learn the new skill.
- ❖ Erma Bombeck was a renowned syndicated columnist, published 15 books, voted one of the 25 most influential women in America, featured on the cover of Time magazine, and received 15 honorary degrees. Her college guidance counselor told her to forget about writing. Her comedy record album sold two copies. She had a failed sitcom. Her Broadway play never saw the stage. Some book signings attracted only two people.
- ❖ Dr. Samuel P. Langley designed and built functional aircraft before the Wright Brothers. A series of small failures eventually led him to stop what certainly would have worked in another try or two. Of course, the Wright Brothers persistence through failure led them to be known worldwide, instead of Dr. Langley.

- ❖ Sister Francis Cabrini founded over 70 hospitals, schools, and orphanages in the United States, Spain, France, England, and South America. The rest of the story is that she was born two months premature, was very sickly, was rejected from the convent, was not accepted as a missionary until she started her own, never made it to China (her dream), and failed at her first missionary attempt.
- ❖ John James Audubon wanted to be a painter. Before he found worldwide fame in that field, he failed as a trader of dye, failed as a general tradesman several times over, and went bankrupt and lived by hunting until he finally made it. He failed for 15 years before making it. His first book, Birds of America, now sells for \$5 million.
- ❖ Gary Marshall was the director of Pretty Woman, The Odd Couple, Laverne and Shirley, and Happy Days. He also had numerous failures, including Blansky's Beauties and Me and the Chimp.
- ❖ Macy's department store is known to almost everyone. R. H. Macy worked on a whaling ship first, followed by a printing shop. Then he opened a thread and needle shop, which failed. Then he traded in dry goods, and failed again. He went to California to mine for gold, and failed. He then tried selling dry goods again, and failed. Finally, in 1858, he opened a fancy dry goods store in Manhattan, which hit it big. By 1870, he was making \$1 million in sales per year. He invented the department store, set prices, modern retail advertising, and appointed the first female executive in retail history.
- ❖ Orville Redenbacher is well known for his popcorn. He started growing popcorn in 1907, but it wasn't until 1965 that he started the popcorn business in a big way, and it took him another 10 years to make it very successful. He had to individually pollinate 150,000 plants each year to reach his goal.
- ❖ Dave Anderson is worth \$30 million, has over 3000 employees, holds a masters from Harvard, and much more. His first business was selling oil reconditioner, which failed. He then made some money making planters, and eventually reached modest success. He then lost everything in a big plant buy where everything froze. He filed for bankruptcy and pawned his wife's jewelry. Then he sold Dixie cups. After that, he worked for his tribe as their CEO, and from there experienced a string of successes that led him to his wealth as the owner of Famous Dave's restaurants.

Drive

Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up. Thomas Edison

Ninety percent of all those who fail are not actually defeated. They simply quit. Paul J. Meyer

When achievers fail, they see it as a momentary event, not a lifelong epidemic. John Maxwell

Until a person learns from experience that he can live through adversity, he is reluctant to buck mindless tradition, push the envelope of organizational performance, or challenge himself to press his physical limits. Failure prompts a person to rethink the status quo. John Maxwell

I do not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act; but I do believe in a fate that falls on them unless they act. G. K. Chesterton

If you always do what you've always done, then you will always get what you've always gotten.

While one person hesitates because he feels inferior, the other person is busy making mistakes and becoming superior. Henry Link

When we give ourselves permission to fail, we at the same time give ourselves permission to excel. Eloise Ristad

Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Helen Keller

I would rather try something great and fail than try nothing great and succeed. John Maxwell

Someone who is unable to get over previous hurts and failures is held hostage by the past. The baggage he carries around makes it very difficult for him to move forward. The problems of people's pasts impacts them in one of two ways: They experience either a breakdown or a breakthrough. John Maxwell

Regret for the things we did can be tempered by time; it is regret for the things we did not do that is inconsolable. Sydney Harris

Don't wait for all the lights to be green before you leave the house. Jim Stovall

You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great. Anonymous

Learning is defined as a change in behavior. You haven't learned a thing until you can take action and use it. Ken Blanchard

Don't let your learning lead to knowledge; let your learning lead to action. Jim Rohn

I am only one. But I am one. I can't do everything. But I can do something. What I can do, I ought to do. And what I ought to do, by the grace of God I will do. Anonymous

A moment of conscious triumph makes one feel that after this nothing will really matter; a moment of realized disaster makes one feel that this is the end of everything. But neither feeling is realistic, for neither event is really what it is felt to be. J. I. Packer

The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don't want, drink what you don't like and do what you'd rather not. Mark Twain

Two men looked from prison bars. One saw mud, the other stars. Anonymous

Until one is committed, there is hesitance, the chance to draw back, and always ineffectiveness . . . The moment one definitely commits oneself . . . a whole stream of events issue from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would come his way. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

If your perception of and response to failure were changed, what would you attempt to achieve? John Maxwell

I can't promise if things change, they will get better. But if things are to get better, they must change. Kierkegaard

You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try. Beverly Sills

You can't expect to hit a jackpot unless you put a nickel in the machine. Flip Wilson

Defeat never comes to any man until he admits it. Josephus Daniels

More than anything else, what keeps a person going in the midst of adversity is having a sense of purpose. It is the fuel that powers persistence. John Maxwell

If you keep on doing what you've always done, you'll get what you already have. Anonymous

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. President Calvin Coolidge

The secret of life is short-term pain for long-term gain. Anonymous

Every time you face mistakes and attempt to move forward in spite of them is a test of character. There always comes a time when giving up is easier than standing up, when giving in looks more attractive than digging in. And in those moments, character may be the only thing you have to draw on to keep you going. John Maxwell

You can't plow a field by turning it over and over again in your mind. Anonymous

No matter what you've experienced, there are people who've had it better than you and done worse. And there are people who've had it worse than you and done better. The circumstances really have nothing to do with getting over your personal history. Past hurts can make you bitter or better – the choice is yours. John Maxwell

The worst danger we face is the danger of being paralyzed by doubts and fears. This danger is brought on by those who abandon faith and sneer at hope. It is brought on by those who spread cynicism and distrust and try to blind us to the great chance to do good for all mankind. President Harry S. Truman

Procrastination is the fertilizer that makes difficulties grow. Anonymous

Procrastination is opportunity's natural assassin. Victor Kiam

Support

Lord, deliver me from the man who never makes a mistake, and also from the man who makes the same mistake twice. Dr. William Mayo

Schools teach the technical disciplines such as math and science, but not about mental health. What they need to teach is how to deal with problems. Every day you're going to get whacked and thumped with problems. Some of us get jackhammered. But to succeed, you have to be open to problems. You have to be open to failure. And as you go up the ladder, you gain the right to get more problems. The higher you go, the bigger the problems. But the most effective people have gone through the toughest rimes. They say you don't become a great sailor by sailing calm seas. Dave Anderson

There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing. Norwegian saying

Keeping perspective

I'm not a failure. I failed at doing something. There's a big difference. Erma Bombeck

Every successful person is someone who failed, yet never regarded himself as a failure. John Maxwell

They are so consumed by the events that they become bewildered and miss the whole learning experience. John Maxwell

Every person's life is filled with errors and negative experiences. But, errors become mistakes when we perceive them and respond to them incorrectly. Mistakes become failures when we *continually* respond to them incorrectly. John Maxwell

Finding the lessons

Insanity is doing what you've always done and expecting different results. Anonymous

People don't plan to fail. They just fail to plan. Anonymous

Failure is good. It's fertilizer. Rick Pitino

If silly things were not done, intelligent things would never happen. Tom Peters

He who makes no mistakes makes no progress. Theodore Roosevelt

The better a man is, the more mistakes he will make, for the more new things he will try. I would never promote to a top-level job a man who was not making mistakes . . . otherwise he is sure to be mediocre. Peter Drucker

A failure is a man who blundered, but is not able to cash in on the experience. Elbert Hubbard

There is no doubt in my mind that there are many ways to be a winner, but there is really only one way to be a loser and this is to fail and not look beyond the failure. Kyle Rote

The failure shows that you neglected the process leading up to the test. John Maxwell

Equate failure with innovation instead of defeat. They learn to reload and get ready to shoot again. Adversity helps to develop that ability. John Maxwell

The things which hurt, instruct. Benjamin Franklin

You gain a whole lot more from having failure kicked up from around your ears than success could ever teach you. Beck Weathers

The more you do, the more you fail. The more you fail, the more you learn. The more you learn, the better you get. The operative word here is learn. If you repeat the same mistake two or three times, you are not learning from it. You must learn from your own mistakes and from the mistakes of others before you. Jim Zabloski

The most important thing in life is not to capitalize on our gains. Any fool can do that. The really important thing is to profit from your losses. That requires intelligence; and it makes the difference between a man of sense and a fool. William Bolitho

If there is any single factor that makes for success in living, it is the ability to draw dividends from defeat. William Marston

The majority of men meet with failure because of their lack of persistence in creating new plans to take the place of those which fail. Napoleon Hill

People make the same mistake again and gain, yet they are never quite sure why. And as a result, they never seem to get off of the failure freeway. John Maxwell

Life is a series of outcomes. Sometimes the outcome is what you want. Great. Figure out what you did right. Sometimes the outcome is what you don't want. Great. Figure out what you did so you don't do it again. Simone Caruthers

I learned more from the one restaurant that didn't work than from all the ones that were successes. Wolfgang Puck

So how do Texans handle failure? They still shout, "Remember the Alamo!" They took a great failure and turned it into a tourist destination that makes them millions. Robert Kiyosaki

R e s p o n s i b i l i t y

If you could kick the person responsible for most of your troubles, you wouldn't be able to sit down for weeks. John Maxwell

Looking back, my life seems like one long obstacle race, with me as its chief obstacle. Jack Paar

There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one's self. Ben Franklin

Most of us do not like to look inside ourselves for the same reason we don't like to open a letter that has bad news. Bishop Fulton Sheen

Most of the time the trouble we face is the result of our own negative actions. It's our fault. John Maxwell

Man blames fate for most accidents, but feels personally responsible for a "hole in one." Anonymous

If you can discover the weakness that weakens you, then you can start doing something about it. And that can change your life. John Maxwell

If you bring forth what is inside you, what you bring forth will save you. If you don't bring forth what is inside you, what you don't bring forth will destroy you. Jesus Christ

The largest room in the world is the room for improvement. Anonymous

Fix the problem, not the blame. Anonymous

The price of greatness is responsibility. Winston Churchill

Success on any major scale requires you to accept responsibility . . . in the final analysis, the one quality that all successful people have is the ability to take on responsibility. Michael Korda (editor in chief of Simon and Schuster)

Life is not simply holding a good hand. Life is playing a poor hand well. Danish saying.

Humility comes before honor. Proverbs

Rules for being human

1. You will learn lessons. Every person or incident is the Universal Teacher.
2. There are no mistakes, only lessons. Growth is a process of experimentation. "Failures" are as much a part of the process as "success."
3. A lesson is repeated until learned.
4. If you don't learn easy lessons, they get harder.
5. You will know you've learned a lesson when your actions change. Wisdom is practice.
6. Your life is up to you. Life provides the canvas; you do the painting. Take charge of your life -- or someone else will.
(unknown author)

Mistakes (John Maxwell)

- M Messages that give us feedback about life
- I Interruptions that should cause us to reflect and think
- S Signposts that direct us to the right path
- T Tests that push us toward greater maturity
- A Awakenings that keep us in the game mentally
- K Keys that we can use to unlock the next door of opportunity
- E Explorations that let us journey where we've never been before
- S Statements about our development and progress

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters (Portia Nelson)

Chapter 1

I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost. I am helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes me forever to find a way out.

Chapter 2

I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe I am in the same place, but it isn't my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter 3

I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in. It's a habit. My eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately.

Chapter 4

I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

Chapter 5

I walk down another street.

The City of Regret (internet lore)

I had not really planned to take a trip this year, yet I found myself packing anyway. And off I went, dreading it. I was on another guilt trip.

I booked my reservation on Wish I Had airlines. I didn't check my bags – everyone carries their baggage on this airline – and had to drag it for what seemed like miles in the Regret City airport. And I could see that people from all over the world were there with me, limping along under the weight of bags they had packed themselves.

I caught a cab to Last Resort Hotel, the driver taking the whole trip backward, looking over his shoulder. And there I found the ballroom where my event would be held: The Annual Pity Party. As I checked in, I saw that all my old colleagues were on the guest list:

The Done Family – Woulda, Coulda, and Shoulda

Both of the Opportunities – Missed and Lost

All the Yesterdays – there were too many to count, but all would have sad stories to share

Shattered Dreams and Broken Promises would be there, too

along with their friends Don't Blame Me and Couldn't Help It.

And of course, hours and hours of entertainment would be provided by that renowned storyteller It's Their Fault.

As I prepared to settle in for a really long night, I realized that one person had the power to send all those people home and break up the party: me. All I had to do was return to the present and welcome the new day!

If you have found yourself getting on a flight to the City of Regret, recognize that it's a trip you book yourself, and you can cancel it at any time – without penalty or fee. But you're the only one who can.

People change when they . . .

Hurt enough that they have to,

Learn enough that they want to, and

Receive enough that they are able to.

John Maxwell

Stories and Acts – which principles are you addressing?

1. When you tell stories to the staff and campers, check off which principles of “failing forward” they are addressing.
2. When mistakes happen during the summer, check off what the reaction of the administration to the counselors was.
3. When campers make mistakes, check off which principles the counselors addressed when working with them.

Review the presentation and the first page (contents) for an explanation of what encompasses each element/principle.

Story / Act	Normalizing failure	Drive to go beyond it	Support – emotional & skill	Keeping perspective	Finding the lessons	Taking responsibility
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇
	◇	◇	◇◇	◇	◇	◇