

#Fail

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The hidden benefit of failing

Geir Isene and Brendan Martin

If you are afraid of failing, it is because you have not failed enough. Avoiding failure will not make you handle failures better or help you conquer your fear.

Whatever you do often, you eventually become good at and comfortable with. Fear of failing is a fear of not being able to handle the consequences of blunders. The only way you will become good at handling such consequences is to handle them often enough. When you become comfortable cleaning up after your mistakes, your fear of failing subsides. Fail enough and you will become more relaxed and confident, and your chances of success will increase.

Different people take different amount of time to become skilled and comfortable in any given area. But eventually, they will at least lose their stress and apprehension in that area.

When training, it is important to push your boundaries – enough to fail. You become accustomed to flopping, to fix the crash and then learn so that you can better succeed when it really matters. But even then you can welcome a mishap so that you can relax regardless – even though it matters the most. And you will have an upward spiral of ever-growing confidence, learning and bettering your odds for success.

It is only a real failure when you stop – when you don't get back up on your horse and keep going. Real success comes from pushing through. Turn every slump into a small success by embracing it; learn to accept it, learn, extract the experience and move on.

Of course, you wouldn't want your brain surgeon to fail when he operates on you. You would want him to have slipped up sufficiently when practicing on dolls and dead animals so that he is confident and not up-tight as he starts the procedure on you. But even if he does kill you, the world is not better off with one less brain surgeon. It is better off with a more experienced brain surgeon. Brain surgery, like the airline industry, and like so many other critical areas have taken huge leaps of progress though failing.

Any change carries a risk of failure. Innovation carries the greatest risk. Which is why many are reluctant to explore their true potential for creativity.

I (Geir) did a seminar on the benefits of failing to a Norwegian shipping company. I paired up the more than hundred attendees and asked them to tell their partner a blunder from their childhood. It was a vibrant buzz in the room. They were then to tell each other about a flunk in a previous job. The sound level was noticeably lower. When I finally asked them to reveal a failure in their current job, the buzz became a simmer.

I started doing the same exercise in Japan, but couldn't get beyond the first question as nobody said a word. Nothing. It was dead silent as no one was ready to offer even a childhood mistake. The Japanese culture is known for taking failures so serious it can lead to suicide.

On one of my trips to Japan, I took one of my sons with me. To get a week off from school, Jonatan had to write an essay on a Japanese invention. He asked many people we met in Tokyo to give him examples of innovations from their country. He only got two answers: Sushi and blue LEDs. Incidentally, the blue LED was invented by an American, Herbert Paul Maruska. The Japanese improved upon it, like they have done with a wide range of technologies and methods. They improve rather than innovate as that carries a lower risk.

Fear of failing may be the greatest barrier to innovation. As innovators know so well, pushing boundaries means taking risks. Mistakes are an integral part of innovation. As Thomas Edison once said, "*I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.*" He also said, "*Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.*"

To unleash your creativity, you need to overcome the fear of failing. You need to take plunges, to risk losing time, money and face. But as long as you turn stumbles into an ability to be comfortable with failing and then learning from them, your confidence and experience will grow and you can take greater plunges and risk having even greater successes.

If you need to, start small. Risk failure through a small adventure that grabs your motivation. It should be something that creates butterflies in your stomach. Something you feel you should do. Something fun. Try another, greater change. And greater yet. Until you fail. Then admit freely to yourself, and even to others, that you did indeed wash out.

Never cover up a mistake. Doing so will only help you practice cover-ups. As my friend Ole Wiik says, "You become good at what you practice." Instead of practicing covering up your mistakes, become good at handling the consequences of failure. Only then will your fear of failure be conquered. And your creativity can be unleashed. You will have adventure and fun along the way.

I am confident we can boost the World if we all started embracing our failures, even publishing them to take the stress out of failing. #Fail

This OnePageBook™ aims to inspire you to fail.

The publisher, "Å" (A-Circle AS, www.acircle.no) carries the slogan, "Boosting performance". The company helps teams and individuals to higher performance and to reach their potential.

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"I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."
(Michael Jordan)

"You can fail at what you don't want [to do],
so you might as well take a chance on doing what you love."
(Jim Carrey)

