



the Business of
Winning



Facing Adversity: Best Practices for Failure

by Robert Evangelista

Failure: We all hate it. In fact, we don't even like to talk about it. Our pride refuses to acknowledge it and our silent superstitions would rather avoid the very thought of it. Whatever the reason, human nature leads us to turn a blind eye to our failures.

What is it about failure that makes us distance ourselves from it as soon as the dust has settled? When, in fact, we should do the exact opposite. Perhaps it might become obvious to others (and to ourselves) that we had a lot more to do with it than we think. If we really want to learn and grow, however, we need to reach out and touch it, analyzing it before walking away.

THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

One of the Business of Winning's hallmarks is its research on successful leaders from all arenas. However, we've also learned that one cannot immerse oneself in the lessons of success without gaining the mirrored insight into failure. What enables one enables the other.

Your role as a manager is to help your teams build a solid foundation for success, rooted in the details of support systems. For example, a strategic planning session needs to involve particularizing specific actions of employees as well as corresponding support systems. If it is essential to the team that Jack executes his task flawlessly and on time, then it **MUST** be equally essential for the team to put in support systems to enable Jack.

Sadly, it's surprising how many companies and managers pay lip service to support. Plenty talk it with many even willing to itemize it. But what separates the winners from the losers is what happens after that. Time after time, companies, organizations and teams that fail to finish, fail. Period. If organizations take seriously the need to complete a detailed plan with implementation of support systems, their proven chances for success rise dramatically.

ANATOMY OF FAILURE

But what's the best approach to take when the initiative fails? Your team's support systems will fall into four categories that are equally important and almost always interdependent. And in the context of specific strategic initiatives, these can become quite detailed. Thus, when an initiative fails, you'll need to step back and look at its underpinnings in this context.

"You may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing we call 'failure' is not the falling down but the staying down."

Mary Pickford

Skills -- To successfully act in the workplace, employees must have the knowledge and ability to perform. Too often, training or skill development is thought of only in the context of recent or past failures.

Environment -- Employees succeed more often when they are in a supportive environment that provides them with the proper tools, space, resources and social/emotional support. This is an aspect of support best detailed by employees.

Motivation -- A popular support system in the workplace, motivation comes in many forms. It can also be positively or negatively presented, with different responses produced. Given that each person is different, skilled managers take the time to learn each person's individual "buttons".

Team cooperation -- In the workplace, we encourage teamwork, knowing that peer pressure can inspire proper behavior as much as the social support, camaraderie and synergy. Not wanting to "let the others down" is often cited as a driver for model team behavior. Additionally, interdependent roles require employees to comprehend cause and effect scenarios of their interaction. Like all support, it's better to identify that going in.

GROW STRONGER FROM FAILURE

It is important to recognize the reasons we fail in any efforts, whether personal or professional, but more importantly, how to make it a constructive experience. If we do a thorough job of assessing our stumbles, we'll often see that the proper support systems weren't in place ahead of time.

The most successful companies are good at the details. Conversely, failure is rooted in a lack of planning. Regardless of which we choose to learn from, we'll see that the tipping point is anchored in support.

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