

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY PLAN TO FAIL

BY ANTHONY RUSSO

For far too long, “failure” has been a taboo word in life and in business. We were raised and told to be perfect, and anything short of perfection was a disappointment and failure.

What if I told you that this philosophical mentality has created a weaker, confused, and more depressed workforce and general population?

We have set unrealistic expectations for our children, our young adults, our workers, and our management. Perfection is temporary and fleeting at best, so why do we place all of our emphasis on this almost mythical golden goose? Exactly, we shouldn't. There is no growth in perfection, and it's an unrealistic goal. Failing, however, means you are pushing the boundaries of what is possible to you and opening up room for higher levels of success.

This philosophy works in business, it works in the gym, and it works in relationships. The struggle that comes from failure creates the opportunity for greatness. Choosing what is hard in the short term is what causes relief in the long term.

So now that the rah-rah portion of this program is over, let's get to the nuts and bolts.

Failure is inevitable. As soon as we get over the shock that we are human and imperfect, the sooner we can progress in our career and life. I've had an experiential marketing staffing agency with a million-plus in revenue, driven fancy cars, and enjoyed travel and fine foods—and for those who caught me in that moment, success might have been all they saw. You might think, “Well, life is easy for him. How can he have any idea what failure is like?” As the well-known iceberg analogy suggests, though, you have to look deeper to see what's below the surface. I had two enormous business failures that led up to the successful business I'm referring to. Each mistake and lesson learned from those two “failures” gave me the building blocks for the success of the third business. So the debt, the stress, the worry, the almost-bankruptcy you don't see—you only see the tip of the iceberg.

In the words of LeVar Burton—and yes, I know I'm dating myself with the *Reading Rainbow* show reference—“You don't have to take my word for it.” Every major success



I have researched has been the product of overcoming failure. Bill Gates's first computer didn't work when he showed it off. Oprah Winfrey was fired for being "not fit for TV," and Henry Ford's first automotive company ran out of money. And I'm sure you've heard this one before, but Michael Jordan didn't make the varsity team on the first try. So what's your excuse?

DON'T JUST GET BACK UP AGAIN

When you and I fail, what should we do? First off, identify the failure—and I challenge us to buck off the typical motivational phrase that tells you to get up again and brush yourself off. It's an incomplete notion, and it's setting us up for continued failures that can be avoided.

Just because I say failure is a good thing doesn't mean that repeated similar failures are. Look at it like this: If you get knocked down from a punch and you get up, dust yourself off, and go right back and get hit the same way again, that doesn't make you any further ahead than you were before.

Instead, I challenge you to analyze what hit you and why you got knocked down to avoid the same mistakes. You know, learn to duck, to block and, better yet, counterpunch.

So now that you've identified the failure and know the causes, think about how it can be fixed or salvaged. If it can't be fixed, then figure out the exact mistake that caused the failure and set up your future plan to make sure a similar mistake doesn't happen again.

Here's an example: You've trained a new hire for three months just to find out he or she is going to take a similar position with a different company for better money, with all of your training. This is a huge waste of resources and probably causes some animosity and anger in your gut. If you can look back and realize there were signs much earlier in the process that the employee was being too opportunistic and disloyal, you'll know next time to cut the cord earlier so you don't get burned. Maybe it's a simple paperwork and contract change in which a new hire has a longer probationary period to make it harder to leave after receiving all that value from you.



“What happens if you don’t push the envelope, change things up, and strive to fail? Well, then you fail to become a blockbuster...”

All that matters at the end of a failure is that you are better equipped to handle or prevent similar situations in the future. I call this a “postmortem analyzation,” and it allows you to connect with potential hires or clients that didn’t work out in that instance while asking basic questions to learn from the experience. Not only does this help with new examples in the future, but sometimes this attention and care to detail will help you get a client back. The power of follow-up is amazing when it’s done in a kind and friendly way.

DON’T JOIN THE SELF-PITY PARTY

Some actionable items I like to give for responding to failure begin with one major first step. *Do not sulk in failure.* The more time you spend sulking, the more time that is wasted. We are human, and we have emotions that cause us to take losses and disappointment hard. However, the quicker the turnaround, the better. The only regret I have in business as I look back is the amount of time it took, on occasion, to get my mindset turned back around.

Now that you’re no longer crying in the corner, try to make sure the necessary changes are in place and then take action in the new direction. At the end of the day, remember that you

are human, mistakes are inevitable, and failing and being a failure are two very different things.

So, my words of advice that I encourage everyone to think through are, don’t be afraid of failure. Embrace it, learn from it, and even enjoy it because you are stronger, wiser, and better prepared than you were before that failure. Push the boundaries of your job title, your relationships, and your career. Change that negative connotation of failure and throw away that negativity. View failures as steppingstones that get you across a huge body of water without falling in.

Now with all that positivity in failure, here’s a warning to those who are afraid to push the boundaries and to fail: What happens if you don’t push the envelope, change things up, and strive to fail? Well, then you fail to become a blockbuster...and you eventually fail. Was that blunt enough? [AQ](#)

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