

# HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL FAILURE

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*We live in a world that is obsessed with winning. While there are numerous books and seminars on how to be successful, very few address the reality of failure. Certainly more people fail than succeed and yet our attention is invariably focused on winning, not losing. Given this faulty emphasis, it would seem prudent to suggest that the essential difference between winners and losers is not that winners never lose, but that winners know how to lose successfully. How then does one become a successful failure?*

## REMEMBER TO REMEMBER

The first step in dealing with failure is to REMEMBER TO REMEMBER. The urge to deny or close our eyes to our failures must be resisted. Those who fail to face their mistakes will be doomed to repeat them. Thus, the first step in dealing with failure is to conduct a thorough evaluation of the experience, no matter how difficult or painful such an examination might be. This review must, however, be completed with the proper motivation and in the appropriate manner. The objective in this phase is to honestly and openly examine the factors that contributed to our downfall. It is not to blame others or, for that matter, to blame ourselves. We are looking for explanations not excuses, reasons not rationalizations. The aim is not to escape responsibility by blaming, but rather to gain insight into the factors that may have contributed to our fall so that we will be less susceptible to them in future efforts.

Once these factors are identified it is important to determine what degree of control we may have had over them. This is a crucial component in the remembering

process for we cannot be responsible for things over which we have no control. If, on the other hand, the identified factors are within our control, we then have the opportunity to develop a strategy for remediation. Remembering to remember is the first crucial step toward becoming a successful failure.

## REMEMBER TO FORGET

Step two in the process of becoming a successful failure is to REMEMBER TO FORGET. Once we have faced our failures, examined them and learned from them, we need to put them behind us. Letting go is difficult, yet we must resist the urge to dwell on the past. Philippians 3:13,14 speaks of forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. Having completed the evaluation and learned from our errors, we must put the experience behind us. All of us are familiar with the saying "Forgive and forget." While this is certainly a good idea, it is essentially impossible. You may be able to forgive, but you never forget. The key is not forgetting, but rather how we choose to remember. There is very little one can do when a memory flashes into our consciousness. What we do from that point on, however, is up to us. There is an ancient proverb that says, "You cannot prevent a bird from landing on your head, but you can keep it from building a nest in your hair." As silly as it may sound, the proverb has great truth. Thoughts can only be controlled by other thoughts. Therefore, when negative, self-condemning memories disrupt our minds we must challenge them with the truth. The truth is that, *"there is no condemnation to those of us who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1). The past has been forgiven and dwelling on it is of no value. "Forgetting" involves choosing to remember what God has done for us and then choosing to let the past go. So often our tendency to dwell on the past is an attempt to undo our past mistakes. We cannot undo them. They are past. It is over. A successful failure remembers to remember and then remembers to forget.

## REFRAMING

The third step in becoming a successful failure is REFRAMING. Reframing involves looking at things from a new perspective or seeing them in a different light. There are several benefits which make this step a crucial phase of the reconstruction process. To begin with, a new perspective often opens up a new opportunity or a new application. There is no better example of this principle than that of the Post-It note. Anyone who works in an office knows the practical benefit those little yellow pieces of paper provide. What is probably less known is that the developer of the Post-It note used a glue that the researchers in his company had abandoned because of its poor sticking qualities. Here was a failed product. What can be worse than a glue that does not stick? Yet this developer took a product that

was a failure and applied it in a new and innovative manner. He saw through the failure and reaped tremendous reward. It is so important that we also see our failures in a new perspective. We must refuse to allow failure to stifle our creativity and undermine our progress.

A second benefit of reframing is that it encourages us to overcome defeat. A wonderful illustration of this is the crucifix. Have you ever wondered why people wear crucifixes? The cross was an instrument of death and torture. Why would someone want to wear such a hideous replica around their necks? One never sees tiny gold-plated electric chairs on display in the jewelry store. No miniature guillotine with a real sliding blade and a diamond stud for your charm collection? How absurd you say. Yet why do people wear gold crosses around their necks? Is not a cross just as cruel and ugly an instrument of death as these others? It most certainly is, yet for a very special group of people called Christians that ugly, horrible, awful object is a symbol of life, hope, freedom and victory. Such a perspective does not deny the pain and agony associated with the cross. It simply does not limit its perspective to the pain. The Christian views the crucifixion through the glory of the resurrection. Doing so does not minimize the bad, it simply accents the good. God turned the evil intentions of wicked men into a marvelous victory over sin.

Reframing allows us to look again at the personal "crucifixions" we may have experienced and see them in a new perspective. Can we see the good in the midst of bad? Can we see the growth that came out of failure? A new perspective does not take away the pain, it simply allows us to look beyond the pain and see the growth.

## **RISK**

The fourth characteristic of a successful failure is a willingness to take RISKS. One of the many devastating consequences of failure, is fear. Fear, or more specifically fear of failure, manifests itself in a variety of forms. For some, fear of failure takes the form of procrastination. By putting off a task one never risks failing at it. Unfortunately, nothing ever gets done. Fear also breeds paralysis and indecision. If you are afraid of failing, then making a decision becomes essentially impossible because every decision risks failure. Paralysis and procrastination can only be overcome by taking a risk. A successful failure takes risks. He takes risk because he has faith. His faith, however, is not in himself for such faith would only breed more fear. A successful failure is able to risk because his faith is in God. Is it faith that God will insure success? No, it is faith that God will use our efforts, even our failed efforts, for His glory. Is it faith that there will be no pain? No, it is faith in a God who is good!

A successful failure is also able to take risks because he has learned to separate his worth from his works. By detaching his self-esteem from his performance he is free from the fear of failure. He can now focus on the process and not be so concerned about the final product. His worth and value is in Jesus Christ, not his achievements. Remarkably, this stance will often result in a far better performance. At the very least it insures that the performer will be able to rebound from a failure and try, try again. The record books tell us that Babe Ruth hit 714 home runs. What the books don't tell us is that he also struck out 1330 times! It is an unavoidable truth that success is always built on failure. If you want to hit home runs, then you've got to swing the bat. When you swing the bat you risk failure. Risk taking is inevitable part of the success equation.

## REPEATS

The fifth step in becoming a successful failure is to REPEAT the first three steps. The importance of this step is that it reminds us that the process of becoming a successful failure is simply that - a process. A successful failure is not someone who stops failing. Failure is an inevitable part of human existence. A successful failure is someone who learns how to deal with failure in a positive and profitable manner. It is a task that presents itself over and over again. Dealing with failure is not a one-time event. It is a daily application of these principles.

Do you want to be successful? Then learn how to be a successful failure.

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