

## PREFACE

*Leadership*: Everything rises and falls on leadership. If you desire to lift the lid on your personal effectiveness, the only way to do it is to increase your leadership skills.

If you pick up any one of my books, you can be sure that it seeks to add value in one of these four areas. I've written this particular book to change your *attitude* about failure. Read it, absorb it, and allow it to help you turn your mistakes into stepping-stones for success. My desire is that *Failing Forward* will add value to your life.

# 1

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## What's the Main Difference Between People Who Achieve and People Who Are Average?

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*We are all failures—at least, all the best of us are.*

—J. M. BARRIE

What makes achievers excel? Why do some people skyrocket while others plummet? You know what I'm talking about. You can call it luck, blessing, or the Midas touch—call it whatever you want. But the truth is that some people just seem to achieve incredible things in spite of tremendous difficulties: They finish in the top 5 percent in nationwide sales for their company after losing key accounts. They find ingenious ways to increase profits for their department in the face of budget cuts. They earn a graduate degree while raising two children as a single parent. They discover awesome business opportunities while colleagues don't see any at all. Or they recruit winner after winner into their organization despite what looks like an anemic labor pool. It doesn't matter what kind of work they do. Wherever they are, they just seem to make things happen.

Certainly all people like to think of themselves as above average. But achievers seem to leave "average" in the dust—so far behind them that ordinary seems a distant memory.

WHAT'S THE ROOT OF ACHIEVEMENT?

What makes the difference? Why do some people achieve so much? Is it . . .

- Family background? Having a good family growing up is something to be grateful for, but it's not a reliable indicator of achievement. High percentages of successful people come from broken homes.
- Wealth? No, some of the greatest achievers come from households of average to below-average means. Wealth is no indicator of high achievement, and poverty is no guarantee of low achievement.
- Opportunity? You know, opportunity is a peculiar thing. Two people with similar gifts, talents, and resources can look at a situation, and one person will see tremendous opportunity while the other sees nothing. Opportunity is in the eye of the beholder.
- High morals? I wish that were the key, but it's not. I've known people with high integrity who achieve little. And I've known scoundrels who are high producers. Haven't you?
- The absence of hardship? For every achiever who has avoided tragedy, there's a Helen Keller who overcame extreme disabilities or a Viktor Frankl who survived absolute horrors. So that's not it either.

No, none of these things are the key. When it comes right down to it, I know of only one factor that separates those who consistently shine from those who don't: *The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure.* Nothing else has the same kind of impact on people's ability to achieve and to accomplish whatever their minds and hearts desire.

WHAT YOU NEVER LEARNED IN SCHOOL

Soccer player Kyle Rote Jr. remarked, "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

*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 that is to fail and not look beyond the failure.*

—KYLE ROTE JR.

a loser and that is to fail and not look beyond the failure." How people see failure and deal with it—whether they possess the ability to look beyond it and keep achieving—impacts *every aspect* of their lives. Yet that ability seems difficult to acquire. Most people don't know where to start looking to get it.

Even positive people have a tough time learning how to see failure positively. For example, I'm known to be a very positive person. (My book *The Winning Attitude* has been in print for more than fifteen years.) But I haven't always been good at failing forward. I wasn't properly prepared for it. It's certainly not something they tried to teach me in school. And kids today don't get it there either. In fact, the school environment often reinforces people's worst feelings and expectations about failure.

Take a look at some of my previous attitudes toward failure, and see if your experience was similar:

1. *I feared failure.* An experience I had in college, along with my response to it, is typical of what many students encounter. On the first day of class when I was a freshman, the professor walked into my history of civilization class and boldly declared, "Half of you in this room will not pass this class."

What was my first response? Fear! Up to that time, I had never failed a class. And I did not want to start failing all of a sudden. So the first question I asked myself was, *What does the professor want?* School became a game that I wanted to win.

I recall that I once memorized eighty-three dates for a test in that class because my teacher believed that if you could cite the dates, you had mastered the material. I got an A on the test, but three days later, I had forgotten all of the information. I managed to avoid the failure I had feared, but I had not really accomplished anything.

2. *I misunderstood failure.* What is failure? As a child, I thought it was a

percentage. Sixty-nine and lower meant failure. Seventy and above signified success. That thinking didn't help me. Failure isn't a percentage or a test. It's not a single event. It's a process.

3. *I was unprepared for failure.* When I graduated from college with my bachelor's degree, I finished in the top 5 percent of my class. It didn't mean a thing. I had played the school game successfully, and I had absorbed a lot of information. But I wasn't at all prepared for what was ahead of me.

I found that out in my first job. As the pastor in a small rural church, I worked very hard that first year. I did everything the people might expect of me and then some. But to be honest, I was as concerned about getting everyone to like me as I was with helping people.

In the type of church I led, each year the people voted to decide whether to allow the leader to keep his job. And many of the leaders I knew over the years loved to brag about the unanimous affirming votes they received from their people. My expectations were high as I prepared to receive my first unanimous vote. Imagine my surprise when the votes came back 31 yeses, 1 no, and 1 abstention. I was devastated.

After I went home that night, I called my father, who was a veteran pastor, former district superintendent in the denomination, and college president.

"Dad," I lamented, "I can't believe it. I worked so hard for those people. I've done everything I can." I was at the point of tears. "Somebody actually voted against me and wanted me to leave the church! And an abstention is as good as a no. Should I leave and go to another church?"

To my shock, I heard laughter on the other end of the phone.

"No, son, stay there," my dad said as he chuckled. "That's probably the best vote you'll ever receive."

### A NEW COURSE

At that moment I realized what an unrealistic view I had of success and failure. If anything, my college experience had reinforced the wrong notions I had about failure. And as I've helped leaders to grow and develop through the years, I've seen that most people are in the same boat.

In *Leadership Magazine*, J. Wallace Hamilton states, "The increase of sui-

***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

cides, 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."

Training for failure! That is a great concept, and it's the idea that prompted me to write this book. Right now you are getting the chance to sign up with me for a

class you were never offered in school. I want to help you train for failure. I want you to learn how to confidently look the prospect of failure in the eye and move forward anyway. Because in life, the question is not *if* you will have problems, but *how* you are going to deal with your problems. Are you going to fail forward or backward?

### PUTTING A NEW FACE ON OBSTACLES

When I think of people who were able to look trouble in the eye and forge ahead, one of the first who comes to mind is Mary Kay Ash. She has built quite an organization. During the last four or five years, I've had many opportunities to speak to the people in her cosmetics company about leadership. In fact, as I travel around the country doing conferences and seminars, it seems that no matter where I speak, there are always at least a dozen Mary Kay consultants in attendance.

I admire Mary Kay. She overcame a lot of obstacles in her career, and she never let failure get the better of her. Mary Kay's first career was in direct sales, and she was quite successful. But she also found that it was difficult for a woman to progress in the corporate world, especially in the 1950s and early 1960s—even after twenty-five years of success. She says,

I had worked my way up to being a member of the board of the company I was with only to find that, even though our sales force was made up entirely of women, governed by an all male board, my opinions were of no value. I constantly heard, "Mary Kay, you are thinking like a woman again!" I felt rejection in the worst form. So I decided to retire.<sup>1</sup>

Her retirement didn't last long. By the time a month passed, she was stir-crazy. She was ready to start her own business. If she was going to encounter obstacles, they would be there only because she brought them on herself. She decided on a cosmetics business that would give every woman who worked in it unlimited opportunities. She purchased the formulas to the best beauty products she'd ever found, worked up a marketing plan, and prepared to set up a corporation.

### TROUBLE!

It didn't take long for her to hit her first obstacle. When she visited her attorney to make legal arrangements for the corporation, he insulted her and predicted her failure. "Mary Kay," he said, "if you are going to throw away your life savings, why don't you just go directly to the trash can? It will be so much easier than what you are proposing." Her accountant spoke to her in similar terms.

Despite their attempts to discourage her, she moved ahead. She sank her \$5,000 life savings into her new business—every cent she had. She put her husband in charge of the administrative side of things as she worked feverishly to prepare the products, design the packaging, write the training materials, and recruit consultants. They were making wonderful progress. But then a month before she was to open for business, her husband died of a heart attack right at their kitchen table.

Most people would never have been able to go on after that. They would have accepted defeat and faded away. But not Mary Kay. She kept going, and on September 13, 1963, she launched her business. Today, the company has more than \$1 billion in annual sales, employs 3,500 people, and empowers 500,000 direct-sales consultants in 29 markets worldwide.<sup>2</sup> And

Mary Kay Ash has received just about every award an entrepreneur could dream of. Despite adverse circumstances, obstacles, and hardships, she failed forward.

### THE IMPOSSIBLE QUESTION

When I was growing up, one of the questions I used to hear from motivational speakers was this: "If the possibility of failure were erased, what would you attempt to achieve?"

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

That seemed to me to be an intriguing question. At the time it prompted me to look ahead to life's possibilities. But then one day I realized that it was really a bad question. Why? Because it takes a person's thinking down the wrong track. There is no achievement without failure. To even imply that it

might be possible gives people the wrong impression. So here's a better question: If your perception of and response to failure were changed, what would you attempt to achieve?

I don't know what obstacles you are facing in your life right now. But whatever they are doesn't matter. What *does* matter is that your life can change if you're willing to look at failure differently. You have the potential to overcome any problems, mistakes, or misfortunes. All you have to do is learn to fail forward. If you are ready to do that, turn the page and let's go!

### *Your First Step to Failing Forward:*

### **Realize There Is One Major Difference Between Average People and Achieving People**

Look at the way any achiever approaches negative experiences, and you can learn a lot about how to fail forward. Read through these two lists, and determine which one describes your approach to failure:

## FAILING FORWARD

### Failing Backward

- Blaming Others
- Repeating the Same Mistakes
- Expecting Never to Fail Again
- Expecting to Continually Fail
- Accepting Tradition Blindly
- Being Limited by Past Mistakes
- Thinking *I am a Failure*
- Quitting

### Failing Forward

- Taking Responsibility
- Learning from Each Mistake
- Knowing Failure Is a Part of Progress
- Maintaining a Positive Attitude
- Challenging Outdated Assumptions
- Taking New Risks
- Believing Something Didn't Work
- Persevering

Think about a recent setback you experienced. How did you respond? No matter how difficult your problems were, the key to overcoming them doesn't lie in changing your circumstances. It's in changing yourself. That in itself is a process, and it begins with a desire to be teachable. If you're willing to do that, then you'll be able to handle failure. From this moment on, make a commitment to do whatever it takes to fail forward.

#### *Step to Failing Forward:*

1. Realize there is one major difference between average people and achieving people.

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## Redefining *Failure* and *Success*

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### Get a New Definition of *Failure* and *Success*

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*The difference between greatness and mediocrity is often how an individual views a mistake.*

—NELSON BOSWELL

On August 6, 1999, a major-league baseball player stepped up to home plate in Montreal and made another out—the 5,113th of his professional career. That’s a lot of trips to the batter’s box without a hit! If a player made all of those outs consecutively, and he averaged four at bats per game, he would play eight seasons (1,278 games straight) without ever reaching first base!

Was the player discouraged that night? No. Did he think he had failed himself or his team? No. You see, earlier in the same game, in his first plate appearance, that player had reached a milestone that only twenty-one other people in the history of baseball have ever achieved. He had made his 3,000th hit. That player was Tony Gwynn of the San Diego Padres.

During that game, Tony got on base with hits four times in five tries. But that’s not the norm for him. Usually he *fails* to get a hit two times out of every three attempts. Those results may not sound very encouraging, but if you know baseball, you recognize that Tony’s ability to succeed

consistently only one time in three tries has made him the greatest hitter of his generation. And Tony recognizes that to get his hits, he has to make a lot of outs.

I've been a Tony Gwynn fan for more than a decade. When I lived in San Diego, I had season tickets to the Padres' games. I saw him play in his first game there. And I've continued to follow his career closely. As he approached hit number 3,000, I knew I wanted to be at the game when he achieved that feat.

On the day he was expected to achieve that milestone, I had just finished teaching leadership at a conference in Chicago, and I was to be speaking in Philadelphia the next day. I scrambled to change my plane tickets. Then I called my son-in-law, Steve, who was going to be at the next conference with me, to invite him along. And each of us hopped on a plane to Montreal for the game.

As I traveled, I knew our schedule would be tight, but I figured we could make it. When we arrived at the airport, everything looked great. But after getting off the plane, Steve got tied up in customs. With the clock ticking away, I was pretty sure that we were going to miss Tony's first at bat. And sure enough, by the time we reached the stadium, he had already batted and hit number 3,000.

### HOW DO YOU DEFINE *FAILURE*?

When we realized that we were probably going to miss Tony's historic moment, did we give up? No. When we got to the stadium and *knew* we had missed it, did we turn around and go home? No. Did I think I had failed when I tried to buy a program but learned that the vendors had already sold out of them? No. You see, we were just glad to be a part of the celebration. And like Tony, who keeps

*One of the greatest problems people have with failure is that they are too quick to judge isolated situations in their lives and label them as failures. Instead, they need to keep the bigger picture in mind.*

hanging in there until he gets his hits, we were rewarded. Late in the game when Tony hit a foul ball into the stands, I got it. A few weeks later Tony signed the ball for me, and now I have a souvenir from his 3,000-hit game.

One of the greatest problems people have with failure is that they are too quick to judge isolated situations in their lives and label them as failures. Instead, they need to keep the bigger picture in mind. Someone like Tony Gwynn doesn't look at an out that he makes and think of failure. He sees it within the context of the bigger picture. His perspective leads to perseverance. His perseverance brings longevity. And his longevity gives him opportunities for success.

### FAILURE IS NOT . . .

Changing your perspective on failure will help you to persevere—and ultimately achieve your desires. So how should you judge failure? Let's start by taking a look at seven things failure is *not*:

#### 1. *People Think Failure Is Avoidable—It's Not*

Everybody fails, errs, and makes mistakes. You've heard the saying "To err is human, to forgive divine." Alexander Pope wrote that more than 250 years ago. And he was only paraphrasing a saying that was common 2,000 years ago, during the time of the Romans. Things today are the same as they were then: If you're a human being, you're going to make mistakes.

You're probably familiar with Murphy's Law and the Peter Principle. Recently I came across something called Rules for Being Human. I think the list describes well the state we're in as people:

Rule #1: You will learn lessons.

Rule #2: There are no mistakes—only lessons.

Rule #3: A lesson is repeated until it is learned.

Rule #4: If you don't learn the easy lessons, they get *harder*.  
(Pain is one way the universe gets your attention.)

Rule #5: You'll know you've learned a lesson when your actions change.

You see, writer Norman Cousins was right when he said, "The essence of man is imperfection." Know that you're going to make mistakes.

*2. People Think Failure Is an Event—It's Not*

Growing up, I thought that failure came in a moment. The best example I can think of is taking a test. If you got an F, it meant you failed. But I've come to realize that failure is a process. If you flunk a test, it doesn't mean you failed a one-time event. The F shows that you neglected the process leading up to the test.

In 1997, I wrote a book called *The Success Journey*. It offers an overview on what it means to be successful. In it I define *success* in these terms:

- Knowing your purpose in life
- Growing to reach your potential
- Sowing seeds that benefit others

The thesis of the book is that success is not a destination—not a place where you arrive one day. Instead, it is the journey you take. And whether you succeed comes from what you do day to day. In other words, success is a process.

Failure works the same way. It's not someplace you arrive. Just as success is not an event, neither is failure. It's how you deal with life along the way. No one can conclude that he has failed until he breathes his last breath. Until then, he's still in process, and the jury is still out.

*3. People Think Failure Is Objective—It's Not*

When you err—whether you miscalculate crucial figures, miss a deadline, blow a deal, make a poor choice concerning your children, or otherwise fumble a ball—what determines whether that action was a failure? Do you look at the size of the problem it causes or the amount of money it costs you or your organization? Is it determined by how much heat you have to take from your boss or by the criticism of your peers? No. Failure isn't determined that way. The answer is that *you* are the only person who

***You are the only person who can really label what you do a failure.***

can really label what you do a failure. It's subjective. Your perception of and response to your mistakes determine whether your actions are failures.

Did you know that entrepreneurs almost never get their first business off the ground? Or their second? Or their third? According to Tulane University business professor Lisa Amos, the average for entrepreneurs is 3.8 failures before they finally make it in business. They are not deterred by problems, mistakes, or errors. Why? Because they don't see setbacks as failures. They recognize that three steps forward and two steps back *still* equals one step forward. And as a result, they overcome the average and become achievers.

*4. People Think Failure Is the Enemy—It's Not*

Most people try to avoid failure like the plague. They're afraid of it. But it takes adversity to create success. NBA coach Rick Pitino states it even more strongly. "Failure is good," he says. "It's fertilizer. Everything I've learned about coaching I've learned from making mistakes."

People who see failure as the enemy are captive to those who conquer it. Herbert V. Brocknow believes, "The fellow who never makes a mistake takes his orders from one who does." Observe any high achiever, and you'll discover a person who doesn't see a mistake as the enemy. That's true in any endeavor. Musicologist Eloise Ristad emphasizes that "when we give ourselves permission to fail, we at the same time give ourselves permission to excel."

*5. People Think Failure Is Irreversible—It's Not*

There's an old saying in Texas: "It doesn't matter how much milk you spill as long as you don't lose your cow." In other words, mistakes are not irreversible. Keep everything in perspective. The problems come when you see only the spilled milk and not the bigger picture. People who correctly see failure take it in stride.



Mistakes don't make them want to give up.  
Success doesn't make them think that they are set up.

Every event—whether good or bad—is one small step in the process of living. Or as Tom Peters acknowledges, “If silly things were not done, intelligent things would never happen.”

*6. People Think Failure Is a Stigma—It's Not*

Mistakes are not permanent markers. I love the perspective of the late Senator Sam Ervin Jr., who remarked, “Defeat may serve as well as victory to shake the soul and let the glory out.” That's the way we need to look at failure.

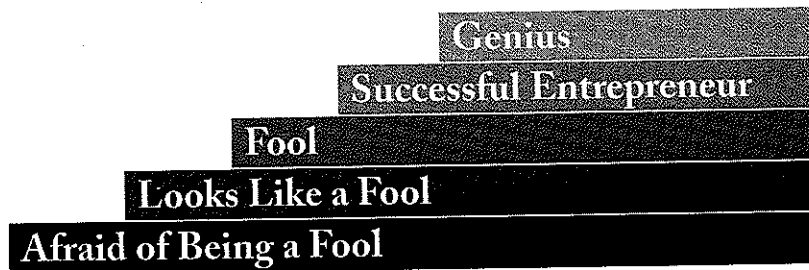
When you make mistakes, don't let them get you down. And don't let yourself think of them as stigmas. Make each failure a step to success.

*The average for entrepreneurs is 3.8 failures before they finally make it in business.*

*7. People Think Failure Is Final—It's Not*

Even what may appear to be a huge failure doesn't need to keep you from achieving. Consider the story of Sergio Zyman. He was the mastermind behind New Coke, something that marketing consultant Robert McMath sees as one of the greatest product failures of all time.<sup>1</sup> Zyman, who successfully introduced Diet Coke, believed that Coca-Cola needed to

**Steps to Success**



act boldly to reverse its twenty-year market decline against its rival, Pepsi. His solution was to stop offering the drink that had been popular for nearly one hundred years, change the formula, and offer it as New Coke. The move was an abysmal failure that lasted seventy-nine days in 1985 and cost the company about \$100 million. People hated New Coke. And it caused Zyman to leave the company.

But Zyman's problems with New Coke didn't keep him down. Years later when asked if the venture was a mistake, Zyman answers, “No, categorically.”

A failure? “No.”

A blunder, a misstep, a bust? “Another word between ‘bust’ and, uh, something else,” he replies. “Now if you say to me, ‘The strategy that you guys embarked on didn't work,’ I'll say, ‘Yeah, absolutely it didn't work.’ But the totality of the action ended up being positive.” Ultimately the return of Coca-Cola Classic made the company stronger.

Zyman's assessment was confirmed by Roberto Goizueta, the late chairman and chief executive of the Coca-Cola Company. He rehired Zyman at Coca-Cola in 1993. “Judge the results,” said Goizueta. “We get paid to produce results. We don't get paid to be right.”<sup>2</sup>

**IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU LOOK AT IT**

If you tend to focus on the extremes of success and failure and to fixate on particular events in your life, try to put things into perspective. When you do, you'll be able to share the philosophy of someone such as the apostle Paul, who was able to say, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.”<sup>3</sup> And that was saying a lot, considering that Paul had been shipwrecked, whipped, beaten, stoned, and imprisoned. Throughout everything, his faith enabled him to maintain perspective. He realized that as long as he was doing what he was supposed to do, his being labeled success or failure by others really didn't matter.

Every person's life is filled with errors and negative experiences. But know this:

Errors become mistakes  
when we perceive them and respond to them incorrectly.

Mistakes become failures  
when we *continually* respond to them incorrectly.

People who fail forward are able to see errors or negative experiences as a regular part of life, learn from them, and then move on. They persevere in order to achieve their purpose in life.

Washington Irving once commented, "Great minds have purposes; others have wishes. Little minds are subdued by misfortunes; but great minds rise above them."

The terrible truth is that all roads to achievement lead through the land of failure. It has stood firmly between every human being who had a dream and the realization of that dream. The good news is that anyone can make it through failure. That's why author Rob Parsons maintained that "tomorrow belongs to the failures."

Too many people believe that the process is supposed to be easy. The prolific American inventor Thomas Edison observed that attitude among people. And this is how he responded to it:

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.

Each of us has to make a choice. Are we going to sleep life away, avoiding failure at all costs? Or are we going to wake up and realize this: *Failure*

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*is simply a price we pay to achieve success.* If we learn to embrace that new definition of failure, then we are free to start moving ahead—and failing forward.

### MOVING FORWARD ON THE HEELS OF TRAGEDY

Over dinner, I heard a great story about the price someone paid to achieve success. It all started when I arranged for two friends to meet. Last year when speaking for Auntie Anne's Pretzels, I was talking to Anne Beiler, the company's founder. As we talked, she mentioned in passing that one of her heroes is Truett Cathy, the founder of the Chick-fil-A restaurant chain.

"Would you like to meet him?" I asked.

"You know him?" Anne responded, a little surprised.

"I sure do," I answered. When we moved my company, The INJOY Group, to Atlanta in 1997, Truett and his son Dan Cathy took all of us under their wings. "They're wonderful friends. I'll arrange for all of us to have dinner together."

I immediately set a date, and soon afterward my wife, Margaret, and I had Truett Cathy, Anne and Jonas Beiler, and Dan and Rhonda Cathy over to dinner. We had a wonderful time. I was amazed as Anne and Dan (who is the president of Chick-fil-A International) openly exchanged trade information about their businesses.

I was pleased because I could tell they were enjoying a good connection. But the highlight of the evening for me was hearing Truett Cathy tell the story of his start in the restaurant business and how that led to the founding of Chick-fil-A.

### HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Truett's description of his childhood activities showed me that he was a born entrepreneur. As a second grader, he discovered that he could buy a six-pack of Cokes for a quarter, sell them for a nickel apiece, and make a 20 percent profit. It wasn't long before he was buying soft drinks by the case, icing them down, and increasing his revenue and profit. When the weather

turned cold and drink sales lagged, he sold magazines. Then at age eleven, he started helping a neighbor with his paper route. By age twelve, he had his own route.

Like many young men of his era, Truett went into the army. When he was discharged in 1945, he was ready to pursue opportunity. What appealed to him was a restaurant, and his dream was to work with Ben, one of his brothers. After learning a little about the business, they scraped together some money, located a site, built a restaurant, and opened it as the Dwarf Grill (later the Dwarf House) in Hapeville, Georgia, on the south side of Atlanta. It was open twenty-four hours, six days a week, and though it required an incredible amount of work, it was profitable from the first week. But it wouldn't be long before Truett faced the first of several major setbacks.

### TRAGIC LOSSES

The first came early, only three years after opening the restaurant. Truett's two brothers were in a small private plane that crashed on the way to Chattanooga, Tennessee. Both of them died. Losing a business partner is tough. Losing both brothers was horrible. Truett was devastated. Once he got over the emotional shock, he went on alone. A year later, he paid Eunice, his brother Ben's widow, for her share in the business. A year after that, he opened a second restaurant.

By then things were going pretty well. Then one night he was awakened by a phone call; there was a fire at his second restaurant location. He dashed off to see what could be done, but when he arrived, he discovered that the fire had totally destroyed the operation. That alone was bad enough. Worse was the fact that he had practically no insurance.

Within but a few weeks Truett faced another debilitating setback. He discovered that he had polyps in his colon that would have to be removed. The timing couldn't be worse. Instead of rebuilding his restaurant, he went in for surgery. One operation turned into two, and much to his dismay, he was out of action for several months—an eternity for an energetic businessman like him.

### TURNING LEMONS INTO LEMONADE . . . AND CHICKEN SANDWICHES

What does an active entrepreneur do when he's stuck in bed for months at a time? If he's Truett Cathy, he comes up with a million-dollar idea. The time Truett spent out of commission inspired him to play with a new concept. He had always loved chicken, and it had been an important part of the Dwarf House's fare. For a while the restaurant had offered a boneless chicken breast on its menu. *What would happen, he wondered, if I took that chicken breast, seasoned and fried it just right, and put it on a bun with the right condiments?* The answer became the Chick-fil-A Sandwich and the start of one of the largest privately owned restaurant chains in the world.

Today Truett Cathy is credited with inventing the chicken sandwich in the fast-food industry. Chick-fil-A operates more than nine hundred

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

—THOMAS EDISON

restaurants across the country and has a 200,000-square-foot headquarters that sits on seventy-three acres just south of Atlanta. In the year 2000, it became a billion-dollar company. It is one of the most successful operations in the restaurant business, selling millions of chicken sandwiches and countless gallons of its famous fresh-squeezed lemonade. The business continues growing. Yet it never would have come

to pass if Truett Cathy had not experienced the setbacks he did, maintained his perspective, and realized that a few negative experiences don't make for failure.

Thomas Edison believed, "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up." If you can change the way you see failure, you gain the strength to keep running the race. Get a new definition of *failure*. Regard it as the price you pay for progress. If you can do that, you will put yourself in a much better position to fail forward.

*Your Second Step to Failing Forward:*

**Learn a New Definition of Failure**

How can you help yourself learn a new definition of *failure* and develop a different perspective concerning failure and success? By making mistakes. Chuck Braun of Idea Connection Systems encourages trainees to think differently through the use of a mistake quota. He gives each student a quota of thirty mistakes to make for each training session. And if a student uses up all thirty? He receives another thirty. As a result, the students relax, think of mistakes in a whole new light, and begin learning.

As you approach your next big project or assignment, give yourself a reasonable mistake quotient. How many mistakes should you expect to achieve? Twenty? Fifty? Ninety? Give yourself a quota, and try to hit it before bringing the task to completion. Remember, mistakes don't define *failure*. They are merely the price of achievement on the success journey.

*Steps to Failing Forward:*

1. Realize there is one major difference between average people and achieving people.
2. Learn a new definition of *failure*.

3

**If You've Failed, Are You a Failure?**

*Failure isn't so bad if it doesn't attack the heart.*

*Success is all right if it doesn't go to the head.*

—GRANTLAND RICE

In an interview years ago, David Brinkley asked advice columnist Ann Landers what question she most frequently receives from readers. Her answer: "What's wrong with me?"

Landers's response reveals a lot about human nature. Many people wrestle with feelings of failure, the most damaging being doubtful thoughts about themselves. At the heart of those doubts and feelings is one central question: Am I a failure? And that's a problem because I believe it's nearly impossible for any person to believe he is a failure and fail forward at the same time.

It seems that advice columnists (such as Ann Landers) and humor writers recognize that keeping a good perspective of yourself is important to overcoming adversity and mistakes. The late Erma Bombeck, who wrote a widely syndicated weekly humor column until a few weeks before her death in 1996, had a firm grasp on what it meant to persevere and fail forward without taking failure too personally.

# 10

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## Grasp the Positive Benefits of Negative Experiences

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

—ELBERT HUBBARD

Working artists David Bayles and Ted Orland tell a story about an art teacher who did an experiment with his grading system for two groups of students. It is a parable on the benefits of failure. Here is what happened:

The ceramics teacher announced on opening day that he was dividing the class into two groups. All those on the left side of the studio, he said, would be graded solely on the *quantity* of work they produced, all those on the right solely on its *quality*. His procedure was simple: on the final day of class he would bring in his bathroom scales and weigh the work of the “quantity” group: fifty pounds of pots rated an “A,” forty pounds a “B,” and so on. Those being graded on “quality,” however, needed to produce only one pot—albeit a perfect one—to get an “A.” Well, came grading time and a curious fact emerged: the works of the highest quality were all produced by the group being graded for quantity. It seems that while the “quantity” group was busily churning out piles of work—and learning

from their mistakes—the “quality” group had sat theorizing about perfection, and in the end had little more to show for their efforts than grandiose theories and a pile of dead clay.<sup>1</sup>

It doesn't matter whether your objectives are in the area of art, business, ministry, sports, or relationships. The only way you can get ahead is to fail early, fail often, and fail forward.

### TAKE THE JOURNEY

I teach leadership to thousands of people each year at numerous conferences. And one of my deepest concerns is always that some people will go home from the event and nothing will change in their lives. They enjoy the “show” but fail to implement any of the ideas presented to them. I tell people continually: We overestimate the event and underestimate the process. Every fulfilled dream occurred because of dedication to a process. (That's one of the reasons I write books and create programs on audiocassette—so that people can engage in the ongoing process of growth.)

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

People naturally tend toward inertia. That's why self-improvement is such a struggle. But that's also why adversity lies at the heart of every success. The process of achievement comes through repeated failures and the constant struggle to climb to a higher level.

Most people will grudgingly concede that they must make it through some adversity in order to succeed. They'll acknowledge that they have to experience the occasional setback to make progress. But I believe that success comes only if you take that thought one step farther. To achieve your dreams, you must *embrace* adversity and make failure a regular part of your life. If you're not failing, you're probably not really moving forward.

### THE BENEFITS OF ADVERSITY

Psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers asserts, “The person interested in success has to learn to view failure as a healthy, inevitable part of the process of getting to the top.” Adversity and the failure that often results from it should be expected in the process of succeeding, and they should be viewed as absolutely critical parts of it. In fact, the benefits of adversity are many. Consider these reasons to embrace adversity and persevere through it:

#### 1. Adversity Creates Resilience

Nothing in life breeds resilience like adversity and failure. A study in *Time* magazine in the mid-1980s described the incredible resilience of a

*To achieve your dreams, you must embrace adversity and make failure a regular part of your life. If you're not failing, you're probably not really moving forward.*

group of people who had lost their jobs three times because of plant closings. Psychologists expected them to be discouraged, but they were surprisingly optimistic. Their adversity had actually created an advantage. Because they had already lost a job and found a new one at least twice, they were better able to handle adversity than people who had worked for only one company and found themselves unemployed.<sup>2</sup>

#### 2. Adversity Develops Maturity

Adversity can make you better if you don't let it make you bitter. Why? Because it promotes wisdom and maturity. American playwright William Saroyan spoke to this issue: “Good people are good because they've come to wisdom through failure. We get very little wisdom from success, you know.”

As the world continues to change at a faster and faster rate, maturity with flexibility becomes increasingly important. These qualities come from

weathering difficulties. Harvard business school professor John Kotter says, "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.'"<sup>3</sup> The problems we face and overcome prepare our hearts for future difficulties.

### *3. Adversity Pushes the Envelope of Accepted Performance*

Lloyd Ogilvie told of a friend who was a circus performer in his youth. The fellow described learning to work on the trapeze:

Once you know that the net below will catch you, you stop worrying about falling. You actually learn to fall successfully! What that means is, you can concentrate on catching the trapeze swinging toward you, and not on falling, because repeated falls in the past have convinced you that the net is strong and reliable when you do fall . . . The result of falling and being caught by the net is a mysterious confidence and daring on the trapeze. You fall less. Each fall makes you able to risk more.<sup>4</sup>

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.

### *4. Adversity Provides Greater Opportunities*

I believe that eliminating problems limits our potential. Just about every successful entrepreneur I've met has numerous stories of adversity and setbacks that opened doors to greater opportunity. For example, in 1978, Bernie Marcus, the son of a poor Russian cabinetmaker in Newark, New Jersey, was fired from Handy Dan, a do-it-yourself hardware retailer. That prompted Marcus to team with Arthur Blank to start their own business. In 1979, they opened their first store in Atlanta, Georgia. It was

called The Home Depot. Today, The Home Depot has more than 760 stores employing more than 157,000 people, the business has expanded to include overseas operations, and each year the corporation does more than \$30 billion in sales.

I'm sure Bernie Marcus wasn't very happy about getting fired from his job at Handy Dan. But if he hadn't been, who knows whether he would have achieved the success he has today.

### *5. Adversity Prompts Innovation*

Early in the twentieth century, a boy whose family had immigrated from Sweden to Illinois sent twenty-five cents to a publisher for a book on photography. What he received instead was a book on ventriloquism. What did he do? He adapted and learned ventriloquism. The boy was Edgar Bergen, and for more than forty years he entertained audiences with the help of a wooden dummy named Charlie McCarthy.

The ability to innovate is at the heart of creativity—a vital component in success. University of Houston professor Jack Matson recognized that fact and developed a course that his students came to call "Failure 101." In it, Matson assigns students to build mock-ups of products that no one would ever buy. His goal is to get students to equate failure with innovation instead of defeat. That way they will free themselves to try new things. "They learn to reload and get ready to shoot again," says Matson. If you want to succeed, you have to learn to make adjustments to the way you do things and try again. Adversity helps to develop that ability.

### *6. Adversity Recaps Unexpected Benefits*

The average person makes a mistake and automatically thinks that it's a failure. But some of the greatest stories of success can be found in the unexpected benefits of mistakes. For example, most people are familiar with the story of Edison and the phonograph: He discovered it while trying to invent something entirely different. But did you know that Kellogg's Corn Flakes resulted when boiled wheat was left in a baking pan overnight? Or that Ivory soap floats because a batch was left in the mixer too long and had a large volume of air whipped into it? Or that

Scott Towels were launched when a toilet paper machine put too many layers of tissue together?

Horace Walpole said that “in science, mistakes always precede the truth.” That’s what happened to German-Swiss chemist Christian Friedrich Schönbein. One day he was working in the kitchen—which his wife had strictly forbidden—and was experimenting with sulfuric acid and nitric acid. When he accidentally spilled some of the mixture on the kitchen table, he thought he was in trouble. (He *knew* he would experience “adversity” when his wife found out!) He hurriedly snatched up a cotton apron, wiped up the mess, and hung the apron by the fire to dry.

Suddenly there was a violent explosion. Evidently the cellulose in the cotton underwent a process called nitration. Unwittingly Schönbein had invented nitrocellulose—what came to be called smokeless gunpowder or guncotton. He went on to market his invention, which made him a lot of money.

### 7. *Adversity Motivates*

Years ago when Bear Bryant was coaching the University of Alabama’s football team, the Crimson Tide was ahead by only six points in a game with less than two minutes remaining in the fourth quarter. Bryant sent his quarterback into the game with instructions to play it safe and run out the clock.

In the huddle, the quarterback said, “Coach says to play it safe, but that’s what they’re expecting. Let’s give them a surprise.” And with that, he called a pass play.

When the quarterback dropped back and threw the pass, the defending cornerback, who was a champion sprinter, intercepted the ball and headed toward the end zone, expecting to score a touchdown. The quarterback, who was not known as a good runner, took off after the cornerback and ran him down from behind, tackling him on the 5-yard line. His effort saved the game.

*In science,  
mistakes always  
precede the truth.*

—HORACE WALPOLE

After the clock ran out, the opposing coach approached Bear Bryant and said, “What’s this business about your quarterback not being a runner? He ran down my speedster from behind!”

Bryant responded, “Your man was running for six points. My man was running for his life.”

Nothing can motivate a person like adversity. Olympic diver Pat McCormick discusses this point: “I think failure is one of the great motivators. After my narrow loss in the 1948 trials, I knew how really good I could be. It was the defeat that focused all my concentration on my training and goals.” McCormick went on to win two gold medals in the Olympics in Helsinki in 1952 and another two in Melbourne four years later.

If you can step back from the negative circumstances facing you, you will be able to discover their positive benefits. That is almost always true; you simply have to be willing to look for them—and not take the adversity you are experiencing too personally.

If you lose your job, think about the resilience you’re developing. If you try something daring and survive, evaluate what you learned about yourself—and how it will help you take on new challenges. If a bookstore gets your order wrong, figure out whether it’s an opportunity to learn a new skill. And if you experience a train wreck in your career, think of the maturity it’s developing in you. Besides, Bill Vaughan maintains that “in the game of life it’s a good idea to have a few early losses, which relieves you of the pressure of trying to maintain an undefeated season.” Always measure an obstacle next to the size of the dream you’re pursuing. It’s all in how you look at it.

### WHAT COULD BE WORSE?

One of the most incredible stories of adversity overcome and success gained is that of Joseph, who was an ancient Hebrew. You may be familiar with the story. He was born the eleventh of twelve sons in a wealthy Middle Eastern family whose trade was raising livestock. As a teenager, Joseph alienated his brothers. First, he was his father’s favorite, even though he was nearly the youngest. Second, he used to tell his father anytime his brothers weren’t



doing their work properly with the sheep. And third, he made the mistake of telling his older brothers that one day he would be in charge of them. Some of his brothers wanted to kill him, but the eldest, Reuben, prevented them from doing that. So when Reuben wasn't around, the others sold him into slavery.

Joseph ended up in Egypt working in the house of the captain of the guard, a man named Potiphar. Because of his leadership and administrative skills, Joseph quickly rose in the ranks, and before long, he was running the entire household. He was making the best of a bad situation. But then things got worse. The wife of his master tried to persuade him to sleep with her. When he refused, she accused *him* of making advances to *her* and got Potiphar to throw Joseph in prison.

#### FROM SLAVERY TO PRISON

At that point, Joseph was in a really difficult position. He was separated from his family. He was living in a foreign land. He was a slave. And he was locked in prison. But again, he made the best of a tough situation. Before long, the warden of the prison put Joseph in charge of all prisoners and the prison's daily activities.

Joseph met a fellow prisoner who had been an official in Pharaoh's court, the chief cupbearer. And Joseph was able to do him a favor by interpreting the man's dream. When he saw that the official was grateful, Joseph made a request of him in return.

"When all goes well with you," Joseph asked, "remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."<sup>5</sup>

Joseph had hope a few days later when the official was returned to court and the good graces of the monarch. He expected any minute to receive word that Pharaoh was setting him free. But he waited. And waited. Two *years* passed before the cupbearer remembered Joseph, and he did so only because Pharaoh wanted someone to interpret his dreams.

#### FINALLY THE PAYOFF

In the end, Joseph was able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. And because the Hebrew showed such wisdom, the Egyptian ruler put Joseph in charge of the entire kingdom. As the result of Joseph's leadership, planning, and system of food storage, when famine struck the Middle East seven years later, many thousands of people who otherwise would have died were able to survive, including Joseph's own family. When his brothers traveled to Egypt for relief from the famine—*twenty* years after selling him into slavery—they discovered that their brother Joseph was not only alive, but second in command of the most powerful kingdom in the world.

Few people would welcome the adversity of thirteen years in bondage as a slave and prisoner. But as far as we know, Joseph never gave up hope and never lost his perspective. Nor did he hold a grudge against his brothers. After their father died, he told them, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." He found the positive benefits in his negative experiences. And if he can do it, so can we.

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#### *Your Tenth Step to Failing Forward:*

#### **Find the Benefit in Every Bad Experience**

Finding the benefit in a bad experience is an ability that takes time to develop and effort to cultivate. You can start by thinking of the last major setback you experienced and listing all of the benefits that have occurred—or might occur—as a result. Do that now:

Major Setback:

Benefits That Occurred:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Benefits That Might Occur:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Once you've learned how to go through that process for an event from your past, the next step involves learning to do it *as* you experience adversity. During the coming week, as you experience problems, setbacks, or failures, take some time at the end of the day to brainstorm all the good things that can come of them. And try to maintain a positive mind-set as you move forward so that you can keep yourself open to the coming benefits of failure.

*Steps to Failing Forward:*

1. Realize there is one major difference between average people and achieving people.
2. Learn a new definition of *failure*.
3. Remove the "you" from failure.
4. Take action and reduce your fear.
5. Change your response to failure by accepting responsibility.
6. Don't let the failure from outside get inside you.
7. Say good-bye to yesterday.
8. Change yourself, and your world changes.
9. Get over yourself and start giving yourself.
10. Find the benefit in every bad experience.

# 11

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## Take a Risk—There's No Other Way to Fail Forward

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

—HENRY C. LINK

Every era has its great explorers, people willing to face danger to break new ground and discover new worlds. Americans love those kinds of people. The names of pioneers and daring adventurers ring throughout our history: Columbus, Crockett, Lewis and Clark, Lindbergh, Armstrong. The fuel that makes it possible for people like them to conquer new territory is risk. Pioneer aviator Charles Lindbergh emphasized that point: "What kind of man would live where there is no daring? I don't believe in taking foolish chances, but nothing can be accomplished if we don't take any chances at all."

Risk is a funny thing; it's very subjective. Here's what I mean: Someone may have no trouble plunging off a high tower with a bungee cord attached to his leg, but the same person may regard speaking in front of a group of twenty people as a death-defying risk. To another person, speaking isn't intimidating at all. For example, I love to speak to groups, and I've spoken to groups as large as eighty-two thousand people. On the other hand, I would never willingly bungee jump.

How do you judge whether some activity is worth the risk? Do you base it on your fear? No, you should do some things that scare you. Should you base it on the probability of success? No, I don't think that's the answer either. Risk must be evaluated not by the fear it generates in you or the probability of your success, but by the *value* of the goal.

*Risk must be evaluated not by the fear it generates in you or the probability of your success, but by the value of the goal.*

### SHE'S A PIONEER?

Allow me to tell you the story of someone who pushed the envelope of risk in order to achieve goals that were valuable to her. As she grew up, there were no significant indications that Millie would someday be one of the great adventurers of the twentieth century. She was an inquisitive child, born in Kansas in 1897. She was bright and excelled academically. She liked reading books and reciting poetry. She also enjoyed sports, particularly basketball and tennis.

After recognizing the impact of war on the soldiers who served in Europe during World War I, Millie wanted to do something to help. She decided to study nursing, and during the war, she worked as a military nurse's aide in Canada. After the war was over, she enrolled as a premed student at Columbia University in New York. In 1920, after her first year at school was finished, she visited her family in Los Angeles. That's when she took her first plane ride at Daugherty Field in Long Beach, California. And she was hooked. "As soon as we left the ground I knew I myself had to fly," she said.<sup>1</sup> She never returned to med school.

### BOLD VENTURES

That was the beginning of a new life for Millie. Oh, I should mention that "Millie" is what her family called her. You and I know her as Amelia—

Amelia Earhart. She immediately began working odd jobs to earn the \$1,000 required to take flying lessons, and soon she was learning how to fly from Anita Snook, another pioneer flier.

Learning to fly wasn't easy—at least not for Earhart. She had more than her share of crashes. But she persevered. Years later, she told her husband her perspective on flying: "Please know I am quite aware of the hazards . . . I want to do it because I want to do it. Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others."<sup>2</sup>

In 1921, Earhart made her first solo flight. The next year she set the first of her many aviation records (for highest altitude). She piloted planes because she loved to fly, but she also had an agenda. She was trying to break ground for others. "My ambition is to have this wonderful gift produce practical results for the future of commercial flying and for the women who may want to fly tomorrow's planes," she said.<sup>3</sup>

During the course of her flying career, Earhart set many records and achieved many firsts:

- 1928: First woman to cross the Atlantic Ocean in an aircraft as passenger.
- 1929: First president of the Ninety-nines, an association of female pilots.
- 1930: Women's speed record of 181.8 miles per hour on a three-kilometer course.
- 1931: First person to set an altitude record in an autogiro (early helicopter) at 18,451 feet.
- 1932: First female pilot to fly solo over the Atlantic Ocean.
- 1935: First person to fly solo and nonstop between Oakland, California, and Honolulu, Hawaii.

### ONE MORE BIG RISK

By 1935, Amelia Earhart was a seasoned, world-class pilot and had done a lot to accomplish her goals of opening doors for women and legitimizing

commercial aviation. She must have believed the motto of all great achievers, "If at first you *do* succeed, try something harder," because that's when she decided to embark on her greatest adventure. She intended to fly around the world. That feat had already been accomplished by a man, but Earhart intended to route her flight near the equator and set a record for the longest flight (by either gender) at 29,000 miles.

In March 1935, she started on her way. She flew the first leg from Oakland to Hawaii. But as she took off from Luke Field near Pearl Harbor, she blew a tire and crashed the plane, causing tremendous damage. She had failed—but she wasn't ready to give up. Her plane was shipped to California for repairs, and she planned her next attempt.

Two years later, in June 1937, Earhart again started on her around-the-world voyage, this time heading east. She observed, "I have a feeling that there is just about one more good flight left in my system and I hope this trip is it. Anyway when I have finished this job, I mean to give up long-distance 'stunt' flying."<sup>4</sup> By the end of June, she and her navigator, Frederick Noonan, had flown 22,000 miles. When they took off from New Guinea on July 2, they were filled with hope because there were only 7,000 miles to go. But they were never seen again. Although U.S. Navy ships searched diligently, no trace of them or their plane was found.

### WORTH THE RISK

If anyone had been able to talk to Earhart during her last hours, I believe she would not have expressed any regret for attempting what she did. She once said, "Now and then women should do for themselves what men have already done—occasionally what men have not done—thereby establishing themselves as persons, and perhaps encouraging other women toward greater independence of thought and action. Some such consideration was a contributing reason for my wanting to do what I so much wanted to do."<sup>5</sup>

To achieve any worthy goal, you must take risks. Amelia Earhart believed that, and her advice when it came to risk was simple and direct: "Decide whether or not the goal is worth the risks involved. If it is, stop worrying."

The reality is that *everything* in life is risky. If you want to avoid all risk, then don't do any of the following:

Don't ride in an automobile—they cause 20 percent of all fatal accidents.

Don't travel by air, rail, or water—16 percent of all accidents result from these activities.

Don't walk in the street—15 percent of all accidents occur there.

Don't stay at home—17 percent of all accidents happen there.<sup>6</sup>

In life, there are no safe places or risk-free activities. Helen Keller, author, speaker, and advocate for disabled persons, asserted, "Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing."

***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

Everything in life brings risk. It's true that you risk failure if you try something bold because you might miss it. But you also risk failure if you stand still and don't try anything new. G. K. Chesterton wrote, "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." The less you venture out, the greater your risk of failure. Ironically the more you risk failure—and actually fail—the greater your chances of success.

When it comes to taking risks, I believe there are two kinds of people: those who don't dare try new things, and those who don't dare miss them.

#### Don't-Dare-Try-It People

1. They *resist* opportunities.
2. They *rationalize* their responsibilities.
3. They *rehearse* impossibilities.

#### Don't-Dare-Miss-It People

1. They *find* opportunities.
2. They *finish* their responsibilities.
3. They *feed* on impossibilities.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 4. They <i>rain</i> on enthusiasm.                | 4. They <i>fan</i> the flame of enthusiasm.           |
| 5. They <i>review</i> their inadequacies.         | 5. They <i>face</i> their inadequacies.               |
| 6. They <i>recoil</i> at the failure of others.   | 6. They <i>figure</i> out why others failed.          |
| 7. They <i>reject</i> the personal cost involved. | 7. They <i>finance</i> the cost into their lifestyle. |
| 8. They <i>replace</i> goals with pleasure.       | 8. They <i>find</i> pleasure in the goal.             |
| 9. They <i>rejoice</i> that they have not failed. | 9. They <i>fear</i> futility, not failure.            |
| 10. They <i>rest</i> before they finish.          | 10. They <i>finish</i> before they rest.              |
| 11. They <i>resist</i> leadership.                | 11. They <i>follow</i> leaders.                       |
| 12. They <i>remain</i> unchanged.                 | 12. They <i>force</i> change.                         |
| 13. They <i>replay</i> the problems.              | 13. They <i>fish</i> for solutions.                   |
| 14. They <i>rethink</i> their commitment.         | 14. They <i>fulfill</i> their commitments.            |
| 15. They <i>reverse</i> their decision.           | 15. They <i>finalize</i> their decision.              |

*Motto:* I would rather try nothing great and succeed than try something great and risk failure.

*Motto:* I would rather try something great and fail than try nothing great and succeed.

If you want to increase your odds of success, you have to take chances.

### TRAPS THAT MAKE PEOPLE BACK AWAY FROM RISK

If risk has such great potential rewards, then why don't people embrace it as a friend? I believe they don't because they tend to fall into one or more of the following six traps:

#### 1. The Embarrassment Trap

Deep down, nobody wants to look bad. And if you take a risk and fall flat on your face, you might embarrass yourself. So what? Get over it. The

only way to become better is to take steps forward—even shaky ones that cause you to fall down. Little progress is better than no progress at all. Success comes in taking many small steps. If you stumble in a small step, it rarely matters. Don't gift wrap the garbage. Let little failures go.

#### 2. The Rationalization Trap

**Spend sufficient time confirming the need, and the need will disappear.**

—ED'S FIFTH RULE OF PROCRASTINATION

People who are caught in the rationalization trap second-guess everything they do, and as they prepare to take action, they say to themselves, "Maybe it's really not that important." But the truth is, if you wait long enough, *nothing* is important. Or as Ed's Fifth Rule of Procrastination states, "Spend suf-

ficient time confirming the need, and the need will disappear."

Sydney J. Harris says, "Regret for the things we did can be tempered by time; it is regret for the things we did not do that is inconsolable." If you take risks and fail, you'll have fewer regrets than if you do nothing and fail.

#### 3. The Unrealistic Expectation Trap

For some reason, many people think everything in life should be easy, and when they find out that achievement takes effort, they give up. But success takes hard work.

Consider this Latin proverb: "If there is no wind, row." As you prepare to take a risk, don't expect to get a favorable wind. Begin with the mind-set that you have to row; then if you receive help, it will be a pleasant surprise.

**If there is no wind, row.**

—LATIN PROVERB

#### 4. The Fairness Trap

When psychologist M. Scott Peck begins his book *The Road Less Traveled* with the words "Life is difficult," what he is getting at is life isn't fair. Many people never learn that fact. Instead of acknowledging it and

moving on, they expend their energy trying to find fairness. They say to themselves, "I shouldn't have to be the one to do this."

Dick Butler expands on this idea: "Life isn't fair. It isn't going to be fair. Stop sniveling and whining and go out and make it happen for you." Wishing that a risk wasn't yours to take won't make it any easier. In fact, it might make it harder. Your attitude about it is your choice.

### 5. *The Timing Trap*

Don Marquis, the famous writer and humorist, was known to be a champion procrastinator. A friend who knew of this tendency in Marquis asked him how he ever got his day's work done. "That's simple," said Marquis. "I just pretend that it's yesterday's."

Some people tend to think that there's a perfect time to do everything—and this isn't it. So they wait. But Jim Stovall advises, "Don't wait for all the lights to be green before you leave the house." If you wait for perfect timing, you'll wait forever. And the more you wait, the more tired you'll get. William James wisely declared, "There is nothing so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on of an uncompleted task." Don't use timing as an excuse to procrastinate.

### 6. *The Inspiration Trap*

Someone once said, "You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great." Many people want to wait for inspiration before they are willing to step out and take a risk. I find that's especially true of people with an artistic bent. But as playwright Oscar Wilde said, when he was asked the difference between a professional writer and an amateur, the difference is that an amateur writes when he feels like it; a professional writes regardless.

When it comes to moving forward, Bill Glass gives this advice: "When you get an insight or inspiration, do something about it in twenty-four hours—or the odds are against your ever acting on it."

## ARE YOU TAKING ENOUGH RISKS?

As you examine the way you live, consider whether you are taking enough risks—not senseless ones, but intelligent ones. Even if you don't fall into

one of the six traps I just reviewed, you still may be playing it too safe. How can you tell? By looking at your mistakes.

Fletcher L. Byrom says:

Make sure you generate a reasonable number of mistakes. I know that comes naturally to some people, but too many executives are so afraid of error that they rigidify their organization with checks and counterchecks, discourage innovation, and, in the end, so structure themselves that they will miss the kind of offbeat opportunity that can send a company skyrocketing. So take a look at your record, and if you can come to the end of a year and see that you haven't made any mistakes, then I say, brother, you just haven't tried everything you should have tried.

If you are succeeding in everything you do, then you're probably not pushing yourself hard enough. And that means you're not taking enough risks.

## ANOTHER KIND OF RISK TAKING

You may have trouble relating to the great explorers and adventurers from history such as Amelia Earhart. The risks those people took may seem too different from your life situation. If so, you need to know about the life of someone whose quiet willingness to risk may seem more like your own.

His name was Joseph Lister, and he was a second-generation physician born in England in 1827. Back in the days when he began practicing medicine, surgery was a painful, grisly affair.

If you had the misfortune of being injured and requiring surgery in the mid-1800s, here's what you could have expected: You would have been taken to a hospital's surgical theater, a building that was separate from the main hospital to prevent the regular patients from becoming upset by the screaming. (Anesthesia had not yet been developed.) You would have been strapped to a table that looked a lot like the one in your kitchen, under which sat a tub of sand, positioned to catch blood.

Your surgery would have been performed by a physician or barber likely surrounded by a group of observers and assistants. All of them would be

dressed in the regular street clothes they wore throughout the course of the day while traveling around town and treating patients. The instruments the doctor used would have been pulled from a nearby drawer where they had been placed (unwashed) after the previous surgery. And if your surgeon needed his hands free while working on you, he might have held the surgical knife between his teeth.

Your chances of surviving surgery would be a little better than 50 percent. If you had the misfortune of having your operation in a military hospital, your chances of surviving would go down to about 10 percent. Of surgery during that era, one contemporary doctor wrote, "A man laid on the operating table in one of our surgical hospitals is exposed to more chances of death than the English soldier on the field of Waterloo."

#### DETERMINED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Like the other surgeons of his time, Lister was distressed by the death rate of his patients, but he was ignorant of the cause. However, he was determined to discover a way to save more of his patients.

Lister's first major breakthrough came after he was given some writings by his friend Thomas Anderson, a chemistry professor. The papers were written by scientist Louis Pasteur. In them the French scientist stated his opinion that gangrene was caused not by air, but by bacteria and germs present in air. Lister thought those ideas were remarkable. And he theorized that if the dangerous microbes could be eliminated, his patients would have a better chance of avoiding gangrene, blood poisoning, and the other infections that often killed them.

#### INNOVATION MAKES HIM AN OUTCAST

Because of what we know today about germs and infection, Lister's ideas may seem to be common sense. But his belief was radical in those days—even among members of the medical community. And when Lister, who was working at a hospital in Edinburgh, presented his beliefs to the senior surgeons, he was taunted, ridiculed, and rejected. Each day as he made his rounds, his colleagues insulted and criticized him mercilessly. He was an outcast.

Despite the rejection of his peers and an inherently gentle nature, Lister refused to back down. He continued his work on the problem, but did his research at home. For a long time he and his wife worked in a laboratory they had created in their kitchen. The key, he believed, was to find a substance that would be capable of killing the microbes.

Lister finally settled on carbolic acid, a substance used to clean the sewage system in the city of Carlisle. His preliminary research done, he was ready to test his theory. But that would require another risk, one greater than rejection by his peers—he would have to experiment with carbolic acid on a living patient, not knowing whether it would kill him.

#### A GREATER RISK

Lister determined to wait until he found the right person. It would require someone who faced almost certain death. He found his patient on August 12, 1865. An eleven-year-old boy who had been run over by a cart was brought into the hospital. His leg had been so badly damaged that the broken bones had come through the skin. And his injury was more than eight hours old. He was the kind of patient who usually didn't survive.

Lister used carbolic acid to clean the wound, his instruments, and anything that came into contact with his patient. He also dressed the wound with bandages soaked in the substance. Then he waited. One day, two days, three days, then four days passed. To his joy, after four days there were no signs of fever or blood poisoning. After six weeks, the boy was able to walk again.

Amid heavy criticism, Lister used carbolic acid in all his procedures. During 1865 and 1866, he treated eleven patients with compound fractures, and none of his patients contracted infections. As he continued his new procedures, he did research to improve his methods, finding additional antiseptic substances that worked even better.

#### THE RESULT OF RISK

In 1867, Lister published his findings, and still the medical profession ridiculed him. For more than a decade, he communicated his findings and

encouraged other doctors to adopt his practices. Finally in 1881, sixteen years after his first success with a patient, his peers at the International Medical Congress held in London recognized his advances. They called his work perhaps the greatest advance that surgery had ever made.<sup>8</sup> In 1883, he was knighted. In 1897, he was made a baron. Today, if you've had any kind of surgery, as I have, you owe Dr. Joseph Lister a debt of gratitude. His risk secured our safety.

Lister's risks may not look as flashy as those taken by someone like Amelia Earhart, but that doesn't matter. What he did brought great personal achievement to him and lasting benefits to others. He wasn't content with success as a doctor. He attempted something more difficult—and riskier. And that's what matters. You risk because you have something of value you want to achieve. That's just another part of failing forward.

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*Your Eleventh Step to Failing Forward:*

**If at First You Do Succeed, Try Something Harder**

The willingness to take greater risks is a major key to achieving success, and you may be surprised that it can solve two very different kinds of problems.

First, if you've been hitting all the goals you set for yourself, then you need to increase your willingness to take chances. The road to the next level is always uphill, so you can't coast there.

Conversely, if you find yourself in a place where it seems that you don't achieve many of your goals, you may be playing it too safe. Once again, the answer is a willingness to take greater risks. (It's ironic that opposite ends of the spectrum come together in the area of risk.)

Think about the next big goal ahead of you. Write down your plan for reaching it. Then go over that plan to see whether you have included enough risks. If not, find parts of that process where you can push the envelope, take more chances, and increase your opportunity for success.

*Steps to Failing Forward:*

1. Realize there is one major difference between average people and achieving people.
2. Learn a new definition of *failure*.
3. Remove the "you" from failure.
4. Take action and reduce your fear.
5. Change your response to failure by accepting responsibility.
6. Don't let the failure from outside get inside you.
7. Say good-bye to yesterday.
8. Change yourself, and your world changes.
9. Get over yourself and start giving yourself.
10. Find the benefit in every bad experience.
11. If at first you do succeed, try something harder.