



Nine Reasons to Embrace Failure

I've always heard that "public speaking" is the number one most common fear. According to a recent survey I conducted in my e-newsletter, however, this is not the case. Overwhelmingly my readership chose "failure." Like public speaking, failure is not inherently bad. We're conditioned to avoid it, but there are plenty of reasons to change our perspective. Here are nine advantages to failing:

1. Failure teaches us. Two words I will never misspell are "flexible" and "exchequer." Why? Because each word knocked me out of a junior high spelling bee. Failure creates an emotional experience, so the lessons we learn when it happens stick. Additionally, going through failure narrows down the possible approaches to success. Scientists rely on trial and error in their research. Each failed experiment brings them a little closer to revolutionary breakthroughs. Think of your own efforts as experiments. When you don't get the desired result, figure out why. Then try again with your new knowledge.

2. Failure reveals our ability. You'll never know how much weight you can lift until you reach an amount you can't. Trainers often refer to this as "lifting to failure." Pushing yourself as far as you can lets you know what's possible. By avoiding limits, you'll never reach your peak. The fear of failure stops us a lot shorter than failure itself. So keep going until nothing more is possible. Then celebrate what you've accomplished.

3. Failure makes us stronger. Those same weight lifters who lift to failure also have learned that is the way they build muscle. At first the tissue is damaged, but it'll heal bigger and stronger than before. Soon the athlete will be able to lift more weight. The same is true for our pursuits. Failure strengthens our character. We humans bounce higher than we fall. Know that with each effort, you grow a little stronger.

4. Failure inspires us. When we don't let discouragement hold us back, failure makes our desire burn hotter. Often this inspiration is a wish to avoid another failure. Many people don't know that Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. "It was good because it made me know what disappointment felt like," he told the *Chicago Tribune*. "And I knew that I didn't want to have that feeling ever again." This led to a work ethic that would elevate him to legendary status. If failure makes you work harder or focus more, it's an experience with tremendous value.

Nine Reasons to Embrace Failure

Page 2

5. Failure inspires others. Leaders must take risks. Even when they don't succeed, their courage can still make a difference. In 1980, 18-year-old Terry Fox attempted to raise \$1 million for cancer research by running across the entire length of Canada on a prosthetic leg. He ran 3339 miles before a relapsed cancer ended his quest. He lost his life, but his effort has inspired over \$340 million in donations to date. His "failure" was hardly in vain.

6. Failure builds courage. Becoming more comfortable with failing enables you to take more risks. If you know you can stomach it, it will no longer threaten you. I used to take groups through ropes courses, requiring them to pursue physical challenges thirty feet off the ground. Often participants would fail at the first high event. While some got discouraged, others discovered that failing wasn't so bad. They were proud for having tried in the first place. Knowing that failure was an option made it easier for them to try the next event. Their courage came not from achieving success, but from their willingness to pursue to it. If you're open to failing, you'll readily take more chances.

7. Failure is better than regret. The times I've been denied an opportunity never felt as bad as when I've let opportunities pass me by. At least when we fail, we know. Not trying at all leaves us wondering. Avoid kicking yourself later by taking a leap today.

8. Failure leaves us open to better opportunities. I was once turned down for a job for which I thought I was the perfect candidate. While unemployment can be scary, rejection can be humiliating. After a few weeks of frustration, I was offered another position I hadn't pursued. This opportunity was more interesting and considerably more lucrative. Without an awareness of the big picture, it's easy to perceive failure as misfortune. Maybe it's nature's way of making sure we wind up where we're best suited.

Failure makes success a little sweeter. We appreciate victory more when we've tasted defeat. Life wouldn't be fun if things always worked out. Know that your failure is just part of the game we're all playing.

We expend a lot of energy running from failure. Try embracing it. Find the opportunity in the adversity. If there's a recipe for success, failure might be its primary ingredient.

Motivational speaker Scott Greenberg gives live presentations and workshops all over America. For more information on his programs or leadership books, call 1-800-450-0432 or visit www.scottgreenberg.com.