

Chapter 11

Using Failure Productively

The way we view failure will determine how we will use it in our lives. If we couch failure in shame and discouragement, we will not gain from it. If we choose to see it as an opportunity to find better solutions, we will profit. Dealing with failure productively is dependent on our attitude toward change. If change is a way of life for us, then we will find value in failure.

One of the great internal values of failure is humility; mistakes keep me humble. Mistakes make me improve in patience with others as I see my own inadequacies. Mistakes help me to be more flexible as I come to see ways to improve what I am doing.

The way to change failures into productive results includes these steps:

- a) Admission
- b) Evaluation
- c) Gratitude

The roadblocks to seeing positive results from failures are just the opposite:

- Blame-shifting
- Ignoring
- Resentment

Admission means I am willing to humble myself to admit I am not the all-knowing, all-perfect One. This puts me in the position to be able to learn from the mistake. Remember, one of the tricks of the enemy is to try to make you think you are equal to your Creator...a sure-fire way to get you defocused and tripped up. That is perhaps the easiest and quickest way to learn humility!

One important way to help clients make failure productive is to help them realize that mistakes are inevitable. This gives opportunity then to talk about the difference between humans and their Creator.

As you see in your clients every day, shame and guilt are rivals to productivity. Much shame and guilt comes from not dealing with failures correctly. Refer to chapter 23 to review this topic as needed. For the most part, your clients are risk-takers, perhaps because in many ways they see themselves as having little to lose. Not so in the area of making mistakes. Protecting their own reputation and what little self-concept they have, they cannot afford admitting to mistakes. Consequently, many find it difficult to try something they have previously failed to accomplish. Some are reluctant to attempt change that seems challenging.

Albert Einstein, the noted genius, made mistakes. There are even books written detailing his mistakes!

*A person who never made a mistake
never tried anything new. - Albert Einstein*

Perhaps one of the most famous people to demonstrate productive failure was Thomas Edison. He is noted for making over 1000 workable inventions. His attitude about failure is worth noting.

If I find 10,000 ways something won't work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward. - attributed to Thomas Edison

**“For though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again,
but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes.”**

Proverbs 24:16(NIV)

Evaluation of the failure begins by looking at the eternal consequence of the mistake. I can see some mistakes as laughable. (This applies only to my own mistakes!) Happy are the people who can laugh at themselves! When the mistake is a repeated error that affects other people, it is time for action. Evaluation allows me to determine if I need to take responsibility and make changes.

One of the major reasons humans do not want to face failure and the consequent need to change is a resistance to accountability. Sometimes success over repeated failure includes involving someone who will be honest with you as an accountability partner. This person can also be valuable as a source of feedback for opportunity for change.

When is a mistake more properly labeled as sin? Not all mistakes are sin, and not all sin should be passed off simply as a mistake. God is the One who judges what is sin and He has a way of convicting us through the Holy Spirit. We address sin with repentance and a request for forgiveness. We address our mistakes as opportunities to improve. The Holy Spirit will be happy to tell you if you are mislabeling sin as a mistake.

Gratitude is that step that seals the deal. When I can come to the place to express gratitude for learning from my errors, I will have found the path to productivity.

**“The steps of a man are established by the LORD,
And He delights in his way.
When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong,
Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand.”**

Psalm 37:23-24

The Learning-from-Mistakes Checklist

- Scott Berkun, *Making Things Happen*

Accepting responsibility makes learning possible.

Don't equate making mistakes with being a mistake.

You can't change mistakes, but you can choose how to respond to them.

Growth starts when you can see room for improvement.

Work to understand why it happened and what the factors were.

What information could have avoided the mistake?

What small mistakes, in sequence, contributed to the bigger mistake?

Are there alternatives you should have considered but did not?

What kinds of change are required to avoid making this mistake again? What kinds of change are difficult for you?

How do you think your behavior should/would change if you were in a similar situation again?

Work to understand the mistake until you can make fun of it (or not want to kill others that make fun).

Don't over-compensate: the next situation won't be the same as the last.