

9 Ways to Look at Failure Differently

Posted on October 2, 2016 by Benson Wong

When we think of failure, we usually think about how bad it is or can get. Rarely do we think of ways to look at failure differently.



After all, failure is like fear. It kept us alive in the earlier part of our history here on earth. For example, getting too close to what looks like a giant cat could mean certain death, especially when you see a pile of bones next it. Much too late, we discover it's really a mountain lion!

We live in modern, much safer times. So, we need to start looking at failure from a different perspective; or rather, many perspectives. Here are 9 ways to help you look at failure differently.

1. Failure is just feedback

Fail 100 times, and you may look at those one hundred times as very painful moments. It's a reminder why you suck and ought to just call it quits. Somewhere along the line, you decided that if you get just one more failure, then you are done. After all, only an insane fool will do the same thing over and over again, expecting different results each time.

But how about this. Reframe your perspective: It was one hundred things that did not work. As a result, you now have good reference points on what not to do when you try again.

One perspective keeps you moving forward. The other perspective gets you nowhere.

2. Are you really failing if you are doing your passions?

I can think of several moments in my life when I must have made a fool of myself in the attempt of trying a new hobby. Fortunately, I hardly ever thought about why I sucked so much.

When I did, I quickly asked myself how I could become better. In asking these questions, I realized I had a very good opportunity to learn from the very best.

It's a model I still follow to this day: First of all, really decide to do your passions. The only real way to know what your passions are is to fall into them accidentally by constantly trying new things. You can read about new things all day long but actually experiencing them is a whole other world.

Next, find people (also known as models) better than you and do exactly what they do. Discover what works best for you. Of course, start taking action and look at your results.

3. If you fail, you simply have a knowledge gap.

You just need to work at filling it in. Start looking for new and innovative ways on how you can do so.

Embrace the learning experience and enjoy making mistakes, for we learn from our mistakes.

4. Life is a game.

And it is the same for everything else you do. Let's take a familiar example. The whole of "making money" by earning a living is a game. The way houses are bought and sold is a game. Smart investors use "OPM" (other people's money) to buy houses when they themselves do not have the money upfront. You may fail a bunch of times before getting good at investing real estate but that's just how any game is played.

You find out what rules you can break, what rules you cannot, and what rules you can bend to your will. The only way to figure this all out is by making mistakes. It's also called "failing". In other words, by failing, you find out what works and more importantly what does not.

You have to learn the rules of the game and play it better than the majority of people. And trust me. The majority of the masses will not spend that extra time getting good at something. All it really takes is a few hours a week more than most normal people are willing to spend.

Let's say you spend two extra hours a week learning something and failing in the process. That's one hundred and four (104) extra hours a year you have on top of everyone else. That by default makes you an expert. Think about it: To be an expert simply means you have to know a little more than everyone else.

And people want someone who's been there and done that, even if that person has failed a bunch of times. Failure builds credibility for you as an expert.

After all, who would you trust more? The person that has failed a bunch of times and seen what works and what doesn't? Or, the person that literally just lucked out and has seldom failed? I don't know about you, but I would put my trust in the person that has seen it all, yet continued to build up the will and tenacity to keep going.

5. Express gratitude for failures.

Be grateful that you are taking progressive action towards your goal. Earl Nightingale said it best when he defined success as follows:

Success is the progressive realization of a worthy ideal or goal.

So, love failing and express gratitude in its presence because this means you are doing more than most people ever will: You are taking action and going after your goals.

Express gratitude because you are playing a game, finding more ways that will not work, receiving feedback, and living your life fully and your passions purposefully. You have chosen to live by design.

6. So what if you fail?

Why do we fear failure so much? What do we fear losing? Our financial security? Our health? Our mental sanity? Or, dare I say it...our lives?

The fear of failing harkens back to our early days of living in caves, when venturing out could mean getting attacked by wild animals or other 2-legged critters. In other words, fear of failing was necessary to our survival.

We now live in much different times; yet, that prehistoric fear still grips us. It causes us to freeze in the moment of truth when we are about to take that leap to go after what we really want.

These days, if we fail the worse that can happen is we lose our reputations and maybe the shirt off our backs. With enough time, both can be rebuilt. We can always seek financial aid from the government (at least here in the United States) so we are hardly at risk of starving to death. Need housing? Again, the government can help.

So, the question to ask yourself is this: If I go after what I really want, what is the worst that can happen? Would I be alright if those worst-case scenarios did come true?

7. Failure is a part of success.

One of the common denominators of success is that failure is inevitable. Like a job search, expect to get 99 nos for every one yay. It's the ying and yang of things. You cannot have success with failure. You cannot have happiness without sadness.

In other words, when you have experienced both you have a basis for comparison. How can you come to appreciate success when you've never experienced the death knoll of defeat? How can you be truly happy if you've never fallen to the bottom of the pit? Claw and fight your way to the top! As Winston Churchill quipped, "If you're going through hell, keep going."

Think of it another way: Only about 10% of the population is even interested in reading and self-improvement. If it's easy, everyone would do it. It's a hard path that you and I have chosen. Yet, the rewards at the end of the road—financial freedom, living a life true to your passions and values, and serving others—are worth it.

8. Failure = Dream Stealers

Another reason we fear failing is we care what other people think. We take their criticism to heart. While I believe that people provide criticism (feedback) because they really care I also filter out feedback from those people I call "dream stealers".

Sometimes, our well-meaning friends and relatives are too afraid to go after what they want themselves. In order to make themselves feel better, they criticize us.

Misery truly loves company. Stop caring about what other people think, especially when they are far off the mark. They are the Devil and the Dream Stealers. What matters is only what you think and what you believe.

9. Failing makes you excited and scared at the same time.

If an idea makes you feel excited and scared at the same time, then you are probably heading in the right direction. Likewise, taking action towards attaining that goal and potentially failing is a sign that you are also heading the right way.

Conclusion

Take these 9 new ways of looking at failure differently, and start shifting your perspective today. Remember that we can only achieve success insofar as we are willing to improve ourselves. Our thoughts lead to emotions, be they good or bad. Emotions lead to action or ambivalence. Action, or lack of action, leads to results.

If you want to see where you are in life, look at your results. Question why you have been getting the results you have been getting. What actions do you take? What emotions led to those actions? And more importantly, what thoughts led to those emotions? Is how you are perceiving failure leading you down the wrong path?