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# Work / Life

## The Many Joys of Repeated Failure

### NAVIGATOR

In Western culture, “failure” has a tragic and undeserved reputation as something bad and painful. It’s very unfair, and it holds us back and limits our success. If “failure” had an attorney, it would have an excellent chance of winning a lawsuit for defamation and slander.

Too often, we view failure as reflecting on the person who “failed”. We view them (or ourselves) as having poor judgment, poor skills, or lack of character! How absurd!

There are only a handful of ways to “fail”, and I don’t view any of them as bad.

First, you can “fail” by losing a competition. I remember talking to a high school athlete who defined himself as “slow” because he lost a race with the state’s leading sprinter, and from my days as a counselor, I remember a beautiful and talented woman who defined herself as a “loser” because she once lost in a beauty pageant. How, exactly, are those examples of “failure”?

Second, you can “fail” by not completing a project or achieving a goal. A friend of mine once enrolled in a graduate school, discovered it didn’t suit her needs, and made the very wise decision to drop out and pursue other interests. For years, she was embar-

assed by that and considered it a “failure”. Hmmm.

Third, you may “fail” to get the results you expect. It seems P. T. Barnum’s circus always paraded through town to attract attention and sell tickets. One day, he needed a trumpet player and offered a free ticket. A boy volunteered, picked up the horn, the parade marched off, and the boy was terrible! He couldn’t play a note! Barnum grabbed the horn, shouting, “I thought you said you could play!” The boy’s reply? “How should I know I couldn’t play, I never tried before.”

Fourth, unlike that young man, you can “fail” by refusing to try. Wayne Gretzky once noted, “You miss 100 percent of the shots you don’t take.” Enough said.

Failure is feedback, nothing more and nothing less. Failure means we did not get the results we anticipated when we began a project. It means we learned something different than we expected. Failure means we tried, we were in the game, we took a risk, and got a result. Failure is what makes scientific and economic progress possible. It’s what makes us fully human.

Everyone knows that Thomas Edison

“failed” to create the electric light bulb through many thousands of experiments. Abraham Lincoln failed in business, lost elections, was considered ugly and unlikely to ever succeed, until he became one of our greatest Presidents and saved the Nation. This week, *TIME* magazine has an article about one of Albert Einstein’s “greatest blunders”, a “blunder” astronomers are now using to understand the future of the universe.

A man recently consulted with me, explaining that he had a great idea for a new business but was afraid to start for fear it would “fail”. He wanted assurance that the idea was sound, that his products would sell, that it would be a good investment. He refused to invest even a few dollars buying books, studying the industry, or calling experts because he didn’t want “to waste the money if the idea isn’t going to work”. Well.

The founder of IBM, Thomas Watson, was once asked the secret of success. Without hesitation, he immediately replied, “If you would increase your rate of success, you must first increase your rate of failure.” How very true!

To succeed, you have to get in the game. You have to be willing to be a beginner, a

novice, an amateur, even a fool. You have to start, and, in the beginning, others with more experience, greater resources, or talent may “beat” you. You may “lose”. But, by being in the game, you will learn, you will get results, you will gain experience, wisdom, and insight. And those are precisely the assets that ultimately produce winners!

I recently read the book *Seabiscuit* and highly recommend it. It’s about the greatest racehorse in American history. He wasn’t pretty, he wasn’t tall or sleek or handsome. He lost races, was horribly mistreated, and was put up for auction. But, as you can guess, one man saw the potential, understood how to train him, inspire him, and love him. Together, in the depths of the Great Depression, they became America’s heroes.

Get in the game. Take reasonable, creative risks. Be willing to lose or “fail”. Learn to embrace unexpected and (sometimes) painful or expensive outcomes as part of the tuition for success. Unless you are willing to pay the price, there is no chance to reach the top of the mountain. Go for it!

(Source: Copyright (c) 2000, all rights reserved. U.S. Library of Congress ISSN: 1529-059X Dr. Philip E. Humbert, [Coach@philiphumbert.com](mailto:Coach@philiphumbert.com))

## WEB SITE PICKS

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## INSPIRATION

### Your Parachute

Charles Plumb, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was a jet pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands.

He was captured and spent six years in a communist Vietnamese prison. He survived the ordeal and now lectures on lessons learned from that experience.

One day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, “You’re Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. You were shot down!”

“How in the world did you know that?” asked Plumb.

“I packed your parachute,” the man replied.

Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude. The man pumped his hand and said, “I guess it worked!”

Plumb assured him, “It sure did. If your chute hadn’t worked, I wouldn’t be here today.”

Plumb couldn’t sleep that night, thinking about that man. Plumb says, “I kept wondering what he might have looked like in a Navy uniform: a white hat, a bib in the back, and bell-bottom trousers. I wonder how many times I might have seen him and not even said “Good morning, how are you?” or anything because, you see, I was a fighter pilot, and he was just a sailor.

Plumb thought of the many hours the sailor had spent on a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn’t even know.

Now, Plumb asks his audience, “Who’s packing your parachute?” Everyone has someone who provides what they need to make it through the day.

Plumb also points out that he needed many kinds of parachutes when his plane was shot down over enemy territory—he needed his physical parachute, his mental parachute, his emotional parachute, and his spiritual parachute. He called on all these supports before reaching safety.

Sometimes in the daily challenges that life

gives us, we miss what is really important. We may fail to say hello, please, or thank you, congratulate someone on something wonderful that has happened to them, give a compliment, or just do something nice for no reason.

As you go through this week, this month, this year, recognize people who pack your parachute.

## HEALTH

### Smoking, Cancer, and Wrinkles

Young women should know that after many years of smoking, the skin of a 40-year-old woman has aged an additional 20 years.



If the desire to be beautiful is a more powerful weapon than the fear of lung cancer, the high risk of wrinkles should be a significant deterrent for smoking.

Lung cancer is rising more rapidly among women than among men in the European Union, and in some countries lung cancer among women under 45 years of age is more common than among men in the same age group.

The wrinkle effects are reversible if women quit smoking early enough. But the damage on skin and the subsequent formation of wrinkles is irreversible if smoking continues for decades.

(Source: European Week Against Cancer 2001.)

## HUMOR

### Alternatives to Metric

- Ratio of an igloo’s circumference to its diameter: Eskimo Pi
- 2,000 pounds of Chinese soup: Won ton
- Time it takes to sail 220 yards at 1 nautical mile per hour: Knot-furlong
- 365 days of drinking low-calorie beer: 1 lite year
- 16.5 feet in the Twilight Zone: 1 Rod Serling
- 1,000 aches: 1 kilohertz
- 1 million microphones: 1 megaphone
- 1 million bicycles: 2 megacycles
- 1 millionth of a fish: 1 microfiche
- 10 rations: 1 decoration
- 100 rations: 1 C-ration
- 8 nickels: 2 paradigms
- 20 miles of intravenous tubing at Yale University Hospital: One I.V. League

## WORDS OF WISDOM

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### The Mountain Story

"A son and his father were walking on the mountains.

Suddenly, his son falls, hurts himself, and screams: "AAAhhhhhhhhhh!!!"

To his surprise, he hears the voice repeating, somewhere in the mountain: "AAAhhhhhhhhhh!!!"

Curious, he yells: "Who are you?"

He receives the answer: "Who are you?"

And then he screams to the mountain: "I admire you!"

The voice answers: "I admire you!"

Angered at the response, he screams: "Coward!"

He receives the answer: "Coward!"

He looks to his father and asks: "What's going on?"

The father smiles and says: "My son, pay attention."

Again the man screams: "You are a champion!"

The voice answers: "You are a champion!"

The boy is surprised, but does not understand.

Then the father explains: "People call this ECHO, but really this is LIFE.

It gives you back everything you say or do.

Our life is simply a reflection of our actions.

If you want more love in the world, create more love in your heart.

If you want more competence in your team, improve your competence.

This relationship applies to everything, in all aspects of life;

Life will give you back everything you have given to it."

YOUR LIFE IS NOT A COINCIDENCE. IT'S A REFLECTION OF YOU!"

— Unknown Author

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

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Happiness is not a station you arrive at, but a manner of traveling."

— Margaret Lee Runbeck

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."

— Anais Nin

Life is just a mirror, and what you see out there, you must first see inside of you.

— Wally "Famous" Amos

## FINANCES

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### Two-Week Shelter



The tax code allows you to rent a home (including a vacation home) for up to 14 days per year without having to declare any taxable income. If you own a vacation home in a resort area or near a major sporting event you might collect thousands of dollars without owing tax or losing any tax benefits.

What's more, if you or your spouse is a principal in a sideline business or professional practice, you can rent your vacation home to the company for a retreat or a management meeting. The company can deduct the payment, as long as it's reasonable for the length of the meeting and the time of the year; you won't pick up any taxable income on your personal return, as long as you observe the 14-day limit.

A problem may arise, though, if your spouse runs a business structured as a sole proprietorship; the business may not be able to deduct the rental expense if your spouse owns the vacation home. However, if the property is held in your name (the name of the non-business-owner spouse), the deduction can be taken.

## TECH TIP

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### Hidden Text

Hidden text is really just another formatting option for text, just like bold, underline, etc. Under the menu Format | Font, you'll see "Hidden" down in the options, usually last on the list.

To hide text just highlight the text and choose Format | Font | Hidden, and it'll dis-

appear from the screen (but not from the document).

Having hidden the text, you'll want to see it, naturally. To do that go to Tools | Options | View and under "Formatting Marks" check the box Hidden Text. When you click OK, the hidden text will now show up with dotted underline to indicate it is "Hidden".

Tip: A quick way to display hidden text is to click the Show All toolbar button. This will display hidden text and other formatting marks.

For more advanced users, you can create Styles that include the hidden text option. This will let you hide/unhide blocks of text throughout a document quickly and easily.

When you print the document, you'll see a printing dialog option (under Options) to print hidden text.

### Why use Hidden Text?

There are a few obvious uses for hidden text:

- An exam or test can be prepared as a single document with the answers hidden in the copies printed for the test.

- In a contract or legal document, you can hide sections that don't apply to certain types of clients. Instead of having multiple documents (and the confusion/inconsistency that can result), you can have just one document with hidden text as required.

- Some people use hidden text for comments/alternative text, etc. The reviewing and comments options in Word are actually a better place for this, but you have the choice.

## WORTH KNOWING

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### The Top 10 Strengths (A-C) and How to Manage the Person Who Has Them

In *Now Discover Your Strengths*, Buckingham and Clifton identify and define 32 strengths and then give instructions on how to manage a person having these strengths. Here are the first 10 strengths, a short definition, and 1-2 examples of how to effectively manage such a person for maximum productivity and pleasure.

#### 1. Achiever

DEFINITION: Feels a constant need for achievement. Feels as if every day starts at zero. By the end of the day, she must achieve something tangible in order to feel good about herself.

MANAGE: (a) When there are times that require extra work, call on this person. (b) Recognize that she likes to be busy. Sitting in meetings is likely to be very boring for her. So either let her get her work done or arrange to have her attend only those meetings where you really need her, and she can be fully engaged.

## 2. Activator

DEFINITION: Where can we start? This is a recurring question in his life. He is impatient for action. He feels only action can make things happen. Only action leads to performance.

MANAGE: (a) Ask this person what new goals or improvements should be achieved by your division. Select an area that fits and give him the responsibility for initiating and organizing the project. (b) Assign him to a team that is bogged down and talks more than it performs. He will stir them into action.

## 3. Adaptability

DEFINITION: He lives in the moment. He doesn't see the future as a fixed destination. Instead, he sees it as a place that he creates out of the choices that he makes right now.

MANAGE: (a) This person lives to react and respond. Position him so that his success depends on his ability to accommodate the unforeseen and then run with it. (b) He will be most productive on short-term assignments that require immediate action. He prefers a life filled with many quick skirmishes rather than long, drawn-out campaigns.

## 4. Analytical

DEFINITION: Her analytical theme challenges other people: Prove it. Show me why what you are claiming is true. In the face of this kind of questioning, some will find that their brilliant theories will wither and die.

MANAGE: (a) Every time you have the opportunity, recognize and praise her reasoning ability. She is proud of her disciplined mind. (b) Remember that she has a need for exact, well-researched numbers. Never try to pass shoddy data to her as credible evidence.

## 5. Arranger

DEFINITION: He is a conductor. When faced with a complex situation involving many factors, he enjoys managing all the variables, aligning and realigning them until he is sure he has arranged them in the most productive configuration possible.

MANAGE: (a) This person will thrive on responsibility, so give him as much as you

are able, according to his knowledge and skill levels. (b) He is excited by complex, multifaceted assignments. He will thrive in situations where he has many things going on at the same time.

## 6. Belief

DEFINITION: She has certain core values that are enduring that affect her behavior in many ways. They give her life meaning and satisfaction; in her view, success is more than money and prestige.

MANAGE: (a) This person will have a passion about something. Discover her passion and tie it to the work to be done. (b) Learn about her family and community. She will have made rock-solid commitments there. You will need to understand, appreciate, and honor these commitments, and she will respect you for it.

## 7. Command

DEFINITION: Command leads him to take charge. Unlike some people, he feels no discomfort with imposing his views on others. On the contrary, once his opinion is formed, he needs to share it with others.

MANAGE: (a) When you need to jar a project loose and get things moving again, or when people need to be persuaded, ask this person to take charge. (b) As much as you can, give him the room to lead and make decisions. He will not like to be supervised closely. (c) Never threaten him unless you are 100 percent ready to follow through.

## 8. Communication

DEFINITION: She likes to explain, to host, to speak in public, and to write. Ideas are a dry beginning. Events are static. She feels a need to bring them to life, to energize them, to make them exciting and vivid. She wants to divert people's attention toward her and then capture it, lock it in. This is why people like to listen to her.

MANAGE: (a) Explore with this person how her communication strengths can be developed so she can make an even more significant contribution to the organization. (b) She finds it easy to carry on a conversation. Ask her to come to social gatherings, dinners, or any events where you want to entertain prospects or customers.

## 9. Competition

DEFINITION: Competition is rooted in comparison. When she looks at the world, she is instinctively aware of other people's performance. Their performance is the ultimate yardstick.

MANAGE: (a) Consider that one of the best ways to manage her is to hire another

competitive person who produces more. (b) When this person loses, she may need to mourn for a while. Let her. Then quickly move her into another opportunity to win.

## 10. Connectedness

DEFINITION: Things happen for a reason. He is sure of it. He is sure of it because in his soul he knows that we are all connected.

MANAGE: (a) If you are also strong in connectedness, share articles, writings, and experiences with him. You can reinforce each other's focus. (b) He may be very receptive to thinking about and developing the mission for your organization. He likes to feel part of something larger than himself.

(Source: Susan Dunn, M.A., Clinical Psychology, [sdunn1@satx.rr.com](mailto:sdunn1@satx.rr.com). The original source is *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, Buckingham and Clifton.)

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# FITNESS

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## Short Exercise Bouts

Short bursts of activity daily (such as three 10-minute bouts or two 15-minute bouts) are just as effective as one long session when it comes to burning calories, losing weight, and improving aerobic fitness.

Working in shorter bouts may be easier than trying to find time for one continuous 30-minute bout.

This research adds to a growing body of studies on the beneficial effects of short periods of activity. Ten minutes of moderate exercise daily can also improve mood and reduce fatigue. Just two minutes of stair climbing several times a day can lower total cholesterol, raise HDL cholesterol (the good-guy variety), and improve the resting pulse rate in sedentary young women.

(Source: *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* 2001;20:494-501.)

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## Questions/Comments to:

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An online version of this newsletter may be found at <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/codec/cc/navig-11.pdf>

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