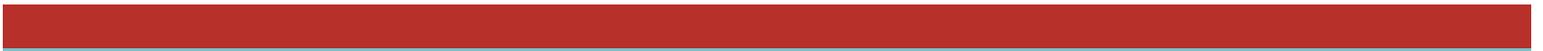


failing successfully



material minds



introduction

Getting over your fear of failure and learning how failure can be a positive experience is one of the keys to your success in this new knowledge economy.

Unfortunately, over the last 30 years there has been a real increase in the fear of failure. It was programs such as Six Sigma that fostered an attitude that failure is bad. While the attitude may have been good in a product-manufacturing environment, once you get away from the product itself, the concept of failure is not as bad.

Once you get over the fact that you will fail at some point in time, missing a deadline, going over budget or substandard work, then you can get on with what you are going to do about failing. You essentially have two choices, you can crash and burn, never to be seen again by the water cooler or you can learn from the mistake and move on

background

New Coke

When it comes down to failures in business there is probably no better story than that of the introduction of "new Coke®". In 1985, The Coca-Cola Company's lead over Pepsi who was its chief competitor had been slowly slipping for 15 consecutive years. Consumer preference for Coca-Cola was dipping, as was consumer awareness. To counteract the declining market share, the Coca-Cola Company decided to do something radical. After performing taste tests with over 200,000 consumers, they decided to change the secret formula for Coca-Cola, the first change to the formula in 99 years. The resulting new formulation for Coke was introduced on April 23, 1985, a day that will live in marketing infamy, spawning consumer angst the likes of which no business has ever seen.



The company hadn't set out to create the firestorm of consumer protest that ensued; instead, they intended to re-energize its Coca-Cola brand and the cola category the United States. When the taste change was announced, some consumers panicked, filling their basements with cases of Coke®. A man in San Antonio, Texas, drove to a local bottler and bought \$1,000 worth of Coca-Cola. Suddenly everyone was talking about Coca-Cola, realizing what an important role it played in his or her life. Protest groups -- such as the Society for the Preservation of the Real Thing and Old Cola Drinkers of America (which claimed to have recruited 100,000 in a drive to bring back "old" Coke) -- popped up around the country. Songs were written to honor the old taste. Protesters at a Coca-Cola event in downtown Atlanta in May carried signs with "We want the real thing" and "Our children will never know refreshment."

Calls flooded in not just to the 800-GET-COKE phone line, but also to Coca-Cola offices across the United States. By June 1985, The Coca-Cola Company was getting 1,500 calls a day on its consumer hotline, compared with 400 a day before the taste change. People seemed to hold any Coca-Cola employee -- from security officers at the headquarters building to their neighbors who worked for Coke -- personally responsible for the change. Mr. Goizueta, the firm's CEO received a letter addressed to "Chief Dodo, The Coca-Cola Company." Another person wrote to him asking for his autograph -- because, in years to come, the signature of "one of the dumbest executives in American business history" would be worth a fortune.



The return of Coke Classic

That firestorm ended with the return of the original formula, now called Coca-Cola classic®, a few months later on July 11, 1985. That July day, the story that the "old" Coca-Cola was returning to store shelves led two network newscasts and made the front page of virtually every major newspaper. Consumers applauded the decision. When the announcement of the return of "old" Coca-Cola was made, those hoarding as many as 900 bottles in their basements could stop their self-imposed rationing and begin to drink the product as they always had -- as often as they'd like. In just two days after the announcement of Coca-Cola classic, The Coca-Cola Company received 31,600 telephone calls on the hotline. Coca-Cola was obviously more than just a soft drink.

The return of original formula Coca-Cola on July 11, 1985, put the cap on 79 days that revolutionized the soft-drink industry, transformed The Coca-Cola Company and stands today as testimony to the power of taking intelligent risks, even when

they don't quite work as intended. "We set out to change the dynamics of sugar colas in the United States, and we did exactly that -- albeit not in the way we had planned," then chairman and chief executive officer Roberto Goizueta said in 1995 at a special employee event honoring the 10-year anniversary of "new Coke." At the 10-year anniversary celebration, Mr. Goizueta characterized the "new Coke" decision as a prime example of "taking intelligent risks." He urged all employees to take intelligent risks in their jobs, saying it was critical to the company's success. The events of 1985 changed forever the dynamics of the soft-drink industry and the success of The Coca-Cola Company, as the Coca-Cola brand soared to new heights and consumers continued to remember the love they have for Coca-Cola.

www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/cokelore_newcoke.html



At some point in time you're bound to fail

If you're going to adopt the concept of materiality and put it into practice by ignoring things that you determine are immaterial and at the same time, you're going to focus on delivering things with speed rather than higher quality, then chances are that you're going to fail. At some point in time, you'll make a decision that something isn't material and perhaps you'll spend less time dealing with it, reducing the quality of work that you're putting into the project. If you are right about what is material and what is not, then you have no problem. If you're wrong however, you've just failed. You've let someone down, made a mistake. I guarantee that at some point, you will fail. The question is whether the gains that you make in gaining some semblance of order in your life by reducing your workload are worth the risk of failure.

Unfortunately, over the last 30 years there has been a real increase in the fear of failure. It was programs such as Six Sigma that fostered an attitude that failure is bad. While the attitude may have been good in a product-manufacturing environment, once you get away from the product itself, the concept of failure is not as bad. However, Six Sigma and its ilk have invaded all sorts of other areas of business and made failure on any terms in any situation, unacceptable.

“Indeed, for a generation of managers weaned on the rigors of Six Sigma error-elimination programs, embracing failure -- gasp! -- is close to blasphemy. Stefan H. Thomke, a professor at Harvard Business School and author of *Experimentation Matters*, says that when he talks to business groups, "I try to be provocative and say: 'Failure is not a bad thing.' I always have lots of people staring at me, [thinking] 'Have you lost your mind?' That's O.K. It gets their attention. [Failure] is so important to the experimental process."

www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06_28/b3992001.htm



Once you get over the fact that you will fail at some point in time, missing a deadline, going over budget or substandard work, then you can get on with what you are going to do about failing. You essentially have two choices, you can crash and burn, never to be seen again by the water cooler or you can learn from the mistake and move on. I think you know what I would advise but first:

fear of failure

What are you likely to fail at?

First of all you need to look at the things that you could fail at. All failure comes when you're trying to do something the first time or when you're trying to change, improve etc. If you're constantly failing at things that are not new then you may be in the wrong job or have some serious thinking to do. Failure also does not mean being unlucky enough to be involved in some activity where random external events kept you from succeeding. People don't usually look upon this as a failure. What people look upon as a failure is delivering something that is either of lower than expected quality, late, or higher than expected cost.



If you are following the advice to only spend time on material things and to do things quickly then it is unlikely that you will fail to deliver something at the expected costs. This is especially true when you are the only element of the cost. If you are doing things quickly then it is likely that speed will not be an issue. What will be at issue is the level of quality. Quality in the knowledge economy is difficult to measure so by acting quickly and getting something done. You have probably not failed but just not delivered enough.

You might prepare a sales proposal without enough detail for the client, a report that doesn't examine all potential outcomes or just answer an email without enough detail. In all of these situations you would have failed.

Why Fear of Failure

Essentially, people are afraid of their prestige in society. People who are afraid of failing are afraid of what other people will think of them. Oddly enough, people are so wrapped up in their own egos that it is unlikely that anyone is even going to think twice if you deliver substandard quality. That is unless you do it all the time. Most people are afraid of their impact on others when for the most part

others don't even notice unless something is egregiously wrong. Think of your own reaction when someone else does something that doesn't meet your expectations. Chances are you'll give that person the benefit of the doubt and just ask them to add a bit more to whatever they gave you. For the first few times you'll chalk it up as a learning experience for the other person and be proud of yourself that you got the chance to be a good coworker and provide direction to the other person. So what to the other person might seem like an abject failure, you saw from your own perspective as a success. Unless the other person does it time and time again, it is likely that you'll forget entirely the situation.

On the other hand if you do fail to deliver quality from time to time because you are only spending time on the material and delivering quickly, you'll get a very positive reputation for speed. You'll get known as someone who is a fast responder, someone who is responsive and gets things done without muss and fuss. I think this is a much better situation to be in because you have reduced your workload while cutting back on quality but gained a reputation for speed.

Go back though to the proposal, the report or the email. What is the likely response from the recipient? It is probably just a question, Can you get me some more information here. They are not likely to be sitting back in their office chair shouting "Failure, Failure, Failure" at the computer.



*"Everybody makes mistakes, Hargrove...
that's why we have termination procedures."*

Symptoms of Fear

Becoming aware of situations where you are afraid of failing is essential in order to know where you should be focusing on speed instead of quality. Fear is simple to diagnose as it comes in only a few forms:

1. Indecision

If you can't make up your mind as to whether or not you should do something or if you should do A versus B then you respond by doing nothing.

2. Doubt

If you're not absolutely certain as to what you should actually be doing or if you can't make up your mind or are apprehensive about your decision then you are experiencing doubt.

3. Worry

If you are uneasy or anxious and you don't feel that you are confident that you made the right decision and you dwell on it over and over then you are worried.

4. Over cautiousness

When you work extra hard to make sure absolutely everything is right or if you check everything over and over again then you're being overcautious.

5. Procrastination

This is my personal favorite, putting things off till later and by deferring action you wait so long that the window of opportunity has closed.

In all of these situations you are compounding your problem of working too hard by not getting at something, taking a risk that you might get it wrong but get it done nonetheless.

Why Failure is Good

Failing though is actually a good thing, not a bad thing. In an interview on 60 Minutes, LeBron James says:

You can't be afraid to fail. It's the only way you succeed. You're not gonna succeed all the time, and I know that. You have to be able to accept failure to get better.

In fact, life is a series of experiments and the more you make the more you'll get out of life. Each failure is a trial or an experiment and as well, an opportunity for growth. Even if the failure costs you financially you are perhaps better off in the long run. It's actually good to fail now and then just to try out new things, to see if you can save some time. Even if you have done something one way for a long time, it's good to shake it up to see if you can eek a bit more productivity.



If you are truly overworked from the effects of the technology revolution then you need to fail in order to get back some sanity in your life. By trying many different ways of ignoring immaterial things or by getting things done fast with less quality than you think advisable then you have the chance to substantially reduce the time you spend doing unnecessary things at work. I worked with someone who would routinely take four days to write a sales proposal. I managed over time to convince him that he could do a proposal that was just as good in an hour and it worked. Eventually he was able to do a sales proposal in an hour and he got just as many questions from a client for that proposal as he did with the one that took four days to write. If you're getting and sending our average 110 emails a day and perhaps 50 of them are substantive, in that they require that you actually do something concrete in terms of reading them and coming up with an answer then if you manage to save just one minute per email you've gained almost an hour of time for yourself

Risks and Consequences

If you're truly ready to take a chance and gloss over the immaterial and go for speed over quality then one way of starting out is to look at the risks of failure. There are two things that you must look at in risk. The first is the risk that you will actually fail and the second is the consequence of that failure. It is probably better to ignore the risk of failure, as this is often difficult to determine. What are easier to determine are the consequences of failure and this is where personal dynamics and your relationships with others come into play. If you have an excellent relationship with any individual then the consequences of failure are likely very small. It is difficult to screw up a good relationship. If however, you don't have a good relationship with someone then the consequences can be very high and not worth saving time on.



In terms of degree of consequences the biggest are with your boss' bosses. If you look bad because you've done something bad for your boss' bosses then your boss will look bad as well and this is something to be avoided at all costs. Next in the list are customers, actual real customers. The consequences of losing business are always bad so it is better not to skimp on work done for them. Next in the list is your boss who is probably very forgiving and will be pleased to know how responsive you are even if you do fail to deliver quality from time to time. Last on the list are coworkers and suppliers who you are not in the business of serving anyway and who can be glossed over if necessary.

Risk is more difficult to figure out when you start out, as it has to do with other people's vision as quality, cost and speed. What is immaterial to you may be material to them and skimping on a task for them because it is material to you might increase your risks. Using this approach to examining risk over time will give you a good indication of what is important and what is not.

Overestimation

One simple reason that many people are overworked is that they overestimate the deliverables on any request. Asked to write a report on a certain issue they spend entirely too much time on analysis and production when the recipient wanted only a brief synopsis. The reason that we spend too much time on getting back to people is that what is material to us is probably not material to them. If in fact it is material to us then it is material because we are responsible for delivering quality cost and speed on that issue. If it is material to us then by definition since the other person does not have responsibility for the same thing then it is very unlikely that it will be material to them. This means that in completing work for other people, we often overestimate the amount of work that needs to be done and over service them.

This is particularly true on doing things for other people who are more senior in an organizational bureaucracy. If they are doing their jobs properly and not micromanaging then those individuals should have a higher level of materiality and should not care about the same details that you do. They will want to know that you are taking care of your details but they will not want or need to know the same level of detail. Delivering quality to them means meeting their required level of detail, not yours so it is likely that you are overestimating the amount of work that needs to be done to meet their needs.



dealing with failure

Plan Ahead

One way of ensuring that you don't spend too much time on something is to plan ahead. In this context, planning ahead is asking a series of questions from whoever you are doing a piece of work to determine their needs. By determining their needs ahead of time it is less likely that you will spend too much time doing something for them. To plan for their needs there are six questions you need to get an answer to before starting work. Be mindful of the fact that this is for major projects, things that will take considerable amounts of time and not for day-to-day interactions.



1. **Who** is the work for? Understanding the end recipient will dictate the consequences and the level of materiality required. If what you're doing is only a single component of a larger deliverable then it is important to figure out who the end recipient is.
2. **What** needs to be done? Is there a simple way of doing it? What is the minimum that can be done to meet the needs of this situation are all questions that should be asked carefully for each project.
3. **Where?** Sometimes but not at all times the question of location comes up. As this is situational, I'll leave it to you to figure out how it applies to a given situation.

4. **When** do you want the work done by? If you are trying to get a reputation for getting things done quickly then it is essential not to mess up on this particular issue.
5. **Why?** Finding out why is of critical importance, as it will assist in the determination of whether something is material or not. Doing something because someone is interested in the answer is entirely different than doing something so a decision can be made. This is particularly true in customer situations where you might spend lots of time when the issue is just interesting and the client actually does not have a budget.
6. **How much?** Figuring out how much could be in terms of cost or time and it leads to figuring out something about the user's expectations. Does the user expect that this will only take a few minutes and will clarifying this expectation help you cut down on what is required?



Fail Quickly

The chances are that if you deliver something that is below the recipient's expectations, they won't even think of it as a failure, just as a miscommunication of expectations. Given the fact that you dealt with the request quickly, the recipient has in all probability, enough time to get you to redo whatever you did, with the added level of quality. If you do something quickly and it isn't enough, it will come back to you. This back and forth process will give you a better understanding of your recipient's needs so that you can adjust what you do the next time. If it's material it will come back again, if not, you're much better off because you've saved yourself all sorts of time. By failing quickly there are no bad repercussions as there is lots of time to repair any situation.

Don't Panic

If you do indeed make a mistake and get called on failing to meet someone's expectations with regard to a particular deliverable the first thing you must not do is panic. Panic never really helps in any situation because it is likely that you're going to make the situation worse if you are not thinking clearly. Always stay calm and think logically about the situation. If you are in this situation then the best thing to do is go back to planning mode. Clearly if you failed it is due to the fact that you didn't fully understand all of the elements of the users needs. If you had understood them then you would have delivered properly and wouldn't be in this bind. So, back to the plan, figure out again what was required and how you missed the requirement and set out to deliver again.

Ask Someone for Help

Many people have the natural reaction of hiding when faced by failure. Instead they should be reaching out and asking for help. There is often a fine line between failure and success and crossing that line can be done often by simply asking someone for help.



Take the Blame

If you find yourself in the position of failing the next thing you should absolutely not do is try to play the blame game by placing the blame on someone else or some other variable in the equation. You may feel you're backed into a corner and try and pin the blame for failure on someone else because in all likelihood you were not the only one involved. However, attacking other people is always seen in management as a way for a person to avoid learning from his or her own mistakes. Instead of that, take the blame; learn from the situation and go on to deliver what was required.

Learn from the Failure

Since failure is a daily occurrence, we shouldn't be afraid of it, in fact we should revel in it as a chance to learn from our mistakes. Failures can teach you about yourself in terms of strengths and weaknesses. It can teach you about others, what you like and do not like and most of all it can teach you how to make your work life more bearable. By taking a risk of failing and reducing the quality of our work we can find out the true needs for quality. In this way we can either be able to make a case to the organization for more resources or cut back on deliverables and save time.

Famous Failures

The famous failures below are now well known and their names are synonymous with success, but it wasn't always this way. At one point the idea of these people reaching the heights they have reached would have seemed absurd. Many didn't just fail, they failed in spectacular fashion.

1 Abraham Lincoln - Former US president Abraham Lincoln first went into politics at the age of 23 when he campaigned for a seat in the Illinois General Assembly and failed. He then opened a general store that failed after only a few months.

2 Robert M Pirsig - His well-known book 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance' was rejected by 121 publishers. Since finally being published in 1974 it has gone on to sell millions of copies in 27 languages.

3 Michael Jordan - The most famous name in basketball was actually cut from his high school basketball team.

4 John Wayne - Before his successful acting career he was rejected from the United States Naval Academy.

5 Steven Spielberg - This household name dropped out of high school and applied to attend film school three times but was unsuccessful due to his C grade average.

6 Beethoven - His music teacher once told him that he was a hopeless composer.

7 Harry S. Truman - This former US President was rejected by the US Military & Naval Academies due to his poor eyesight. At one point he was a clerk in a

newspaper mailroom, and also an usher in a movie theater.

8 Babe Ruth - This baseball legend struck out 1,330 times.

9 Henry Ford - The Ford Motor Co was Henry Ford's third business, the first two didn't work out.

10 Winston Churchill - This former British Prime Minister did poorly in school and had a speech impediment in his early years.

11 Marilyn Monroe - Marilyn Monroe spent much of her younger years in foster homes. One of her first jobs, during the second world war, was inspecting parachutes.

12 Walt Disney - He was fired by the editor of a newspaper for lacking in ideas.

13 Soichiro Honda - The founder of Honda was turned down for an engineering job by Toyota after World War Two.

14 & 15 Masaru Ibuka and Akio Morita - These two were the founders of Sony, but one of their first products was an electric rice cooker. They only sold 100 or so of these cookers because they tended to burn rice rather than cook it.

16 Charles Darwin - His father told him he would amount to nothing and would be a disgrace to himself and his family.

17 Albert Einstein - He learned to speak at a late age and performed poorly in school.

18 Thomas Edison - As a boy he was told by his teacher that he was too stupid to learn anything.

19 John Grisham - This best selling novelist's first novel was rejected by sixteen agents and twelve publishing houses.

20 Isaac Newton - He failed at running the family farm and did poorly in school.

presentoutlook.com/famous-failures/

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