



Demonstrating Leadership in the Face of Failure

By Jason Janoski

We all strive to demonstrate value — to our employers, our clients and to the people who trust us to help them be successful. But we all fail from time to time. It's inevitable. Our failures highlight our deficiencies and flaws, but they give us an opportunity to address and strengthen them. Your ability to rebound and make strides during tough times will demonstrate that you're a teammate who can be counted on, in good times and bad.

Failure is not fun. No one damages a relationship or wrecks a car and says "I *can't* wait to do that again!" The same applies when we fail in our professional lives. Whether we lose a sale, get passed over for a promotion, or don't get that raise — it stings.

Don't give up. More importantly — don't live in denial. Persistence is an admirable and valuable trait, but refusing to acknowledge reality impedes growth. If you can accept criticism and employ the necessary course corrections, you'll demonstrate leadership and foster confidence.

If you can stay engaged and seek to understand — *truly seek to understand* — the circumstances and causes of failure, you'll find fertile ground for improvement. And that kind of introspection will earn respect and make you an asset for your organization.

It's hard to be objective in the throes of defeat. Try to utilize these tactics when you're struggling — they'll help you turn failure into success:

- Don't overreact. We have a natural impulse to over-correct. *As with all things, finding balance is critical.* The difference between adjustment and overreaction can be slight, and an overzealous response could make your situation worse.
- Seek to understand. Some people struggle with failure because they refuse to acknowledge defeat. When you're beaten, it helps to swallow your pride a little bit. Trust your colleagues' observations and wisdom— ask questions. "What can I do better?...more?...less?" "What did you see?" "Have you noticed if I...?"
- Stay engaged. Be open to criticism and resist the urge to point fingers and look for excuses. If you're not tuned in to the criticism, the external factors, and your weak points, you'll miss the silver lining.

- Maintain perspective. Most failures are not catastrophic. Don't let this temporary downturn deter you from pursuing the same opportunity in the future. Panicking or losing your cool in defeat undermines your leadership and lowers morale. Instead, accept that many factors played a role (i.e. a worthy competitor or disadvantageous market conditions) and find ways to mitigate them to strengthen your approach.
- Accept the new reality. In most cases, failure represents a change in the existing paradigm. Old calculations and expectations may no longer be relevant. While this shift can be jarring, it also gives you a chance to recalibrate your perception of the current situation/marketplace/organization.

Each time you go through the process of failure and adjustment, you'll realize that it's not as scary — or painful — as you once thought. Eventually, each failure will become a catalyst for excellence, not the stinging defeat it used to be.