

Fail Your Way to Success

By Nancy Quinn Rummel, ACC

Our biggest failure can also be our greatest success. This may seem like a paradox, but it happens more than we think.

This week my good friend interviewed for a job that is perfect for her, and she was asked to describe her career successes and “mistakes.” She answered that earning her PhD while raising two teenagers was one of her biggest accomplishments and greatest failures because she lost family time in order to achieve her dream.

She forgot to consider, however, how she influenced her two sons in showing them that the importance of education never ends and taking a risk often results in great rewards. She was a busy mom the past four years, but she was also a wonderful role model for them in terms of having the tenacity to execute a plan. So I disagreed that her decision to earn a PhD was in any way a mistake.

This conversation reminded me that we can make a lot of mistakes and still succeed. But we can't succeed if we stop making mistakes. Setbacks are part of any journey. It's when we are too afraid to make a mistake that we stop becoming as successful as we can be.

Tolerating fear of failure becomes easier when we have a path to follow, and a clear vision of what we are determined to achieve. Then the ability and tenacity to execute our plan is essential. A plan is just a plan without the discipline of execution. That's where we see some companies falter. After developing a strategic plan, they fail to provide the leadership to make sure their people do what is necessary to implement the plan.

Realizing that we failed to fully implement a strategic plan can turn out to be a great success. This realization can motivate us to put execution at the core of our culture. Execution is the process of tenaciously following through on our plan, and holding our people accountable for it.

A great business book on this is: “Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done” by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan.