

Making Failure Your Friend

by **John C. Maxwell**

Failure is either your friend or your enemy - and you choose which it is. If you play a dirge every time you fail, then failure will remain your enemy. But if you determine to learn from your failures, you actually benefit from them - and that makes failure your friend.

William Bolitho said, "The most important thing in life is not to capitalize on our gains. Any fool can do that. The really important thing is to profit from your losses. That requires intelligence; and makes the difference between a man of sense and a fool."

Anyone can make failure their friend by maintaining a teachable attitude and using a strategy for learning from their mistakes. To turn your losses into profits, ask the following questions every time you face adversity:

1. WHAT CAUSED THE FAILURE?

You won't learn all you can unless you're willing to find out what went wrong in the first place. Were you in a no-win situation? Is there a certain point when things broke down? Can you pinpoint one central mistake?

After his near death experience on Mount Everest, climber Beck Weathers admitted, "When you're up that far, you get high-altitude stupid."

2. WHAT SUCCESSES ARE CONTAINED IN THE FAILURE?

My friend Warren Wiersbe says, "A realist is an idealist who has gone through the fire and been purified. A skeptic is an idealist who has gone through the fire and been burned." Don't allow the fire of adversity to make you a skeptic. Allow it to purify you.

No matter what kind of adversity you experience, there is always a potential jewel of success contained in it. Sometimes it may be difficult to find. But you can discover it if you're willing to look for it.

3. WHAT CAN I LEARN FROM WHAT HAPPENED?

Unfortunately many people react to adversity the same way Peanuts character Charlie Brown does in a comic strip I once read. Charlie is at the beach and has just finished building a beautiful sand castle. But as he stands back to admire his work, his masterpiece is pummeled by a huge wave. Staring at the smooth mound that had been his creation, he says, "There must be a lesson here, but I don't know what it is."

People that approach adversity like Charlie Brown become so consumed by the events that they miss the whole learning experience. But there is always a way to learn from adversity and mistakes. The key is to always maintain a teachable attitude and embrace the idea that Lord Byron once conveyed: "Adversity is the first path to truth."

4. WHO CAN HELP ME WITH THIS ISSUE?

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of learning: experience, which is gained from you own mistakes, and wisdom, which is learned from the mistakes of others. Admiral Hyman Rickover said, "All of us must become better informed. It is necessary for us to learn from others' mistakes. You will not live long enough to make them all yourself."

As much as possible, glean wisdom from the wise counsel of others. Seek advice, but make sure it's from someone who has successfully handled mistakes or adversities.

5. WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

In their book "Everyone's a Coach," Don Shula and Ken Blanchard state, "Learning is defined as a change in behavior. You haven't learned a thing until you can take action and use it."

When you are able to learn from bad experiences and turn them into something good, you make a major transition in your life. For several years I've taught that people change when they HURT enough that they have to, LEARN enough that they want to, or RECEIVE enough that they are able to. You may have experience with each of those situations. Make sure that they are agents of positive change in your life each time you face them.

Writer Sydney Harris said, "A winner knows how much he still has to learn, even when he is considered an expert by others. A loser wants to be considered an expert by others before he has learned enough to know how little he knows."

Make a new commitment to learn something from every mistake or adverse experience in your life. The lessons are there for the learning. But failure won't reach out and teach you. You must be willing to make failure your friend by seizing the opportunity to learn.

This article is taken from John's upcoming release, "Failing Forward".)

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