

Overcoming Fear of Failure

Overcoming fear of failure is crucial for success. For many highly successful men and women who have accomplished great things in life, failure was merely a stepping stone to achieving greatness. Men like Henry Ford, Winston Churchill and Thomas Edison understood that failing to make the attempt is the 'real' failure and that doing nothing, begets nothing - least of all success. Women like Emily Dickinson and Marie Curie did not succeed initially and certainly had a more difficult time striving towards it in their day.

Why then would someone have a fear of failure?

- **Not knowing what it really takes to succeed.** One reason is that many of us are so focused on success and the appearances of it, that we forget what it really takes to achieve it. We rarely think about failure as being a part of life and how many success stories have emerged from sheer failure. No one talks about how many times Abraham Lincoln failed at getting elected to office before he ended up becoming president (8), how Bill Gates dropped out of Harvard before becoming a sensation in the computer world, or how Michael Jordan failed to make his high school basketball team before becoming one of the greatest basketball players ever. In these times of fast media and instant news, we often see the glamorous side of success rather than the obstacles and hard work it takes to get there.
- **Having unrealistic expectations.** We often expect to succeed on our first attempt at a venture and if we don't, we think we've failed. How realistic is that? Just because we failed a test, got passed over for a promotion, or didn't get a 'yes' asking that cute girl/guy for their phone number, does it mean we will never succeed at it? Not at all! Yet fear of rejection, or perceived failure, stops many from trying again. The same applies in competitive sports. Athletes must learn to accept loss before they discover what it takes to win. In any sport, expecting to win from the onset is totally unrealistic. Failure is part of the process of learning how to win. Likewise, in the entertainment and music businesses. Most 'overnight' successes took years before achieving high levels of success.

In his book *Outliers* Malcolm Gladwell repeatedly talks about the "10,000-Hour Rule", in which he states that the key to success in any field is largely a matter of practicing a specific task for a total of around 10,000 hours. As an example, he brings up that The Beatles performed live in Hamburg, Germany alone over 1,200 times from 1960 to 1964, amassing more than 10,000 hours of playing time. He also points out that Bill Gates met the 10,000-Hour Rule when at the age of 13, he spent some 10,000 hours or more, learning programming on a high school computer that he managed to gain access to. Needless to say, 10,000 hours of practicing anything would include many occurrences of failure, some frustration and falling short of goals.

- **Perfectionism.** Some of us are afraid of failure because we believe we must be perfect. If we make an attempt and then fail at it, we risk looking foolish and therefore feel somehow flawed. For perfectionists everything must be done at a high level with no room for mistakes. They believe that if they can't get something done perfectly, they'd prefer not do it at all. Unfortunately, this type of thinking deprives the perfectionist of real learning and the benefits and value gained from experience.

How to Overcome Fear of Failure

Only by overcoming fear of failure will anyone be able to achieve success in life. Here are some tips on how to eliminate fear and focus on success:

- **Understand and expect that at times you will fail.** Realize that you are human and humans make mistakes. Before any of us learned how to walk, we crawled. We got up, fell down, got up again and continued the process until we could walk expertly.
- **Don't take failure personally.** Instead, view it as a stepping stone. Make certain you learn from it and then apply what you've learned to future situations. Refuse to consider it a character flaw or weakness. Doing so will only prevent you from achieving future success.
- **No one succeeds all of the time, sometimes not even most of the time.** In baseball, star players fail 70% of the time. Babe Ruth's batting average was .342 which means he struck out 66% of the time. Wayne Gretzky's career shooting percentage in hockey was 17.57% meaning he missed 82.43 % of the time. Wayne is also famous for saying "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take." So it is in life. You won't fail at anything if you don't make the attempt. You also won't succeed!
- **Remember that 'failure' has produced many successes.** Consider how many people in history had failed before they became successful and quite likely because of it. Albert Einstein's teacher told him to quit school because; "Einstein, you will never amount to anything!" Ludwig Von Beethoven's music teacher said of him "as a composer, he is hopeless". Henry Ford's first two automobile companies failed.
- **Appreciate the benefits of failure.** Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better." In other words, your chances of getting things right on the first try are slim to none. The more you try, the better you'll get at it.
- **Believe in yourself.** Rather than giving up when things don't work out, take it as an opportunity to build perseverance and resolve. Believe that you've got what it takes to work through the obstacles and difficult times. Remind yourself how many failures became successful because they wouldn't give up. The wonderful poem "*Don't Quit*" by Edgar Albert Guest is an inspiring illustration of that mindset.