



# DEALING WITH SETBACKS

## DETOURS ON THE ROAD TO SUCCESS



**INSIGHT 1** Failures can be stepping stones to success.

### CONSIDER THIS

"Whenever an error pops up, the usual response is 'Jeez, another screw up, what went wrong this time?' The creative thinker, on the other hand, will realize the potential value of errors, and perhaps say something like, 'Would you look at that! Where can it lead our thinking?' And then he or she will go on to use the error as a stepping stone to a new idea. As a matter of fact, the whole history of discovery is filled with people who used erroneous assumptions and failed ideas as stepping stones to new ideas."

—Roger von Oech, *A Whack on the Side of the Head* (New York: Warner Books, 1983), p. 90.

## A New Perspective on Failure

### INVENTION BY MUTATION

"[Thomas] Edison came upon many of his inventions while looking for something else. His ability to transform one invention into another--invention by mutation, rather than flashes of inspiration--produced the phonograph as well as the incandescent light, motion-picture projector, and a microphone-like carbon transmitter that improved the telephone's audibility."

—Elizabeth Newhouse et al., eds. *Inventors and Discoverers* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1988), p. 56.

### REAL BENEFITS

A failure is a man who has blundered but is not able to cash in on the experience. —Elbert Hubbard, American writer (1856-1915)



### DISCUSS

What things would you attempt if you knew that it was impossible to fail?



### DISCUSS

Have you ever made an error that led you to an even better idea?



### DISCUSS

It's easy to look back with wisdom about the past. But what about now? Think of a current problem or setback you're struggling with. Does the difficulty suggest any new approaches or ideas?



"There is the greatest practical benefit in making a few failures early in life." —T.H. Huxley, English biologist, (825-1895)



**INSIGHT 2** The greatest successes were often failures.

**RESUMÉ: ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

- 1832 Defeated for State Legislature
- 1836 Elected to State Legislature
- 1838 Defeated for Speaker
- 1840 Defeated for Elector
- 1843 Defeated for Congress
- 1846 Elected to Congress
- 1848 Defeated for re-election to Congress
- 1855 Defeated for the Senate
- 1856 Defeated for Vice-President
- 1858 Defeated again for the Senate
- 1861 Elected President of the United States

*“There lies the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen...”*

–Edwin M. Stanton, Lincoln’s Secretary of War, after Lincoln was assassinated.



**DISCUSS**

What do you think enables some people to keep going even in the face of repeated failure? Does your view of failure keep you from persevering? What would, or does, help you most to keep going?



**INSIGHT 3** There is risk of failure in anything you do.

**OTHERS ON RISK**

“There’s as much risk in doing nothing as in doing something.” –Anonymous

“A man sits as many risks as he runs.”  
–Henry Thoreau, American writer (1817-1862).

“During the first period of a man’s life the greatest danger is not to take the risk.”  
–Soren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher (1813-1855).

**Why We Fear Failure**



**PLIGHT 1** We’re conditioned by our culture.

**LIFE IS A LOT LIKE INVENTING**

“An inventor is almost always failing. He tries and fails maybe a thousand times. If he succeeds once he’s in... We often say that the biggest job we have is to teach a newly hired employee how to fail intelligently. We have to train him to experiment over and over and to keep on trying and failing until he learns what will work.”

–Charles Kettering, American automotive pioneer (1876-1958)



**DISCUSS**

In what ways do you think our society heightens our fear of failure?



## PLIGHT 2 We're afraid of how it will make us look.

### FEAR OF FLYING--AND FALLING

"...there are people who always resist learning anything new because they cannot tolerate being beginners. They would rather narrow their choices, limit their pleasures, constrict their lives than look--for even a little while--like fools."

–Judith Viorst, *"The Smartest People are Sometimes Fools,"* Redbook



### DISCUSS

Has there ever been something you really wanted to try, but didn't because you were afraid of what other people would think? How do you know when it is worthwhile to take the risk, regardless of what others might think?

**"The fear of making a mistake is, of course, rooted in insecurity..."**

–James L. Adams, *Conceptual Blockbusting* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1974), p. 45.

## How to Turn Failure into Success

**TIP NO. 1** Don't take it personally.

### OPTIMISM VS. PESSIMISM

"Optimism...is a handy measure of a person's self-worth. According to Martin Seligman, a University of Pennsylvania psychologist, how people respond to setbacks--optimistically or pessimistically--is a fairly accurate indicator of how well they will succeed in school, in sports and in certain kinds of work...People with an optimistic view of life tend to treat obstacles and setbacks as temporary (and therefore surmountable). Pessimists take them personally; what others see as fleeting, localized impediments, they view as pervasive and permanent." –Alice Park, *"One Way to Test Your EW,"* Time, 2 October 1995, pp. 64, 65.



### DISCUSS

What keeps you from having an optimistic outlook, and why?

**TIP NO. 2** Lose your fear of what others might think.

### SOME THINGS OTHERS HAVE THOUGHT...

"You ain't goin' nowhere, son. You ought to go back to drivin' a truck."

–Jim Denny, manager of the Grand Ole Opry, to Elvis Presley in 1954.

"We don't like their sound. Groups of guitars are on the way out."

–A Decca Recording Company executive, turning down the Beatles in 1962.

"The singer will have to go."

–The new manager of the Rolling Stones, upon hearing Mick Jagger in 1963.



### NO FEAR

"The fear of man is a dangerous trap, but to trust in God brings safety." –Solomon, a King of Israel

**Solomon's writings are a collection of practical insights for living life successfully. Written almost 3,000 years ago, they offer ancient wisdom on the keys to success, peace, and fulfillment in life.**

## GOOD MIX

"True humility and respect for the Lord lead a man to riches, honor and long life." –Solomon

## WHAT GOD IS LIKE

In the Bible, God is described as:

All-powerful	All-knowing
Fair	Merciful
Eternal	Loving
Totally good	Pure
The Creator	In complete control...and more.



## DISCUSS

Why might humility and respect for God lead to success?

## A SHORT STORY

"[A man once went] off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities. Then he left. Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master's investment. The second did the same. But the man with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried his master's money.

"After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them. The one given five thousand dollars showed him how he had doubled his investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.'

"The servant with the two thousand showed how he also had doubled his master's investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.' The servant given one thousand said, 'Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent.'

"The master was furious. 'That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest.

"Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this "play-it-safe" who won't go out on a limb."  
–Matthew 25:14-30a, from [The Message](#)



## DISCUSS

Do you think this story is really about money?  
Why was the master so upset with his servant?  
What was the principle Jesus wanted us to understand?

**The book of Matthew is one of four histories of the life and teachings of Jesus found in the Bible. Jesus often taught using "parables." A parable is a short, fictional story that communicates a spiritual principle.**

## LONG NECK

"If the Creator had a purpose in equipping us with a neck, he surely would have meant for us to stick it out." –Arthur Koestler, British writer (1905-1983)

## ON PLANNING

"If God be your partner, make your plans large."  
–D.L. Moody, American minister (1837-1899)



## APPLICATION

1. What is the greatest obstacle or setback I currently face?
2. Could this setback be a detour on the road to success? How?
3. What do I think God expects of me in this situation, and in my life as a whole?