

Taking Advantage of Failure

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Failure is inevitable. So why are we all so afraid to fail?

Encouraging failure is very easy to apply to highly competitive industries that rely on constant innovation in products or processes. Many notable leaders in tech industries have been vocal about their encouragement of failure and its importance for overall success. It may not translate as directly, but the same idea can be applied to the everyday workplace and result in increased productivity, morale, and employee retention.

Often, the fear of failure does not come solely from the fact of failure but rather from the secondary consequences such as missing a deadline, letting your team down, embarrassment, or loss of self-esteem. These are all logical fears, and if someone is feeling this way, it likely means that they care about their work and how they are perceived by their peers. This overall fear can cause a great amount of anxiety and stress that prevents you from taking advantage of the opportunity failure provides. Failure offers you the chance to learn from mistakes and grow as a professional not only from the specific mistake itself but how you handle it and move forward. It is important to remember that failure is just an outcome and not a direct reflection of the individual.

As with many aspects of an organization, it all starts from the top. It is important for leaders to tolerate failure and not overly criticize and control others. Over time, this will create a culture that encourages support and communication when it comes to mistakes or challenges. Communication is a key part of this process, and all members of the organization should feel comfortable communicating with one another regardless of status or position. In a culture that is

not supportive, the pressure and anxiety one might feel on a project or task can cause them to think they need to figure it out on their own and not reach out for assistance. A workplace with that type of environment will only result in more mistakes reaching the point of no return. If individuals feel comfortable, it will be much easier to have a conversation earlier in the process to work through questions and avoid mistakes. This is even more important now as we have seen the workplace environment change over the past three years with the implementation of remote work and hybrid work schedules. While there are many positive aspects of remote work, it can also lead to people feeling isolated and diminishing their communication.

I have had the pleasure of working with leaders who openly admit mistakes and do not make excuses or pass the blame. This immediately gives a sense of relatability to their subordinates and exhibits that their success did not come without mistakes along the way. Openly admitting to mistakes allows for collaboration, which in the long run, will lead to earlier conversations about challenges as employees feel comfortable starting the discussion. It also provides a great amount of encouragement that can lead to longer success and tenure within a given organization.

It is helpful to remember how you felt as a new or inexperienced member of the workplace. Simple actions of honesty and support can go a long way.