8 KEYS OF EXCELLENCE

Acknowledgment: Failure Leads to Success
Learn from your mistakes—view failures as information you need to learn, grow, and succeed.

The only real failure is not learning from your mistakes. Our failures provide us with valuable gifts—they give us the information we need so that we can succeed next time. The only path to success is stepping out of your comfort zone and being willing to risk. What keeps us from taking risks? It’s often our feeling that failure is negative and our fear that failing will cause us shame and guilt. How would you act if you knew that failure is virtually your only path to success? We know this because nearly all successful people failed a lot. But they learned, tried a new way, and went on to succeed.

Think about the meaning of ‘failure’
If I say the word ‘failure,’ what emotion does it bring to mind for you? Guilt? Shame? Inadequacy? Not a pretty picture. Failure is the label we stick on unsuccessful ventures. It’s practically synonymous with incompetence. The word alone brings up feelings of embarrassment and regret.

When we fail, we automatically send ourselves negative messages. We discourage ourselves from trying again, because if we try we risk another failure. It’s true that when you give up trying, you don’t have to face the possibility of another failure. But you’ll have close to zero chance of achieving success. In order to really succeed, you’ve got to be willing to fall on your face a few times.

You didn’t start out being afraid of failing or hating to fail. When you were little, failure didn’t weigh you down with emotional sludge. When you failed as a toddler learning to walk, you stood up and kept on going. It was the same when you were learning to ride a bike. But somewhere along the way you learned that trying and not succeeding was bad. That turned into trying was bad, and then that you were bad.

Your failures by themselves aren’t so terrible for the most part. It’s how you think about them that gives them the power to shut you down.
When you fail, you experience two types of consequences: internal and external. The external consequences are what happen in the world as a result of your failure.

The internal consequences are what happen inside you: the emotional impact of your failure. That math exam you botched last year? The external consequences were a bad grade and maybe a serious lecture from your parents. The internal consequences were those persistent little demons that whispered, “You’re no good at math. You’re too stupid to do this.” The bad grade came and went—the little voices stayed.

Because our society views failure in a negative way, we learn to avoid trying new things. Instead of risking failure, we fall back into the comfort zone of the familiar, the tried and true. In order to avoid embarrassment or other negative aspects of failure, we let fabulous opportunities pass us by. If you’re going to harness the power that lies within your failures, you’ll have to change the way you think about them. Learn to see them for the gifts they are.

Failure is not just one possible path, it’s practically the only path to success. It’s necessary. It’s required. You can’t succeed without learning. And in order to learn, you have to risk failure. Learning doesn’t happen in an atmosphere of fear. Why not? Because fear shuts down the experimentation process. People don’t take risks when they’re afraid. They won’t try something new. And what is learning if not trying new things? You can’t succeed if you can’t grow. You can’t grow if you can’t learn. You can’t learn if you can’t fail.

Of course, there’s a huge difference between appropriate and inappropriate risk. Not all risks are of equal value, and not all risks are worth taking. Deciding the value of a risk is a skill like any other. Weigh the rewards of each risk against its potential outcomes, and look at the circumstances in terms of their impact on your inner vision.

**Treat failure as a learning process**

You have to risk failure in order to learn anything. Whether you fail or not, risk-taking alone is a powerful learning tool. But the actual experience of failing is the fastest way to learn. Failure vastly improves your odds of success, particularly in the long run, because it tells you what to do—and what not to do—next. When you analyze your failures and figure out where you went wrong, you’re teaching yourself, literally by trial and error, how to go right. Failing is a great way to learn and grow.

**Mobilize your failures—turn defeat into victory**

Treat your failures as gifts. Whenever you fail, the universe has just handed you a piece of wisdom. Don’t let it go to waste. Mine it for all it’s worth. Ask yourself . . .

- What happened?
• What did I learn?
• What will I do differently next time?

“Life is a series of outcomes,” says Simone Carruthers, psychologist and business consultant. “Sometimes the outcome is what you want. Great! Figure out what you did right. Sometimes the outcome is what you don’t want. Great! Figure out what you did so you don’t do it again.”

The only time you’ve really failed is when you fail to learn from your mistakes.

I grow by learning from my failures!