



Making Failure Your Friend

Most school children can tell you how the American Revolution began. We've all learned about the battle of Bunker Hill, "No taxation without representation!" and the first shot "heard 'round the world" in Concord. And most historians will tell you that the French and Indian War planted the seeds for the American Revolution. But do you know how the French and Indian War began? A war that engulfed Europe in the Seven Years War and cost the British crown one of its most valiant generals?

It seems that the French were inciting Indians in the Ohio territory to raid and kill English settlers in the mid 1700s. The King of England dispatched a squadron of troops and allied Indians under the command of a young, untested Major. When they arrived a minor skirmish took place and the leading French official was captured. As the young major discussed surrender terms with him, one of the allied British Indians struck down the French official and killed him. Several weeks later, the French sent in an overwhelming force to conquer the British and force a surrender. The young major was forced to sign a formal surrender written in French. He could only read English and thought the document said that he simply surrendered his post. The statement actually was a pre-written confession that he, himself had murdered the French official. France declared war on Great Britain and the Seven Years War began in Europe.

On the American continent, it was known as the French and Indian War. Britain won, but not without paying a high cost. General Wolff was killed at the Battle of Quebec. France ceded Canada to Great Britain, but the cost of the war forced the British government to raise taxes on the American colonies. Their protection came at a high price. You've heard the stories about a one-night tax revolt known as the Boston Tea Party, and Paul Revere's midnight ride, but what happened to the young British Major?

Disgraced and humiliated, the king never assigned him a prominent command again. In fact he was so desirous to serve in battle, that he attended the First Continental Congress in his militia uniform, hoping to catch the eye of the delegates and gain a command. He was successful in this attempt. They gave him command of the entire Continental army. His name? George Washington. But George learned from his mistakes and failures. He had become a successful landowner. Through marriage, he owned a large tract of property, known as Mount Vernon. Throughout the war he sought the best commanders to keep the King's Army at bay. In the same way, we can learn from our mistakes and turn deficits into dividends. We need to learn two facts:

1. Everyone is going to fail. A football coach once said he was glad to lose his first game. It took the pressure of a perfect season off his shoulders. Quit trying to avoid a loss. Everybody fails at some point. Learn to anticipate failure with a positive attitude. Mother Teresa called Failure "the kiss of Jesus" on her life and looked forward to what her failures could teach her. That brings us to the second fact. Babe Ruth holds the major league record for strikeouts. Mickey Mantle, one of the greatest hitters in the history of baseball, had the equivalent of seven seasons in times he got to the plate and never got a hit. You are never so close to victory as when you are defeated in a good cause.

2. Everyone can learn from failure. Not everyone knows this. They fail, cover it up and try to act like nothing has happened. Ivory Soap is the result of a chemical "flaw." It isn't pure soap so it floats. Rather than discard the results, they used it as a marketing campaign. Their advertisements proudly proclaimed that it was 99 44/100% real soap. By the way, as a result of the minor air that is in the soap, Ivory Soap floats. They turned that into an advertising plus, also. Either they cover it up or, they never get over it and live a life of despair. History says that George Pickett, the Southern General who led the famous ill-fated charge at the Civil War Battle of Gettysburg never got over the loss. He blamed it on Robert E. Lee the rest of his life.

When life shuts a door in your face, look for the window of opportunity you can crawl through. We can overcome our failures and move on to greater things. History teaches this lesson repeatedly. There is a difference between saying, "I failed," and saying "I'm a failure." Change your phrases. Change your attitude. Most people won't see you as a failure unless you project that image out to them. Henry Ford and the founder of Honda failed numerous times before attaining the successes they are known for. These men credited their successes to their failures. They knew how to pass on their lessons to others and future generations.

Remember the story about George Washington? One of his favorite generals was Benjamin Lincoln. Lincoln was a New Englander and a good commander. He fought bravely and successfully at the Battle of Saratoga. Washington gave him command of the forces at Charleston, South Carolina (the 4th largest city in America at the time). Lincoln attempted to take the port city of Savannah, Georgia, but was repelled back to Charleston. Several months later, General Henry Clinton, of His Majesty's Army, forced Lincoln to surrender his Southern Department and the city of Charleston. This was the largest surrender of American personnel during the war. Lincoln would be known forever for the defeat he suffered. But the story doesn't end there.

Six months later he was freed in a prisoner exchange and immediately rejoined Washington on the Hudson River. Less than a year later, he assisted in the Siege of Yorktown. At the surrender of the British, Lord General Cornwallis refused to be present for the official ceremony of surrender. He sent a subordinate to give his sword to George Washington. Washington refused to accept the surrender from a subordinate and appointed Benjamin Lincoln to accept Lord Cornwallis' sword. This man who had overseen the largest American defeat of the Revolutionary War was elevated to "hero" by officially receiving the British surrender and the end of hostilities. Washington failed in his first command. He learned about failure and overcoming it to become the "Father of his country." He passed along his experience by elevating Benjamin Lincoln to command and victor at Yorktown.

The issue is not, "Are you going to fail?" -That fact is certain. The issue is "What are you going to do with you failure?" Use each day as an opportunity to seek out the lessons failure can teach you and turn your deficits into dividends for success.

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