

2010

## How Do I Fail (as a Leader and Otherwise)?

### We Will Fail and God Knows It

It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all – in which case, you fail by default. – JK Rowling.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:31–34 ESV)

And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” Peter said to him, “Even though they all fall away, I will not.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” But he said emphatically, “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And they all said the same. (Mark 14:27–31 ESV)

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15–17 ESV)

## Learn From Your Failures and Move On

- Analyze your failure
  - What went right?
  - What went wrong?
    - Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly. (Proverbs 26:11 ESV)
- Perform a self-exam
  - Ask, “Am I being infected by my failure?”
- Ask for and listen to feedback

When feedback is:	Most people:	But good failers (alchemists):
Personally offensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow anger and defensiveness to cloud their understanding</li> <li>○ Provide explanations, which speakers usually dismiss as excuses</li> <li>○ All the emotional tone to escalate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Listen carefully to the message while managing their emotions</li> <li>○ Don't immediately try to explain their actions</li> <li>○ Maintain a neutral tone</li> </ul>
Inaccurate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reflexively questions the feedback's accuracy</li> <li>○ Focus on all the feedback's inaccuracies</li> <li>○ React to the literal meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Postpone accuracy considerations until later</li> <li>○ Focus on the accuracies</li> <li>○ Look beyond the literal meaning to learn about the people's perceptions, assumptions, and attitudes</li> </ul>
Irrelevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Focus on all the feedback, pertinent or not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Focus on just the information that can help them deal with the problems they face</li> </ul>
Unbalanced (Exaggerates the negative and ignores the positive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lose touch with their own strengths and so remain vulnerable to obsessing with their weaknesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Place negative feedback in the context of prior positive feedback from others, as well as generate their own internal positive feedback messages</li> </ul>

(Harvard Business Review April 2007)

## Ultimately, Failure No Longer Defines Us

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

(Romans 3:23–25 ESV)

If our moral failures have been forgiven by God, what's the worst that can happen if you fail as a leader (specific context of failure in a venture or program, etc.) Because failure does not define us. Christians are a group of forgiven failures.

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:20–24 ESV)