



Failing Forward: Turning mistakes into stepping stones for success

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Author bio and credits: John Maxwell is an expert on leadership. He has written more than 20 books and speaks to more than 250,000 people every year.

Author's Big Thought: The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and their response to failure. This impacts every aspect of their lives. Failure is not a single event, it is a process.

Chapters:

Chapter 1. Realize that there is one major difference between average people and achieving people

Chapter 2: Learn a new definition of failure and success. People are too quick to isolate events in their life and label them as failure – need to see them in the context of the bigger picture

7 things failure is not:

1. Failure is not avoidable – humans are bound to fail sooner or later.
2. Failure is not an event, but a process. Success is not a destination – it is the journey you take and what you do day to day – success is a process, and so is failure.
3. Failure is not objective. You are the only person who can label your actions a failure.
4. Failure is not the enemy – it takes adversity to achieve success. It is fertilizer.
5. Failure is not irreversible.
6. Failure is not a stigma – they are not permanent markers. Make each failure a step to success
7. Failure is not final – failure is simply a price we pay to achieve success and if we learn to embrace that new definition of failure, then we can move ahead. It's the price you pay for success

Chapter 3: If you have failed, are you a failure? Remove the “ u” from failure

Three ways people respond to fear of failing:

1. Paralysis – people stop doing anything that might lead to failure
2. Procrastination – steals people time, productivity
3. Purposelessness – avoidance of pain of making mistakes – inactivity.

Can't avoid fear – to conquer it, you have to feel the fear and take action anyway. You have to know that you will make mistakes. As soon as you take action it gets easier.

Experience gains competence. The whole process starts with action.

Fear also paralyzes high achievers. When it comes to overcoming failure – you have to take action to reduce your fear.

Chapter 4: Find the exit off the failure freeway. People who get used to failure make the same mistake over and over. If you always do what you've always done then you will always get what you've always gotten. The people who stay on the failure freeway see every obstacle as someone's fault.

Chapter 5: Change your response to failure by accepting responsibility

People's reactions to failure

1. They are angry – taking frustration out on others
2. They cover up mistakes.
3. They speed up – try to leave troubles behind by working harder and faster, but without changing direction.
4. They back up. May lie first and then back up to cover up. Need to be able to admit it.
5. They give up.

Every failure is an opportunity to take the right action and begin again. Need to take full responsibility and admit mistakes. It takes character – we need to get ahead of ourselves and take responsibility for our actions.

Chapter 6: Don't let failure outside of you get inside of you. No matter what happens to you, failure is an inside job. We can't control the cards we're dealt, but we can control the way we handle them. Start by cultivating the right attitude. The law of human behavior- sooner or later we get exactly what we expect – is this optimistic or pessimistic? – The answer reflects your attitude.

Martin Seligman observes that people who bounce back are optimists. No matter your natural bent, you can cultivate optimism by learning contentment.

Contentment is not:

1. Containing your emotions.
2. It's not maintaining your current situation it means having a good attitude as work yourself out of it
3. Not power or money – true contentment comes from having a positive attitude – seeing solutions in every problem, believing in yourself and holding on to hope. No matter what happens to you a positive attitude comes from within.

Handicaps can only disable us if we let them. The real and lasting limitations are created in our minds.

Chapter 7: Say goodbye to yesterday -is the past holding your life hostage? The ability to put things behind and move on is important. Tragedies don't have to stop a person from being productive and moving forward. No matter how dark a person's past is, it need not color their future. People experience either a breakdown or breakthrough.

Signs of being held hostage by their past:

1. Comparison
2. Rationalization – excuses never lead to achievement
3. Isolation – withdrawal
4. Regret – it saps a person's energy
5. Bitterness – the inevitable consequence of not processing old injuries.

Past hurts can make you bitter or better – it's up to you.

Start by acknowledging the pain.

Forgive others or yourself if need be.

Chapter 8: Change yourself and your world changes: Who is this person who keeps making these mistakes?

If you are continuing facing obstacles – make sure that you are not the problem. Why are people so hesitant to change? They don't know what their strengths are. To reach your potential you need to know who you are

- See yourself clearly – need to see both good and bad
- Admit your flaws accurately – own up to what you can do or should not do
- Work on your strengths – to excel do what you do well.
- Build on your strengths passionately.

Not pursuing what you want is a problem of motivation, not achieving is a problem of persistence.

Chapter 9: Get over yourself and start giving yourself. Get over yourself, everyone else has. Turn attention away from yourself and toward helping others. Anybody can touch the lives of others and make a difference. If you have a history of repeated failure may have to find another way of thinking – improve approach to success – need to think of others and not just be self-absorbed. Most people are too insecure to help others.

Developing a giving spirit helps overcome feelings of deficiency in a positive way.

If you want to overcome failure you have to get over yourself and start thinking of others. – How to add value to others:

1. Put others first in your thinking when you meet them.
2. Find out what others need – what do they value – how they spend their time and money is a clue to what they value.
3. Meeting the needs of others with excellence and generosity – offer your best with no thought to what you'll receive in return. Giving is the highest level of living.

Chapter 10: Find the benefit in every bad experience. Grasp the positive effects of negative incidents. The only way you can get ahead is to fail early, fail often and fail forward. Every dream that people achieve comes from attention to a process. The process of success comes from repeated failure. Adversity should be expected in the process of succeeding.

The benefits of adversity are many:

1. Adversity creates resilience
2. Adversity develops maturity – maturity with flexibility becomes increasingly more important. Those qualities come from facing adversity. The problems we face and overcome prepare our hearts for future difficulties.
3. Adversity pushes the envelope of future performance. Each fall makes you able to risk more
4. Adversity provides greater opportunities.
5. Adversity prompts innovation.
6. Adversity brings unexpected benefits. E.g. Edison and the phonograph.
7. Adversity motivates

There are almost always positive benefits from negative experiences – just have to look for them.

Chapter 11: Take a risk – there is no other way to fail forward.

Risk allows for pioneering. Nothing can be accomplished if we don't take any chances at all. How do you judge if some activity is worth the risk? Risk must be evaluated neither by the fear that it generates nor by the probability of success but by the value of the goal.

If at first you do succeed – try something harder. Decide whether the goal is worth the risk involved – everything in life is risky. There are no safe places – avoiding danger is not any safer. Also risk failure when you stand still and don't try anything new. The more you risk failure and actually fail – the greater the chances for success.

People fall into one or more of the following traps:

1. The embarrassment trap.
2. The rationalization trap – people who second-guess everything they do and then decide it isn't important.
3. The unrealistic expectation trap – success takes hard work.
4. The fairness trap – life is not fair, and that's a fact.
5. The timing trap – there is no perfect time to do anything – don't wait for all the lights to be green to leave the house.
6. The inspiration trap – you don't have to be great to start but you do have to start to be great.

How can you tell if you are playing it too safe – if you succeed at everything you are doing, you are not taking risks.

Chapter 12: Learn from a bad experience and make failure your best friend. Failure is either your best friend or your enemy. If you learn from your failures then it can become your best friend.

All it requires is your attitude. The attitude after failure defines your altitude after failure. *Ask the following question*

1. What caused the failure? Where did things fall down? Did you make a mistake? Did others make a mistake?
2. Was what happened truly a failure or where did things fall short – was the goal unrealistic?
3. What successes are contained in the failure?
4. What can I learn from what happened?
5. Am I grateful for the experience? Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.
6. How can I turn this into a success? Draw dividends from defeat – analyze defeat and determine how to use it for your benefit.
7. Who can help me with this issue? Learn from the mistakes from others as much as possible
8. Where do I go from here? Once all the thinking is done take action and use the experience.

Chapter 13: Work on the weakness that weakens you. Learn the ten reasons why people fail.

Many people have blind spots about themselves – you can't fix a problem if you don't know you have it. Look for reoccurring issues in your life. *The following are the most frequent:*

1. Poor people skills. This is the top reason that leaders fail. This skill will take you farther than any other skill you can develop.
2. A negative attitude. If your situation is always getting you down, maybe it's a result of your attitude.
3. A bad fit. Sometimes a situation change is also in order.
4. Lack of focus – priorities are out of whack which is a poor use of resources.
5. Weak commitment – can't accomplish anything of value without commitment.
6. Unwillingness to change – inflexibility. Some people are so in love with the past that they won't make changes. If you resist change, you are really resisting success.
7. A shortcut mindset. Victory belongs to the most persevering. Cutting corners is a sign of impatience and poor self-discipline
8. Relying on talent alone. Don't skip the hard work of improving it.
9. Acting on poor information.
10. Not having any goals. Many people haven't allowed themselves to dream. You need to find your purpose.

Chapter 14: Understand there is not much difference between failure and success. The little difference between failure and success makes a big difference. The quality that makes the difference is persistence. Nothing worth achieving comes easily – cultivate tenacity and persistence. You need a strategy. A four-point plan for approaching achievement:

1. Find a purpose – purpose is the fuel that powers persistence.

- a. Get next to people who possess great desire
 - b. Develop discontent with the status quo
 - c. Search for a goal
 - d. Put your possessions into that goal
 - e. Visualize enjoying the rewards of that goal
2. Eliminate excuses. Have to keep moving forward. Take complete responsibility.
 3. Develop incentives. Persistence is many short races.
 4. Cultivate determination. To develop persistence one has to continuously develop determination.

Chapter 15: Get up, get over it and get going. It's what you do after you get back up that is important. Figure out what to do so that you don't continue falling down. You need a plan that helps determine what to do after you get back up: (Acronym FORWARD)

1. **Finalize your goal** – the goal shapes the plan, the plan shapes the action, the action achieves the results
2. **Order your plan.** If you neglect to plan you plan to fail.
3. **Risk failing by taking action.**
4. **Welcome mistakes** – embrace the learning from mistakes
5. **Advance based on your character** – always a time when giving up is easier. There will be a defining moment
6. **Reevaluate your progress continually.** Learn and adjust.
7. **Develop new strategies to succeed.** Success is a continual process. There will never be a perfect plan – need to constantly reevaluate and adjust.

Chapter 16. Now you are ready to fail forward. The author described the story of Dave Anderson, an entrepreneur (Famous Dave, rainforest restaurants etc.) – the story embodied every aspect of failure mentioned in all the chapters. Fail early, fail often and fail forward.

Reviewer's recommendation: I listened to this as an audio book. The book is full of good information and many stories of people's experiences.

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About the reviewer: Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD

Many CEO's find themselves asking "What now?" to sensitive situations that only an experienced former CEO can understand. Frumi is brought in to solve problems and often remains to work with you, as your confidante and secret weapon. She has an uncanny knack of getting to the heart of your corporate climate and maximizing your team's performance, profitability and sustainability.

To schedule a free *Break From the Pack to Success* consultation email

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