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9-16-2011

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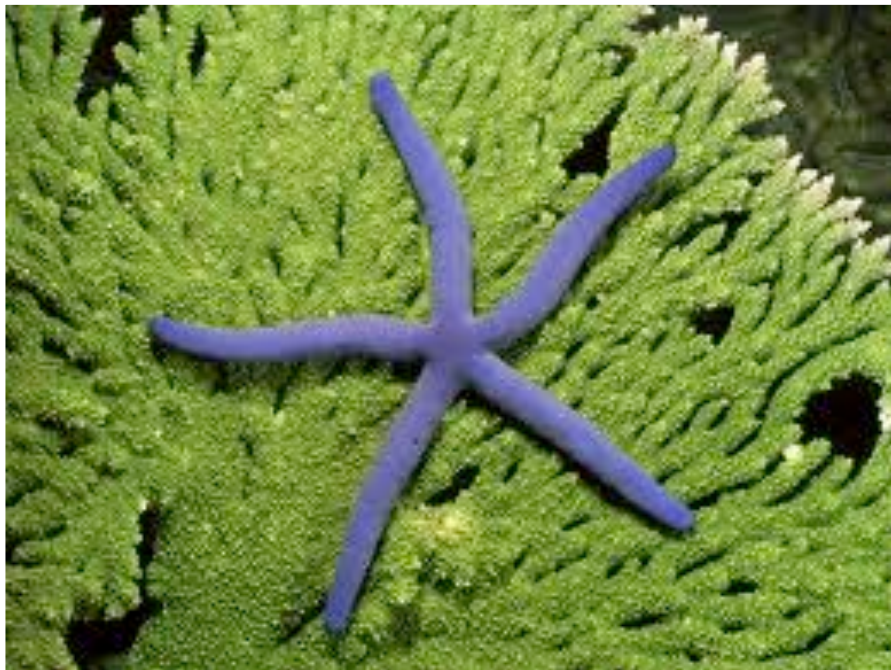
Reimers-Hild, Connie I., "Coaching Power Tool: Success vs. Failure" (2011). *Kimmel Education and Research Center - Faculty & Staff Publications*. 15.
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Coaching Power Tool

Success vs. Failure

Connie Reimers-Hild, Ph.D.



Coaching Power Tool: Success vs. Failure

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Thirty spokes converge upon a single hub;
It is on the hole in the center that the use of the cart hinges.

We make a vessel from a lump of clay;
It is the empty space within the vessel that makes it useful.

We make doors and windows for a room;
But it is these empty spaces that make the room livable.

Thus, while the tangible has advantages,
It is the intangible that makes it useful.

Lao Tzu
Tao Teh Ching (p. 23)

Part of personal leadership and innovation is self-discovery, which requires introspection and the ability to see the unseen. As the reading from Lao Tzu's *Tao Teh Ching* illustrates, sometimes it is necessary to consider a different perspective. We have to shift our thinking to see the importance of all parts of a wheel, cart, vessel or a room. Sometimes, it is the unobvious that may be the most important. It is important for us to

challenge our thinking and traditional thought to redefine success, failure and our ability to take risks.

For example, many of us may marvel at the colors of a beautiful vase while it is the empty space on the inside that provides functionality. We must further consider that the outside and inside are both required give the vase value and purpose. Sometimes it is what we do not immediately see or experience that gives life value and purpose. We must search for purpose and meaning in order to begin to understand how we perceive success and failure. Napoleon Hill's research (p. 31), demonstrates the relationship between accomplishment and purpose:

“Purpose is the touchstone of any accomplishment, large or small. A strong man can be defeated by a child who has a purpose. Shift your habits of thinking about the significance of your task and you can often accomplish the seemingly impossible.”

Napoleon Hill,
Think & Grow Rich Action Pack (p. 31)

Increasing our awareness of success and failure requires us to explore our perception of both. One of the first steps in the process of personal innovation is discovering and defining success and failure from a holistic perspective on your own terms.

Self-Application

Success:

What exactly is success? Many of the books, blogs and other for-profit resources available on success would have us believe that success is making it big in terms of money, power and fame. If you happen to have an executive title or big paycheck, you must be successful, right? This type of success is largely associated with external motivation and gratification.

What is the cost of getting “to the top” or “making it big?” Sometimes, we forget to consider the tradeoffs associated with perceived success, or we only hear about the positive elements of money, fame and status. Rarely do we get a glimpse of a person’s entire life-the whole perspective.

People have many different aspects of life that come together to form their life experience. Success comes in many different ways and in many different forms. Cultures and nations around the world define success differently, and it is important for individuals to define their own version of success to live their best lives.

While I was growing up in rural Nebraska, USA, my extended family thought getting married and having lots of children was a sure sign of success. When spending time in remote villages throughout Northern Nigeria, I found that feeding a village and selling enough produce to send children to school was success. While in Costa Rica, our group toured two different campuses of Earth University, spent time in the urban area of San Jose and in the rural Costa Rica exploring the relationships between agriculture, natural resources and education. Our University group had just finished one of the highlights of the trip. We visited a rural farm family

in the tropical rainforest. This family had just gotten electricity after installing a methane digester, and they were excited to show us their progress-their success!

The house itself was what many of us living in rural Nebraska would consider a machine shed that needed work. Picture a worn wood frame covered with rusty pieces of corrugated tin on top of a dirt floor that turned to mud when it rained. Wooden planks were used for a partial floor in the tiny living area where two parents were raising three children and taking care of an elderly parent. Walls consisted mostly of blankets and curtains.

We talked with the woman of the house. She was a wife and mother as well as a leader in the agricultural community. She and her husband were building a very diverse farming operation, which was growing more successful each year. She was a tiny woman with big beautiful brown eyes, glowing skin and a gorgeous smile. Her young son clung to her while we were standing in their kitchen.

With the help of a professor from Earth University, she told us all about the advances they had made in their farming operation. It was a great story. She turned on her stove and a huge flame came shooting out of one of the burners. The look on her face said it all-the thrill of success!! A great tribute to the hard work her family had invested into their farming operation. It was a wonderful sight. I didn't have the guts to ask for a picture but wish I had. What a great moment.

Rarely do we examine success in terms of personal fulfillment, happiness or joy. Sometimes, we lose sight of the little things that make our day great or have gifts we take for granted.

Maybe your success is being a stay-at-home Mom. Perhaps you are a janitor or manager or a small business owner. Or, you might be the President of a large corporation. Whatever the case, it is important to live successfully on your terms and in your own time. Are you happy? Are you fulfilled? Do you love life?

Failure:

My Grandma and I both graduated from West Point Jr.-Sr. High in West Point, NE, USA. She graduated from high school in 1930. I graduated in 1990. We attended our class reunions together. It was her 70th and my 10th. She was sad because only a handful of her classmates were left. It was hard to see the sadness on her face. I think she knew it was the last time she would ever attend her class reunion. I was disappointed because my classmates were so serious. To be honest, all I wanted to do was catch up with everyone and talk about the "Glory Days."

Things have certainly changed for West Point's class of 1990 over the years. Instead of using snail mail and phone calls, we are communicating via Facebook. Further, my classmates no longer seem as serious as they did 20 years ago. People have gotten jobs, lost jobs and grown businesses. We have moved, gotten married, divorced and widowed. We have all lost loved ones. We have all faced both tragedy and triumph; We all had experienced successes and failures.

*The one thing we have in common is this:
Another 10 years had passed.*

My Grandma used to tell me that time would go by faster as I got older. As usual, she was right. Life passes by quickly, and we all need to embrace each and every day. Do you ever find yourself watching the clock or hoping the day goes by quickly? Remember, time is something we never get back. Wishing for a day to end is the same as hoping your life goes by even faster than it already does!

How can you make your life count? Rediscover your passion and head in the direction of your dreams. I am convinced that society is missing out on vast amounts of human potential because so many of us never really “go for it” and pursue our true passions. Instead, we cling to what we know because it makes us feel safe and secure.

The most precious resource we all have is time, and we must use it wisely. We cannot get back today or yesterday, so pursuing our dreams cannot wait. Pursuing dreams takes confidence and the ability to take risks. When you pursue your dreams, there will be times of self-doubt, there will be times when you second guess yourself and there will be times when you think you just cannot do it anymore. In order to make your dreams a reality, you must believe in yourself and in your dream.

Believe in yourself to the point that you are willing to take risks and to fail. Be willing to fail until you succeed. After all, learning from our mistakes is one of the best ways to move our dreams forward.

What is Risk?

What does it take to achieve success? What about avoiding failure? Interestingly enough, both success and failure hinge on taking risks. Does the thought of taking risks or failing seem too scary? Then, you may have to change your mind about risk and failure, especially if you want to achieve your definition of success.

Consider the following questions: Is it really a risk to pursue your dream? Or, is it more of a risk to never pursue a dream and regret it later in life? What is failure? Is pursuing your dreams failure? Or, do you truly fail if you never tap into your human potential and share your unique talents and dreams with the rest of the world?

Anything you do requires a certain amount of risk. For example, what risks are involved in having a job vs. starting a business? Staying in a job you dislike may seem safe. However, one round of layoffs can eliminate your “safe” job and your paycheck. Starting a business may seem very risky. There is an element of risk in starting a business; however, it may be more secure to control your own future than to let others employ you. There is risk in everything we do. Driving down the street, having a baby, getting married—all of these life events and adventures require us to take risks.

Thomas Edison, one of the most prolific inventors in history, viewed failure as a learning tool and as a success. Edison held over 1,000 patents and founded 14 companies. Each time he pursued an invention he failed. However, he viewed his failures as a way not to do something. Each

failure was a learning experience that advanced his idea. We can each redefine failure by remembering one of Edison's most famous quotes,

“If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.”

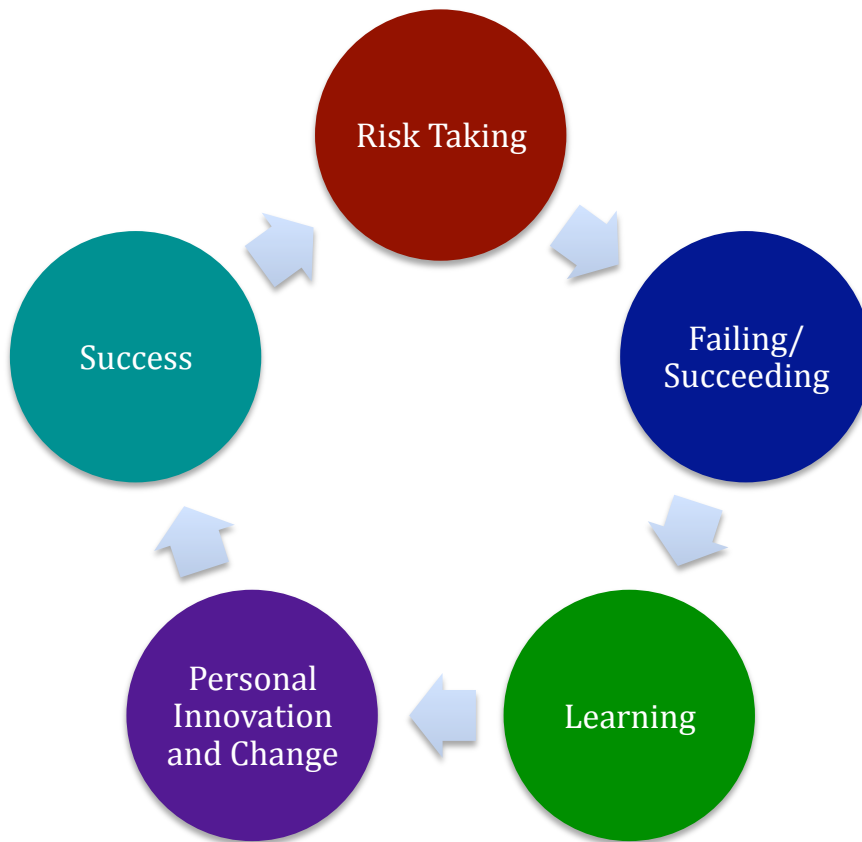
Go out there and astound yourself! Time is going to move forward. What we decide to do with our time is up to us, so make every minute count!!

Personal change is important and so is the way we view and define failure. In order to do this, we must redefine failure. Is failure trying something and not achieving the desired results? Or, is it lack of trying because we fear that we may fail (not achieve what we were hoping to accomplish)?

It is important for all of us to come to grips with the fact that not everything we try is going to work as well as we had planned. This can be a difficult concept for many of us to comprehend, especially if we are of the perfectionist type.

Sometimes the best we can do is fail until we succeed and learn from the mistakes we make along the way. Better yet, give yourself permission to make mistakes. Learning from success and failure is a great way to create personal innovation and change while experiencing success. Anytime you work towards personal change, mistakes are going to happen. The real key is to enter into the Cycle of Risk Taking (Figure 1) and learn from mistakes and failures so you can redefine them as successes. Keep moving. The most important aspect of personal leadership and innovation is taking action.

Figure 1: Cycle of Risk Taking



If you dress conservatively, wear something outlandish and totally out of character. Then, go to the grocery store or some other public location. Check out the looks and reactions from others. If you are scared of speaking in public, volunteer to give a presentation for a local organization. Or, post a video of yourself giving the talk on YouTube. Take dance lessons, paint a picture, and make a fantastic meal. It does not matter what you choose to do. Have some fun with it. The point here is to stretch yourself. Take risks you would ordinarily avoid and do something out of the ordinary that you want to try. Push your limits!

Coaching Application

Innovation Action: Your Personal Definitions of Success and Failure

In order to unleash your true potential, become very aware of how you define success and failure. Are they your definitions? Or, are they definitions society has imposed upon you?

Take some time for personal introspection when doing this exercise. Find a quiet place be honest with yourself as you work through the following exercises.

First, Draw and Define Success:

How do you define success? Take out a piece of paper and write the most vivid description of success as it pertains to you and your life. Use both pictures and words to stimulate your mind. Paint your ideal picture of success:

Next, Draw and Define Failure

What does the word failure mean to you? Write what naturally comes to you. Remember, there is no right or wrong.

Summarize Your Thoughts

- How do your definitions and drawings of success and failure compare and contrast?
 - How are they similar?
 - How are they different?
- What did you notice about yourself?
- What are your key takeaways from this exercise?

Summary:

Personal innovation is a journey for you to experience and enjoy. As Lao Tzu's *Tao Teh Ching* illustrates, sometimes it is necessary to consider a different perspective. A shift in thinking may help us see the importance and value of all parts of life, including our successes, failures and risks. Sometimes, it is the unobvious that may be the most important. Challenge your thinking and traditional thought to redefine success, failure and your ability to take risks.

There is risk in all we do. Sometimes, it is the unseen that can help think differently about our life. Clarity about your personal definitions and thoughts regarding success and failure can help clarify the ways in which you choose to live life. Being true and honest with yourself is the key to making it work for you. This can and should be a challenging process.

Take some time with it and revisit your thoughts, definitions and drawings often. You may change your mind about success and failure as you go through life. Your journey is a continuous, fluid process and personal change, choice and growth is all part of the process! Keep your thoughts of success and failure with you. And remember, sometimes failure is not doing something we have always wanted to do.

Client Perspective

Clarifying success and failure is an important step for clients. Many times, clients are working towards goals and objectives that have been set by others, including bosses, co-workers, colleagues, parents, spouses, etc.

This type of external motivation is typically challenging for clients to maintain because it is not based on personal fulfillment.

If clients are true to themselves and can be honest through this process, it will heighten their self-awareness so they can create structures that support their journey to achieving their personal definition of success.

Coaching Perspective

As coaches, we need to be aware of where clients want to go and what they truly define as success and failure. Clients' personal definitions of success and failure can help us keep them accountable while also helping them create structures designed to move them toward success. If clients can truly develop their personal definitions of success and failure, coaches can better determine clients' return on investment (ROI) as well.

During this process, coaches must keep their own definition out of the process. Holding oneself in a neutral position as a coach will be critical to the success of the client. Coaches must use powerful questions and other coaching tools to help clients develop their unique definitions of both success and failure. Tools can help coaches strengthen their understanding of clients. This process may help uncover underlying beliefs and personal truths. Deep learning about clients will empower coaches to serve coachees throughout their journey.

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Life is short...live it to the fullest!