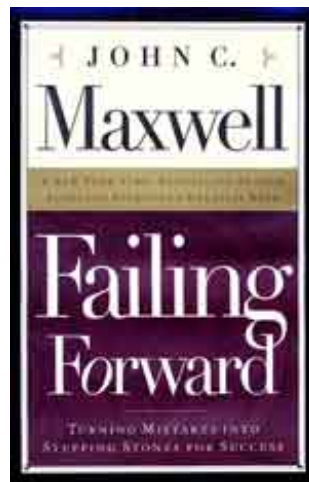


# Failing Forward

Turning Mistakes into Stepping-Stones for  
Success



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## The Big Idea

Failing forward tells you how to look at life's setbacks and learn from your mistakes. If you haven't failed at anything, it means you haven't really taken a risk at anything. Failures are only as bad as you perceive them to be. Life is much better when you live, and try, and fail. Living requires failing every now and then. The basic steps to moving on and failing forward are:

- Realize there is one major difference between average people and achievers. The difference is in how they respond to failure.
- Learn a new definition of failure.
- Remove the "you" from failure. Don't take it personally.
- Take action and reduce your fear.
- Change your response to failure by accepting responsibility.
- Don't let failure from outside get inside you.
- Say good-bye to yesterday.
- Change yourself, and your world changes.
- Get over yourself and start giving yourself.
- Find the benefit in every bad experience.
- If at first you do succeed, try something harder.
- Learn from a bad experience and make it a good experience.
- Work on the weakness that weakens you.
- Understand there's not much difference between failure and success.
- Get up, get over it, get going.

## What's the main difference between average people and people who achieve?

Regardless of family background, wealth, opportunities, morality, or hardships and trials, it is people's perception of and response to failures that sets achievers apart from the mediocre.

People are training for success when they should be training for failure. Disappointments are more prevalent and life is full of them. The question is not if you will have problems, but how you are going to deal with them.

Mary Kay cosmetics is a company with more than 1 billion dollars in annual sales, employs 3,500 people, and empowers 500,000 direct-sales consultants worldwide. Mary Kay Ash survived her husband's untimely death, right before the opening of her business in 1963. She had taken a risk on her \$5,000 life savings to start her own company, and despite her personal tragedy, she launched the business that is now a leading beauty company.

Read through these two lists and determine which one describes your approach to failure:

### Failing Backward

Blaming others, repeating the same mistakes, expecting never to fail again, expecting to continually fail, accepting tradition blindly, being limited by past mistakes, thinking I am a failure, quitting.

## **Failing Forward**

Taking responsibility, learning from each mistake, knowing failure is a part of progress, maintaining a positive attitude, challenging outdated assumptions, taking new risks, believing something didn't work, persevering.

## **Redefining failure**

- Failure is unavoidable.

You will learn lessons from each mistake. A lesson is repeated until it is learned, and if you don't learn the easy lessons, they get harder. Pain is one way the universe gets your attention. You know you've learned your lesson when your actions change.

- Failure is not an event.

Success is not a destination. It is a journey. Failure and success work the same way.

- You are the only person who can label what you do a failure. Give yourself permission to fail as well as to succeed.
- Failure is not irreversible. Spill the milk as much as you can, but don't lose the cow.

The average failure rate for entrepreneurs before they finally make it in business is 3.8 failures

- Failure is not final.

Think of mistakes in a whole new light. As you approach your next big project, give yourself a reasonable mistake quotient. Give yourself a quota and expect to hit it before the project reaches completion. Remember, mistakes don't define failure. They are merely the price you pay for achievement on the success journey.

The Seven Abilities Needed to Fail Forward:

- Achievers reject rejection. People who don't give up keep trying because they don't base their self-esteem on their performance. Take responsibility for your actions, but don't take failure personally.
- Achievers see failure as temporary.
- Achievers see failures as isolated incidents.
- Achievers keep expectations realistic.
- Achievers focus on strengths.
- Achievers vary approaches to achievement. In other words, they keep trying different things until something works for them.
- Achievers bounce back. They don't take their mistakes personally.

## **Remove the “you” from failure**

Break out of your negative pattern of thinking. Look at an area of your life where you have repeatedly failed, and do the following:

- Examine your expectations for that area. Adjust your expectations to make them more realistic. Expect to make your quota of mistakes.

- Find new ways to do your work. Brainstorm at least 20 new ways and try at least half.
- Focus on your strengths. How can you use your best skills and personal strengths to maximize your effort?
- Vow to bounce back.

### **Fear of failure stops forward progress**

- A fear of failure can bring on Paralysis and nothing can be achieved if you let this paralysis take over.
- Procrastination is opportunity's natural assassin. The risk and cost of action is always less than the risk and cost of inaction.
- Purposelessness. When you don't take a risk and go for your dream, you go about life without any sense of direction or purpose. Self-pity, excuses, misused energy, and hopelessness are the symptoms of a purposeless life.
- Motivation is a by-product of action. Just do it.

"A life spent in making mistakes is not only more honorable but more useful than a life spent doing nothing."

-Playwright George Bernard Shaw

### **Take action and reduce your fear.**

George Frederick Handel faced success as a musical prodigy early in life. At age 56, he ended up in debt and thoroughly disappointed with the changing times, feeling his music was unappreciated by fickle audiences. A friend gave him a libretto based on the life of Jesus Christ, and the work so inspired Handel that he wrote almost non-stop for 21 days, creating "Messiah", a musical masterpiece that is considered one of the greatest of all time. If Handel had wallowed in self-pity over previous failures, he would never have had the energy to write another composition and try again.

So ask yourself, what objective essential to your success are you most afraid of tackling right now? Face your fears and act. Examine your fears and determine what is the first step you can take to get started on your objective. Keep trying to achieve the first step. Then go on to the next step. You must act and from this action springs motivation and courage.

### **Blow-ups, cover ups, speeding up, backing up, and giving up on the failure freeway**

Failure can cause unchecked anger in people. We often take out our frustrations on others when we have failed. Learn to check and control your temper.

If you think covering up your mistakes is a way out of failure, remember Nicholas Leeson, who single-handedly brought down Barings bank because of his unwillingness to stop covering up his losses.

Speeding up is what happens on the failure freeway when people race in hard and fast, in the wrong direction. They don't stop and think what they really should be doing with their lives.

Backing up on the failure freeway means not looking at where you should go, making a mistake, and then backing up dangerously against traffic, to the exit you missed. You end up looking silly trying to justify your mistake. Own up to it and then change your ways.

Giving up or quitting happens when you are already close to success. The achievers know they have to pass the breaking point, the point where others give up.

Wake up! Get off the failure freeway.

The piece that follows is one of the most-requested pieces from people attending John Maxwell's speaking engagements.

### **Autobiography in five short chapters by Portia Nelson:**

#### Chapter 1

I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost. I am helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.

#### Chapter 2

I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe I am in the same place, but it isn't my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.

#### Chapter 3

I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in. It's a habit. My eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately.

#### Chapter 4

I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

#### Chapter 5

I walk down another street.

Change your response to failure by accepting responsibility. Take a hard look at a recent failure you considered not to be your fault. Look for anything negative in the failure that you should claim responsibility for. Then own it.

### **No matter what happens *to* you, what matters is what happens *in* you.**

First you need to take on a positive attitude. You can cultivate optimism by learning the secret of contentment.

Contentment means not containing your emotions. Don't be in denial and try to bury your emotions. Contentment means not maintaining your current situation, but maintaining a good attitude as you work your way out of the situation. Contentment means not looking to power, position or possessions for your satisfaction.

Contentment means expecting the best and not the worst, remaining upbeat even when you've been beaten up. Contentment means you see solutions while others see only problems. Contentment means believing in yourself even when others believe you've failed. Contentment means holding on to hope even when others say it's hopeless.

Learn to accept things considered a fact of life. You cannot control the weather, or any natural disaster, a sudden tragedy, or mishap. You CAN take positive action and work to solve problems that occur because of these facts of life. It's all a state of mind. Think of Helen Keller, born blind

and deaf, she was able to overcome her disabilities and achieve more than people who are born with sight and hearing.

List down all your sources of frustration and failure, heartaches, and pains. See which one was a fact of life, and what action you need to take. Then do it cheerfully.

Successful people never dwell on past difficulties. Moving on and failing forward is the key.

### **Getting over it**

The signs of breakdown are when a person thinks he has it harder than anyone else, (comparison) he rationalizes and makes excuses for himself (rationalization) withdraws from society (isolation), and at the end of his life, is filled with regret and bitterness.

Every major difficulty in life is a fork in the road. You make a choice to either break through or break down. Learn to let go of your past. First, acknowledge the pain, let yourself grieve, forgive the other person, forgive yourself, and then finally - MOVE ON.

### **You are your greatest enemy.**

John James Audubon, the man for whom the National Audubon Society was named, went through many years of failures at trading businesses before finally realizing his weekend hobby would be his ticket to financial security. His hobby was hunting and painting pictures of birds in their natural habitat. In 1820, he had a big idea. He would collect all his paintings of birds and go to England to find a publisher for a book. Today, the collector's item *Birds of America*, a series of 100 color plates on large 29 x 39 inch format in the original first edition of 200 copies costs \$5 million. If James Audubon kept trying to make it as a businessman, he would never have become such a huge success.

So clearly, there is nothing wrong with changing your mind, or changing your course of action.

### **To change your world, first change your self.**

The process of change and looking at your mistakes:

- See yourself clearly. Look at both your good and bad aspects.
- Admit your flaws honestly.
- Discover your strengths joyfully.
- Build on those strengths passionately.

Ask people closest to you to make observations about your weaknesses and strengths. What are your gifts, opportunities, resources, and skills?

Develop a plan that allows you to build on these strengths and maximize your potential.

### **People who struggle with chronic failure often think of no one but themselves.**

Here's a flash. The world does not need you to exist. The world does not revolve around you, and the world doesn't owe you anything.

Get over yourself –everyone else has. If you feel a nervous breakdown coming on, get out of your house and go do something for those who are less fortunate.

It's about what you give, and not what you get. This applies to relationships as well as business.

So stop taking yourself so seriously and lighten up. Put the team goals ahead of your own ego. Go the extra mile for a friend. Be generous and put others first and you will soon forget how pathetically self-absorbed you've been.

**We overestimate the event and underestimate the process. Every fulfilled dream occurred because of dedication to a process.**

If you're not failing, you probably aren't moving forward. Prepare yourself to pay the price of the occasional setback in exchange for the progress you're making.

Remember that adversity creates resilience, develops maturity, builds character, pushes you to give your best performance, provides greater opportunities, prompts innovation, and reveals unexpected benefits. Sometimes a mistake can be the million-dollar idea or invention like Ivory soap or Kellogg's Corn flakes, products which were both created by accident.

Adversity motivates. Lose your job once and bounce back by finding a new and better one. Lose that new job and start your own business. The business fails and you move to another town and find a wonderful new job in a different field. It just takes a positive, optimistic attitude to get through the bad times, because these things too will pass. Work hard at your action plan and think ahead.

Learn from all your experiences whether good or bad. Nothing can teach you better than a bad experience.

### **Take a risk. There's no other way to fail forward.**

Think of Amelia Earhart. She was a pioneer in aviation, breaking new ground for women and commercial flying. She has a list of 'firsts' that ended with her final big adventure, a trip around the equator, the longest by a pilot ever – at 29,000 miles. She took off from New Guinea with her navigator Frederick Noonan, to cover the last 7,000 miles of her journey on July 2, 1937. They were never seen again. US navy ships combed the seas in search of the missing plane but nothing was ever found. Amelia Earhart was a great risk-taker and adventurer, but even ordinary people like you can go about your work in a quiet way and achieve extraordinary things.

Look for opportunities, finish your responsibilities, and challenge yourself to take on larger and larger tasks. Face your weaknesses, lose your fear of failure, and fulfill your commitments. It is so much better to try something great and fail than try nothing great and succeed.

So what if you embarrass yourself whenever you fail? Get over it. Regret for the things you did not do at the end of your life will haunt you. Life is not easy and not fair. It takes hard work.

Also, the best time to start is Now. The difference between an amateur and a professional writer, as Oscar Wilde said, is that the amateur writes only when he feels like it, and the professional writes regardless of how he feels.

Take a risk especially if it means what you come up with will benefit many people long after you're gone.

If Dr. Joseph Lister did not defy the medical conventions of his time, we would all still be dying of severe infections because doctors would perform their surgeries without cleaning their

instruments, sanitizing surgical rooms, and other things which seem like common sense to us today.

Do not wait until you suffer a heart attack or face a near-death experience to start changing your ways. Analyze a recent failure and see what caused it, what did you do to cause the failure and what have you learned?

The top ten reasons people fail

- Poor people skills
- A negative attitude
- A bad fit (Trying to put a square peg in a round hole, or staying in the wrong job/field)
- Lack of focus
- A weak commitment
- An unwillingness to change
- A shortcut mind-set (cutting corners instead of taking the time to achieve something of value)
- Relying on talent alone (Sans the work ethic, people skills, etc)
- Poor information-gathering
- An absence of goals

### **People should come before purpose.**

Never underestimate how much you will need people in your life. Your co-workers, friends, clients and family are all there to support you, but you need to make it easy for them to do so. It is up to you to work with colleagues as a team player. It is up to you to make your marriage work. Nobody can do these things for you, so you've got to value people before anything else.

### **Work on your weaknesses!**

Start improving yourself by talking to a friend. Ask him to evaluate you in your area of weakness. Then put yourself on a plan to turn your weakness into strength. Stick to your action plan for 1 year.

### **Macy's department stores: a story of failure**

R. H. Macy failed at retail six times before he got the formula right. After several attempts at retail in different states, and after trying five different professions, Macy opened a fancy dry goods store in New York City in 1858 - and the rest is history. Macy invented the concept of the modern department store, with fixed prices, and high volume at lower prices, and innovative retail advertising.

### **The plan**

#### **Find your purpose in life!**

- Surround yourself with people who make things happen.
- Search for a goal that excites you and invest your time and money into making your goal a reality.
- Visualize yourself enjoying the fruits of your labor.
- Stop making excuses and procrastinating.
- Give yourself little rewards and incentives for every achievement along the way.



- Refuse to give up.

Are you willing to pay the price? How much are you willing to go through to achieve your dream?

It's what you do after you get back up that counts.

**Finalize your goals**

**Order your plans**

**Risk failing by taking action**

**Welcome mistakes**

**Advance based on your character**

**Reevaluate your strategies and progress continually**

**Develop new strategies to succeed**

Now you are ready to face your new goals, knowing you will be making mistakes along the way, but getting closer to your dream. Life should not be wasted doing things we are not passionate about. If you need more inspiration visit [www.injoy.com](http://www.injoy.com)

Visit [www.injoy.com](http://www.injoy.com) for more information on John Maxwell's books.

Take the Free success assessment at [www.failingforward.com](http://www.failingforward.com) and see if past failures are holding you back or moving you forward.