

10 Ways to Turn Failure Into Success

Charles C. Manz

Learning from failure is something that can directly benefit us all in our professional and personal lives. Learning from failures can help us become more effective over time and advance in our careers. The following is a list of “10 Ways to Turn Failure Into Success”, based on the book *The Power of Failure* (by Charles C. Manz, Berrett-Koehler Publishers):

1) Redefine Failure

There are a variety of roads we can take in the pursuit of success. One obvious route is to work toward a goal as unerringly as possible until it is achieved. Success is measured by our clear progress toward this end. Failure is not only left out of the equation it is avoided above all else. It is seen as incompatible with success. Failure is a natural part of life that can impact us positively or negatively depending on how we define it. Unfortunately, most views of failure can lead to our downfall. Rather than viewing it as a final fatal result reflecting ineptness or deficiency we need to redefine it in a way that helps us see its contributions to our longer-term success.

2) Redefine Success

The perspective that failure is incompatible with success dominates our everyday lives and this outlook can create some real problems in terms of our ability to learn, grow and take the necessary risks we need to be fully alive. We can choose another road (perhaps Robert Frost’s mythical road less travelled by) that brings us face to face with failure as a primary vehicle for success. Success is too often viewed as a final result indicating that we no longer need to learn or improve. Rather, we need a view of success that reflects a continuous journey with both ups and downs and that recognises the important role of setbacks and failures that if managed well, help shape future success.

3) Persistence

Setbacks are an unavoidable part of everyday life. We all fail. And not just a little but a lot, especially if we are taking the risks and pursuing the learning of new skills that enable us to meet exciting and worthwhile challenges. We are called to accept the infusion that these challenging times can offer to the health of our journey toward success. The worthwhile journey toward a rich, meaningful, and rewarding life requires a willingness to receive a good dose of failure, the ironic life-blood of success. By a process of persistence, we can channel various inevitable setbacks into success.

4) Use Negative Feedback to Your Advantage

We all have been at the receiving end of negative feedback either at work or at home. Although this experience can often seem unsettling, negative feedback can provide positive information for improvement and it may even suggest that you are on to something new and different. It may reflect a distinct departure from the tried and true norm of how things are normally done and thus, become a sign of pending breakthrough.

5) Learn to Win When You Lose

When you've given your full effort and sincerely tried to address worthwhile tasks and challenges, choose to be motivated and positively shaped by the fruits of honest failure. If it's a competition, be gracious in defeat and learn from your opponent. A good short-term loser who is seriously committed to winning can embrace the challenge of temporary setbacks and take the lessons they offer and the drive they can instill for being a good winner going forward.

6) View Failures as Stepping Stones to Success

Success and Failure are not incompatible. Most failures are simply challenges in progress that can provide a foundation for success. When you make an error or have a setback think carefully about how you can improve and do better with more resulting success down the road.

7) Find the Opportunities in Failure

Setbacks or short-term failures can contribute to future success if we focus on the opportunities they contain rather than the obstacles. If you are experiencing setbacks with a particular activity others are probably as well. If so, this is an opportunity to address a common need or challenge.

8) Learn From Failure

This straightforward prescription sums up many of the items on this list. Failure provides a doorway for continued learning and growth if we focus on the potential advantages smart failure has to offer. Ironically, success, if it is viewed as a shrine of achievement and a final result, can actually lead to complacency and stagnation.

9) Accept Your "Real Failures"

A real marker of genuine failure can be found when one hasn't sincerely tried to do his/her best or done something unethical or intentionally harmful to somebody else. Moving beyond denial of our mistakes to accepting and taking responsibility for them is essential for learning, personal growth and renewed progress toward success.

10) Look Beyond Yourself

Experiencing the trappings of success without any purpose or meaning in life can lead to a rather hollow existence. For most people, having a real purpose and meaning are likely connected with contributing to a greater good beyond oneself. Usually this involves helping and supporting others in some way, even if that means helping and supporting someone else enjoy success at your own expense. As you learn to focus outward, on helping others succeed rather than yourself, you become less vulnerable to what otherwise might appear to be personal failures.

Charles C. Manz, Ph.D. is an award winning author of over 200 articles and scholarly papers and more than 20 books including bestselling *The Power of Failure*. Formerly a Marvin Bower Fellow at the Harvard Business School, he is the Nirenberg Chaired Professor of Leadership in the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.