

Fail Forward

By Matt Williams

In our culture, failure is often viewed in a negative way – something to be avoided at all cost. When was the last time you failed?

When was the last time you fell short, didn't measure up or simply were unable to accomplish what you set out to do?

If the answer to these questions is, well never, or I can't recall – that's unfortunate. It's by failure that we have the opportunity to learn and to grow as individuals and within disciplines. People who never fail, in all likelihood, have not taken risks or stepped beyond their comfort zones. "If you're not fouling, your not playing the game", a mantra often repeated to my kids, employees and peers when the focus was on avoiding mistakes rather than playing to your full potential.

To strive for something greater not only requires a willingness to risk failure, but clarity of the thing being sought – a goal. For those who rarely or never fail, chances are they have chosen to either set safe goals (easily achievable), or set no goals at all. They rarely suffer disappointment, but rarely accomplish anything of significance. Consider the possibilities of what could be achieved if you were willing to set meaningful goals and risk possible failure? Imagine the personal satisfaction that comes with accomplishment, the realization that you're limited only by your fears and that once overcome, limitless possibilities await you. It requires commitment, persistence and a belief that, regardless of the outcome, you succeed simply by taking the risk.

If you've been avoiding the pursuit of something meaningful, afraid to take risks or have convinced yourself that "there's no point in trying" – Take a step back and look around. People from all walks, with no more intellect, personality or opportunity have achieved great things for themselves and society simply because they set goals, persisted in their pursuit and were willing to risk failure (sometimes multiple times in pursuit of their goals).

If you're ready to get out of the box and move forward, continue reading. If you're already convincing yourself that this sounds right, but its not for me, then continue in your current existence and accept that it won't change unless you do.

Grab a pen and paper – those who write down their goals are **95%** more likely to achieve them! Now just think, brainstorm and get your thoughts on paper. Consider:

- What would you like to accomplish in life?
- What would you like to be known for?
- If you couldn't possibly fail, what would you do?
- Where would you like to go?

Remember, don't let previous boundaries or beliefs about yourself limit you – dream big!

Once you've completed your list, put it aside and let it percolate for a day or two. Revisit the list and make whatever additions or deletions to it that seem appropriate, being careful not to let doubt or limiting beliefs to creep in. When you are comfortable that you have a complete list, begin to prioritize the items base upon importance to you and to other goals. This process should result in your identifying the highest priority goal in terms of influence, importance and impact.

Once prioritized, begin to walk backwards, identifying the steps necessary to undertake and the outcomes to achieve in pursuit of the goal. The most used acronym for assessing the quality of the goal and its associated steps is SMART. The steps and the resulting goal should be Specific, Measure-able, Attainable, Results oriented, and Time bound. When you identify the specific tasks in this manner, you will have a sense of control and can work methodically toward your success. The accomplishment of each intermediate step will provide you with a sense of achievement and the motivation to continue in the pursuit of your goal.

Time passes quickly and our tomorrows are shaped by the commitments we make today – Will you be one whose fears and self limiting beliefs keep them achieving their dreams or one who risks failure to achieve success?