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By Robert J. Tamasy

A FAIL-SAFE PHILOSOPHY FOR FAILURE

Seth Godin, a consultant, entrepreneur and business blogger, posed a question to his readers that all of us have asked ourselves at one time or another: “But what if I fail?” Godin offered a realistic answer to that ominous possibility: “You will.” Then he asked an even more important question: “After I fail, what then?”

Failure is one of the great certainties of life. Not every seed sprouts into a healthy, fruitful plant. Not every decision is the correct one. And not every attempt at trying something different, whether it is a business venture, an attempt to acquire a new skill, or even purchasing a new product, leads to success. However, failure is often a part of the process necessary for attaining success.

As Godin observed, “if you have chosen well, after you fail you will be one step closer to succeeding, you will be wiser and stronger, and you almost certainly will be more respected by all of those that are afraid to try.” If nothing else, failure reveals one way for not achieving the success we desire.

Stories have been told about how Thomas Alva Edison made hundreds of failed attempts for inventing the incandescent lightbulb before discovering the right way to get it done. If we examine the lives and careers of any highly successful executives and entrepreneurs, we will find their paths to success were littered with failures, times of discouragement, sometimes even bankruptcy. One secret to their success, however, was they never stopped trying. They refused to let failure define them.

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We find numerous examples in the Scriptures of people who failed on their way to success. One Old Testament example was Joseph, who got on his brother's nerves by constantly reminding them he was their father's favorite. He was sold into slavery, then wrongfully imprisoned, but Joseph still rose to be second in command of Egypt. And he formulated a plan to overcome a devastating famine, not only for the Egyptians but also for his family and ultimately, the people of Israel.

In the New Testament, Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, three times denied Him. Yet he later became one of the leaders of the early Church. And the apostle Paul was transformed from a misguided persecutor of Christians to another central figure of the first-century Church and author of numerous letters in the Bible. The Scriptures teach that failure need not be a dead end, but instead, can be a launching point. Here are some of its principles for dealing with failure:

Team up with others. Failure is easier to bear when you do not have to carry the burden alone. *"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who fails and has no one to help him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).*

Learn to rely on God's strength. Failure often teaches us the importance of trusting in and depending on God, His strength and wisdom. *"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:29-31).*

Persevere when facing challenges. Quitting in the face of failure may prevent us from experiencing the joy of success if we just persisted with our endeavors a bit longer. *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).*

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© 2019. Robert J. Tamasy has written *Business at Its Best: Timeless Wisdom from Proverbs for Today's Workplace; Tufting Legacies*; coauthored with David A. Stoddard, *The Heart of Mentoring*, and edited numerous other books, including *Advancing Through Adversity* by Mike Landry. Bob's biweekly blog is: www.bobtamasy.blogspot.com.

Reflection/Discussion Question

1. How many times have you been hindered by the concern, "What if I fail?" How do you typically answer that question?
2. What would you consider to be your greatest failure? What was its impact on you – then and now?
3. When you read or hear accounts of people who have achieved great success after enduring much failure, how does that affect you? Does it inspire and motivate you, or do you reason that might have worked for them, but not for you? Explain your answer.
4. In your view, how can we – or how should we – continue to persevere in the wake of failure? What is the role of faith in dealing with failure?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 16:3,9, 19:21, 20:24, 27:1; 1 Corinthians 15:57-58; Hebrews 11:1,11-12,24-27

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