The Art and Science of Mistakes:

How to Fail Forward

Randall Grayson, Ph.D.

Social, developmental, & organizational psychology applied to camp
www.visionrealization.com

Please utilize the audio that accompanies this presentation in order to benefit fully.
Stand up if . . .

★ Within the last year
  ♦ You hurt yourself in a preventable way
  ♦ You made a financial mistake that cost you money

★ Last summer
  ♦ You goofed interpersonally with another staff member
  ♦ You praised people as much as you would have liked to
  ♦ There was at least one non-minor injury at your camp
  ♦ Training staff next summer will correct the mistakes of this one

★ Last month
  ♦ You said something that you wish you could take back
  ♦ You didn’t eat a healthy diet, exercise enough, and give yourself enough personal/family time
Mistake?  Failure?

- **Mistake** *suggests* something *temporary*
- **Failure** *suggests* something *permanent*
- What about pure accidents and chance?  Was it mostly within our control?
- **Good mistake = best effort, bad result**
  **Bad mistake = sloppiness or lack of effort**
- **Point:** Always positively move forward
Mistakes are a frequent friend

- If you haven’t failed that many times, and
- You’ve found your success easy
  - You aren’t learning and moving forward fast enough
  - You aren’t insightful enough
  - You need more feedback
Pause for reflection

- On the back of the handout, write down three mistakes you made last summer (3 minutes)
  - 1 that still troubles you
  - 2 that you handled well and overcame

- Place key word for each on front page

- Think about *why* you handled two well, and why that one problem/mistake still troubles you
Preface and process

- Preaching to the choir
- Acknowledge expertise in room
- Nuggets / Check list
- Presenting the ideal
- What’s in the handout?
- Please ask questions at any time
Contents at a glance

- Normalize failure
- Drive
- Support
- Keep perspective
- Find the lessons
- Take responsibility

- Apply it to camp
Normalizing failure

- Common and necessary
- Where do we learn about failure?
- Fear and misunderstanding
- Benefits of failure
Story (principles) is the same
- Primates who excel
- Resilient children who are “at-risk”
- Adults in business, art, teaching, or trade

Average successful entrepreneur fails 3.8 times

Failure is really a matter of conceit. People don’t work hard because, in their conceit, they imagine they’ll succeed without ever making an effort.

Thomas Edison
Admiral Peary made it to the North Pole on try number 8

Oscar Hammerstein had five flop shows that lasted less than a combined total of six weeks before Oklahoma, which ran for 269 weeks and grossed $7 million.

John Creasey received 743 rejection letters from publishers before one word was ever published – he eventually published over 200 books, which have sold over 60 million copies.

Albert Einstein, Edgar Allan Poe, and John Shelley were all expelled from school for being mentally slow.

When a baby learns to walk, it falls down a lot to learn the new skill.
Vincent van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime. Thomas Edison was considered unteachable as a child. “Great achievers are given multiple reasons to believe they are failures. But in spite of that, they persevere.”

John Maxwell

He who makes no mistakes makes no progress.

Theodore Roosevelt
The better a man is, the more mistakes he will make, for the more new things he will try. I would never promote to a top-level job a man who was not making mistakes . . . otherwise he is sure to be mediocre.

Peter Drucker

A failure is a man who blundered, but is not able to cash in on the experience.

Elbert Hubbard

You can't avoid it, you've got to learn to handle it. If you come face to face with your own mistakes once or twice in your life it is bound to be extra painful. I face mine every day -- that way they ain't usually much worse than a dry shave.

Larry McMurtry, Lonesome Dove
Common & necessary (5 of 5)

An extra helping of failure?

- Plan to succeed
- Prepare for failure
- Nurse or pilot

"Well, back to the old drawing board."
Lessons on failure (1 of 2)

- Usually not at school
  - Opposite of extreme self-esteem movement
  - Rarely celebrate and teach process of getting it wrong

- Culture sometimes hinders
  - Work
    - Failure category on resumes
    - Presentations
    - Performance reviews
    - Rehiring staff
  - Interpersonally
    - fresh look; has she changed?
  - Conversation

The New Yorker

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Lessons on failure (2 of 2)

- Where is our failure school?

- Culture sometimes helps
  - Relationships – not the number, but the lessons
  - Family
  - Camps

- Handle failure with toxic gloves if at all
  - Afraid it is contagious
  - Taught most mistakes shameful
  - People add insult to injury
Fear and misunderstanding

Is the fear irrational?
- Consequences are real
  - Amusing, to no fun, to tragic
- On the buffet line of life, we’d rather skip the things that taste bad

Miss the lessons
- Innovation
- Motivation
- Character & maturity
- Resilience
- Experience
Benefits of failure

- Innovation
  - “The new math” Fortune article
  - Ceramics story
  - Cornflakes was born from a mistake

- Dislodge the status quo – provides motivation

- Develops experience, resilience, and maturity

Good people are good because they’ve come to wisdom through failure. We get very little wisdom from success.

William Saroyan
Drive to go beyond failure

- Take action
- Barriers to action
- Put the state before the goal
The situation may be pure hell

The consequences may be irrevocable, and they may be severe

But . . .

Failure rests in completely giving up

Get up and get going. No action is true failure
Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.

Thomas Edison

I do not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act; but I do believe in a fate that falls on them unless they act.

G. K. Chesterton

Regret for the things we did can be tempered by time; it is regret for the things we did not do that is inconsolable.

Sydney Harris
Take action (3 of 4)

✦ Procrastination is the fertilizer that makes difficulties grow.
  Anonymous

✦ Procrastination is opportunity’s natural assassin.
  Victor Kiam

✦ There are risks and costs to a program of action, but they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.
  President John F. Kennedy

✦ Take the long-term perspective

✦ Study on our ability to bear the pain
  (Roll video)
Take action (4 of 4)

No matter what you’ve experienced, there are people who’ve had it better than you and done worse. And there are people who’ve had it worse than you and done better. The circumstances really have nothing to do with getting over your personal history. Past hurts can make you bitter or better – the choice is yours.

John Maxwell
Barriers to action (1 of 4)

Pain of failure leads to fear of failure

You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try.

Beverly Sills
Barriers to action (2 of 4)

Fear

- The worst danger we face is the danger of being paralyzed by doubts and fears. This danger is brought on by those who abandon faith and sneer at hope.

  President Harry S. Truman

Getting past fear

- Emotional support
- Skills training
- Keeping perspective
- Compelling positive vision (failure is reason to change)
- Understanding motivation
Barriers to action (3 of 4)

✦ Self-pity and victim
  ✦ Complaints
  ✦ Sympathy ploys
  ✦ Sometimes anger

✦ Excuses with no action
  (examine – you, the situation, and others)

✦ Step on the gas while in neutral

✦ The setting of a great hope is like the setting of the sun. The brightness of our life is gone.
  Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Motivation

- Break inertia
- Act
- Motivation

You’re more likely to act yourself into feeling than feel yourself into action.

Dr. Jerome Bruner
Put the state before the goal

- One might think that the money value of an invention constitutes its reward to the man who loves his work. But, speaking for myself, I can honestly say this is not so . . . I continue to find my greatest pleasure, and so my reward, in the work that precedes what the world calls success.
  
  Thomas Edison

- Choose the job for the state, not for the goal (e.g., money)

- Direct camp because it is a joy, not because it is a goal

- Shoot archery because it is fun; skill and discipline are secondary

- Go to camp for friendship and nature; personal & physical benefits are secondary
Support

✦ Emotional support

✦ Skill support
Emotional support

- We are born helpless. As soon as we are fully conscious we discover loneliness. We need others physically, emotionally, intellectually; we need them if we are to know anything, even ourselves.  
  
  C.S. Lewis

- Fundamental need for people
  - Solitary confinement is the worst thing you can do to a prisoner
  - There are virtually no very happy loners
  - Visited patients recover more quickly
  - All causes of death are consistently higher for divorced, single, and widowed individuals
  - When people fail, can use a hug, a hand, and/or some hot chocolate
Skill support

- A winner knows how much he still has to learn, even when he is considered an expert by others. A loser wants to be considered an expert by others before he has learned enough to know how little he knows. — Sydney Harris

- There are two kinds of learning: experience, which is gained from your own mistakes, and wisdom, which is learned from the mistakes of others. — John Maxwell

- Schools of hard knocks and bootstrapping

- Jumping with a bungee cord – skilled mentor
  - Knowledge
  - Model
  - Coach (scaffold)

- See “Staff training best practices” resource
Tools & principles for failing forward

* Covered
  - Normalize failure
  - Drive
  - Support

* To be covered
  - Keep perspective
  - Find the lessons
  - Take appropriate responsibility
Keeping perspective (1 of 2)

✦ Every successful person is someone who failed, yet never regarded himself as a failure.  
  
  John Maxwell

✦ I’m not a failure. I failed at doing something. There’s a big difference.  
  
  Erma Bombeck

✦ Every person’s life is filled with errors and negative experiences. But, errors become mistakes when we perceive them and respond to them incorrectly. Mistakes become failures when we continually respond to them incorrectly.  
  
  John Maxwell
Keeping perspective (2 of 2)

Look at the whole picture
(systems analysis)

- You
- The situation
- Other people

"An interesting selection, Dad, yet essentially a failure—as you can see, I'm still awake."
Finding the lessons (1 of 2)

- Insanity is doing what you’ve always done and expecting different results.
  
  Anonymous

- He who makes no mistakes makes no progress.
  
  Theodore Roosevelt

- There is no doubt in my mind that there are many ways to be a winner, but there is really only one way to be a loser and this is to fail and not look beyond the failure.
  
  Kyle Rote

- The things which hurt, instruct.
  
  Benjamin Franklin

- The majority of men meet with failure because of their lack of persistence in creating new plans to take the place of those which fail.
  
  Napoleon Hill
Finding the lessons (2 of 2)

- The more you do, the more you fail. The more you fail, the more you learn. The more you learn, the better you get. The operative word here is learn. If you repeat the same mistake two or three times, you are not learning from it. You must learn from your own mistakes and from the mistakes of others before you.

  Jim Zabloski

- Systems analysis

- Support
  - A mentor with knowledge
  - A mentor with skill/practice
Taking appropriate responsibility (1 of 3)

- If you could kick the person responsible for most of your troubles, you wouldn’t be able to sit down for weeks.  
  
  John Maxwell

- Looking back, my life seems like one long obstacle race, with me as its chief obstacle.  
  
  Jack Paar

- There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one’s self.  
  
  Ben Franklin
Taking appropriate responsibility (2 of 3)

- If you bring forth what is inside you, what you bring forth will save you. If you don’t bring forth what is inside you, what you don’t bring forth will destroy you.  
  
  Jesus Christ

- The largest room in the world is the room for improvement.  
  
  Anonymous

- The price of greatness is responsibility.  
  
  Winston Churchill

- Humility comes before honor.  
  
  Proverbs

- Fix the problem, not the blame.  
  
  Anonymous
Taking appropriate responsibility (3 of 3)

- Responsibility = power = choices
- Success counseling & internal control
- Safe place for campers and staff to do so (systems analysis)
- Offer stories and quotes
Applying it to camp

- Taught you how to fish (six principles)
  - Normalize
  - Drive
  - Support
  - Keep perspective
  - Find the lessons
  - Take appropriate responsibility

- Before I give you fish, tell me what you would do to implement these ideas
Applying it to camp

- Espoused values / policies
- Structures
- Activities / processes
We appreciate intelligent mistakes, work with outright gaffs, and value people’s ability to fail forward in either case.

When people fail, we offer them a hand, but not the back of it.

We encourage carefully planned experimentation even if it might result in failure.
Structures

✿ Staff selection format
   ✴ On staff application, ask for example of failing forward
   ✴ Same for interview

✿ Include on performance reviews
   (a) makes mistakes
   (b) learns from them

✿ Quote stones along a path, plaques, printed on daily schedule, bulletin boards

✿ The Goof List Binder
Activities / processes (1 of 3)

epad

Educate staff about making mistakes

- Orientation
- Summer staff meetings
- In-service training

How?

- Feel free to use/give this presentation
- Use the “Stand up if . . .” activity
- Tell stories
  - Administration to everyone
  - Small groups, which report back to the whole
- Hold three stories in hip pocket
Activities / processes (2 of 3)

✦ Mistake journals  (successes too)
  ✦ Campers
  ✦ Counselors
  ✦ Administration

✦ Administration mistake bulletin board

✦ Mistakes as they happen during the summer

✦ Exalted Order of The Extended Neck

✦ Problem? Hug!
Activities / processes (3 of 3)

- Staff train campers
  - Vespers, assembly, unit time, . . .
  - Counselors tell stories that model the principles
  - Via mistakes journal
  - “Teachable moment” When they fail

- Success counseling method with vision of better way

- Postmortems that utilize an interdependent, systems analysis
For further reference

If you are very, very careful, nothing good or bad will ever happen to you.

Dr. Robert Maurer
Thank You!
Teacher: "I don't know the answer, but you've sure given me a lot to think about."
"Today, we're going to learn how to deal with rejection."
"This next number goes out to all the little people I met on my way back down."
“So how’s everything going?”
ED'S DPY GOODS

LOST OUR MOTIVATION
EVERYTHING MUST GO
"After the judicial system, I'm my own harshest critic."
"Thank you for letting us consider the enclosed manuscript. Although it has obvious merit, we are sorry to say that is doesn't suit our present needs."