

Recover with honor

TRANSFORM YOUR FAILURES INTO OPPORTUNITIES THAT DEFINE YOUR CHARACTER

“I’m sorry to call you so late,” said Cynthia, the senior project manager on one of my company’s largest consulting projects. The clock beside my bed showed 3 a.m., and I knew from experience that this call would not bring good news.

“The new system is scheduled to go live in three days, but we’ve just discovered a problem,” she said.

I could hear the urgency in her voice as well as the sounds of her team scrambling in the background.

“One of the major features of the system has a fatal error that only occurs under very specific circumstances,” Cynthia said. “We can fix it, but we’ll need two weeks.

There’s no way we can make the launch date.”

I was stunned fully awake when I realized what this would mean to our client. Intense preparations, including international travel, training, press releases and a public launch celebration, would have to be postponed.

I dreaded the thought of the call I would now have to make.

When you fail, be the first to admit it

Over the next few hours, I reviewed the problem in detail, listened to explanations of why our testing process had failed to detect it and carefully planned the message I would give to our client. But through it all, I was fighting the temptation to keep the problem hidden.

Each time I thought of calling our client, I imagined a series of reasons why full disclosure wasn’t necessary. My

mind raced with rationalizations, including the high likelihood that the error wouldn’t be discovered and could be quietly resolved in the background without the client ever knowing it existed.

But then I asked myself a simple, but powerful, question — *What would I want someone else to do in the same situation?* The answer was immediate and clear: I would want to hear the full truth as quickly as possible. A few minutes later, I placed the call.

When you face your next failure, you will be tempted to either hide or deny it — a temptation made stronger by all the times you have seen others respond in this way. But if you have the courage to disclose all the facts, no matter how painful, you will begin to rebuild trust with those who depend on you.

When you fail, take personal responsibility for the resolution

The most important statement I made in my call to the client was, “I take full responsibility for the resolution.” Making this statement elevated my commitment from the level of an organizational imperative to the higher level of a personal promise. It also created an accountability that kept me going through the long days and nights that followed as we worked to fix the problem.

Success belongs to everyone on the team, but failure must be owned by the leader.

The next time you fail, make yourself publicly and personally accountable for the resolution. Become the leader who is willing to place your own reputation at stake. When you do, you’ll find that this level of commitment not only drives your performance, but it also earns the respect of everyone around you.

When you fail, be willing to learn

It was hard for me to accept all that happened on this project. I had wanted to be the leader who stood proudly at the podium during the launch celebration — not the leader who had to admit and own a major failure.

But a single failure can teach you more than a dozen successes if you are humble enough to learn. By accepting, and recovering, from this failure I was forced to grow in ways that I now know were essential to my future success.

Throughout your life and your career, you will inevitably experience failure, particularly if you are attempting great things. When you do, remember that it is not failure that defines your character; it’s how you recover.

Choose to recover with excellence and with honor, and you will transform your mistakes into the experiences that ultimately make you the leader and the person you want to be. <<



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