



**Glenn Llopis**, Contributor

I share the immigrant perspective on leadership & workplace innovation

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## 5 Things Failure Teaches You About Leadership

As you reflect upon your career and future, step-back and [assess your body of work](#) and how it has impacted the manner in which you lead.

What makes you a stronger leader and provides you the perspective to cast a greater vision and help others achieve more? It is the wisdom

embedded within your failures. Understandably, most people would rather not talk about their failures, but it sure does teach one how to manage adversity; for example, to understand why certain dots didn't connect in their career, or why certain relationships or opportunities went awry.



### ***Failure ultimately shapes you as a leader.***

As both a senior corporate executive and an entrepreneur, failure fueled the most rewarding opportunities and learnings in my career. Whether it was the decisions I made, the people I hired, the investments I made, the relationships I invested in – or any of the ones I didn't – from each experience I learned something new about leadership. For example, I developed a better understanding of the expectations people had of me as their boss; of how to deal with a marketplace that can be so unpredictable; of how certain relationships are connected to resources you didn't know about that could have made your path to success much easier.

### ***Failure is the most powerful source for know-how and understanding. It teaches you about survival, renewal and reinvention of yourself and the organization you are leading.***

*You can learn about others based on their history with failure. If you really want to know more about another person's character, simply ask: What have been your (3) greatest failures and how did you overcome them? If they can't think of at least three, they either haven't stretched themselves enough (and are extremely risk adverse) or they are not valuing the benefits of failure (and thus are too proud to examine – or even admit – their failures).*

Failure is one of life's greatest enablers. Think about it. If you never failed at anything, you would never be forced to take action to course-correct or try new ways to seize opportunities previously unseen. In the end, it's what you

do with failure that defines your character as a leader. For example, do you admit defeat – or do you find a creative way to mask reality? Do you ask yourself what you learned during the process of failing – or do you hold someone else accountable and / or blame the circumstances you were faced with to deflect criticism of the failed outcome?

Great leadership (like [great management](#)) is about being accountable for your actions. Some of [the greatest leaders in history failed](#) at one time or another, a list that includes Thomas [Edison](#), [Bill Gates](#), [Walt Disney](#), and many others. Their ability to hold themselves accountable enabled them to persevere, become better leaders and build their legacies.

Here are (5) things failure can teach you about leadership that can make you a better person too:

### **1. Confront Your Failure and Learn from It**

Instead of running away from or masking the failure you experienced, take the time to reflect upon the situation. Confront the issue head-on and evaluate what you could have done better and identify the lessons learned.

If other people were involved (directly or indirectly), ask them to provide you feedback and identify the opportunities that can be seized from this learning moment. Quickly create a plan of action while the pain you experienced is fresh and begin to outline how the key learnings from the failure can be used in different situations.

### **2. Build Your [Team](#) and Make the [Business](#) Better**

Early on in my corporate career, I was responsible for losing a business relationship that cost the company \$5 million dollars in annual revenue. At the time, my leadership style was too relaxed and I trusted the management system that I had inherited – from production, inventory, and quality control to marketing and customer service, etc. – rather than being proactive about making the system better.

This failed relationship forced me to find ways to make the system more effective and interdependent upon the decisions made by each departmental leader. In the process of reinventing the system, it made our team stronger and more united. We all matured and designed an entirely new set of best practices that renewed our entire business model; this allowed us to acquire new business relationships and become a much more innovative company.

***Failure teaches you about who you can trust and depend upon. It gives you real perspective about who really has your back.***

### **3. Trust Your Gut and Make More Decisions**

Allow failure to make you stronger and wiser. With this attitude you must become fearless when embarking upon new ventures. As such, failure should empower you to trust your gut and thus enable you to make better decisions; based on your failed experiences, you will be better equipped to navigate new situations.

This may sound counter-intuitive, but once you understand why you failed you may realize that you weren't that far away from success. In other words, now that you have taken the time to reflect upon what you could have done to avoid failure, it puts you in a position of strength that allows you to trust your

instincts. This also allows you to be more resourceful with your relationships. It enables your entrepreneurial spirit as a leader – and you can begin to see opportunities with greater clarity and focus.

Many people have the tendency to quit when faced with the disruption that failure can bring. I have learned that failure gives you hope if you allow yourself to manage through the adversity rightly. I encourage you to read this poem written by former College Football Head Coach, Terry Hooppner, "[Don't Quit](#)."

#### 4. Second Chances are All Around You

Failure is not fatal. It is a wake-up call for the next opportunity. Remember, opportunity is the true mother of success. As such, you must never forget that second chances are all around you. With this lens, failure allows you to see opportunities with broader observation. You can now identify the opportunities that lie around, beneath and beyond what you seek – thus widening your field of opportunity.

I have always found that with failure comes opportunity. Never forget this. How you go about seizing the next opportunity gets you closer to learning how to overcome adversity. Each encounter with failure makes you understand why the following quote has become so popular: "*If I only knew then what I know now.*"

#### 5. Appreciate Your Leadership Responsibilities

Failure has always opened my eyes to appreciate my responsibilities as a leader. It's made me think about my duty, its impact on others and the business at-large. It has made me want to become a more effective leader by finding innovative ways to improve my skills. In fact, I am a student of leadership. I practice what I teach (as a consultant) by studying how great leaders have overcome adversity.

As you plan your week, be more aware of your responsibilities and make the effort to seize each opportunity that you have before you as a leader, by applying lessons 1 – 4 each day.

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