



Dear Friend,

Safe! ... or Was It Out?

Let me be completely honest. I haven't sat down and watched a baseball game since Reggie Jackson played for the Yankees. So, as you can guess, I wouldn't exactly be called a fan.

However, you'd have to have been living under a rock not to have heard about umpire Jim Joyce's major blunder in a recent game. In the final inning, Joyce called a runner "safe" rather than "out," robbing Tigers pitcher Armando Galarraga of his place in a very small fraternity of players who can boast of throwing a perfect game.

Now, I'm not here to beat up on Joyce. In fact, after my initial "Get the guy some glasses" reaction, I actually was proud of him. And, here's why.

We all make mistakes. Some of us, though, by virtue of who we are or where we are at a given moment, just make more public goofs than others.

But, when Joyce got the chance to review the video and see what really happened, we all knew that he knew that he'd messed up. Joyce admitted -- loudly, colorfully, and publicly -- that he'd blown it. And, then he made a beeline to Galarraga to 'fess up and make amends with him.

So, Jim Joyce got it right...even though he got the call wrong.

And, in the spirit of Jim Joyce, we devote this month's edition of *EA Insights* to failure. An interesting, and perhaps uncomfortable, topic, I know. But, let's give some thought to how to regroup when (not if) we make a mess of things. And, trust me, we all will!

Enjoy this month's newsletter!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
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The Art of Failing Well

June Melvin Mickens, J.D.
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--You miss a deadline, and now the whole project is off schedule.

--You tell an off-color joke in a staff meeting, and now Human Resources is calling you in for a talk.

--You lose your cool with a client, and now everyone is in crisis mode trying to salvage that business.

--You thought the total was \$1M, but it actually was \$3M, and now you've got to figure out how to make up the difference.



Mistakes -- they're a part of life. Some we can avoid, to a degree, with care. Others are inevitable. But, failing at something, however it happens, isn't fun. (Now, that's an understatement!)

Failure can breed a whole range of fears. "What if I..." You fill in the blank.

Failure also can be embarrassing. "People will see me for who I really am." "I'll look like a fool."

So, to avoid the fear and the embarrassment, we may gravitate to one of two extremes.

On the one hand, there are folks who choose to steer clear of failure at all costs by sticking only with what they know. They refuse to try anything new, or different, or risky. And, that's perhaps the greatest mistake of all.

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"Quotes"

"You've failed many times, although you may not remember. You fell down the first time you tried to walk. You almost drowned the first time you tried to swim, didn't you? Did you hit the ball the first time you swung a bat? Heavy hitters, the ones who hit the most home runs, also strike out a lot. R.H. Macy failed seven times before his store in New York caught on. English novelist John Creasy got 753 rejection slips before he published 564 books. Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times, but he also hit 714 home runs. Don't worry about failure. Worry about the chances you miss when you don't even try."
~ Unknown

"If you want to succeed, double your failure rate."
~ Thomas J. Watson

"We learn wisdom from failure much more than from success. We often discover what will do by finding out what will not do; and probably he who never made a mistake never made a discovery."
~ Samuel Smiles

"What we call failure is not the falling down, but the staying down."
~ Mary Pickford

On the other hand, there are folks who do put themselves in the game, unlike the folks in the first group. However, whenever they are faced with an unfamiliar task, they study and check and circle, and then do it all again...and again...and again *ad nauseam*, in an attempt to be absolutely, perfectly, sure before taking any action. They're careful to the nth degree. So, they reduce their likelihood of failure by not moving forward until certainty has been achieved. And, while that tackles the issue of failure in one way, it adds to it on the flipside because of their lack of productivity.

The bottom line is that there really is no way to insure against failure of some sort, at some time. So, given that mistakes are unavoidable for us all, here's the real question. Is there any way to fail well? In other words, is it possible to see benefit -- and not just grief -- come out of our errors? Well, if you ask one who has experienced her fair share of failure over the years, the answer definitely is "yes." And, let's use the word at the center of this discussion -- "F-A-I-L" -- to think through just how that might happen.

Fess up (to yourself and others). Have you ever been around someone who just would not admit to having made a mistake? Have you ever been that person? (That's okay; we'll let the people you work and/or live with provide that answer.)

Perhaps the most important key to failing well is admitting when something hasn't gone right. Don't adopt the Teflon approach -- letting the blame slide off of you and onto others. Take responsibility for your actions and your errors. There may be momentary embarrassment in acknowledging your mistake. Ultimately, though, you can't move forward until you are willing to declare to yourself and to anyone else involved that "Houston, we have (or had) a problem."

Attitude is everything. Guess what? Nobody's perfect. Consequently, we're all going to falter periodically. And, although the goal is not to go through life trying or expecting to fail, a healthy attitude involves understanding that, despite our best efforts, we will not succeed at everything we put our hands on. Just knowing that can be freeing -- for you and for those around you.

Identify the root of the error, and extract the lesson. A failure becomes a wasted experience, if you learn nothing from it. So, in order to fail well, take a step back and really look at what happened. Try to understand what was going on around you, the role you played, or anything else that may have been a contributing factor to the undesired outcome. Then, connect the dots. What lessons can you take away from the incident that will help you or others to achieve better results in the future?

Let it go, and move on. Here's where the whole approach comes full circle. Once you admit what's happened, put things in perspective, and discover the lessons to be learned, then you've got to move on! Continuing to beat yourself up forever is counterproductive. Yes, make a note of the experience and file it away in your memory bank so that, if similar circumstances occur somewhere down the road, you can recall past lessons and not repeat errors. But, leave it at that, and go on to the next challenge.

Mastering the art of failing well, in many respects, opens the door to increased growth -- for you personally and as you seek to enhance capacity in those around you at work and elsewhere. So, how'd you handle your or someone else's latest blunder?

EA's Coaching A-B-C's!

Check out our individual professional development programs -- the **Executive Advantage** Coaching A-B-Cs!

A: ADVanced Insights Program (1 - 2 months of exploration of who you are and how to leverage how you're wired for greater success)

B: Basic Program (2 - 3 months building on the ADVanced Insights exploration and adding support in goal-setting)

C: Comprehensive Program (a full year of support that includes all of the benefits of the ADVanced Insights and Basic programs, plus skill-building and goal implementation coaching)



Executive Advantage supports professional clients to:

- Enhance leadership and communication skills
- Achieve greater job satisfaction and productivity
- Improve time management
- Boost work-life balance
- Decrease stress

For information about **Executive Advantage's** solutions for professionals, contact us [online](#) or at **(301)280-5950**.

"Excuses are the nails used to build a house of failure."
~ Don Wilder

"Success is 99 percent mental attitude.... Success is having the courage to meet failure without being defeated. It is refusing to let present loss interfere with your long-range goal."
~ Wilfred A. Peterson

"Our task is to become our best selves. One of God's greatest gifts to us is the joy of trying again, for no failure ever need be final."
~ Thomas S. Monson

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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