



WPC CLASS NOTES

My 2 cents



You are going to fail. It happens to everyone some time or another. How we deal with failure significantly affects our success and, ultimately, our happiness. In my professional experience as a leadership consultant and entrepreneur, I've found four lessons to better manage it.

Identify your purpose. Why do you exist? Or, said differently: What kind of productive individual do you want to be? Your answer to this fundamental question will become the standard on how you'll measure progress and gauge setbacks.

Don't underestimate the power of this simple but profound exercise. Take the example of Jacob Cohen, a struggling comedian who experienced a constant string of failures in his pursuit of success. He became so disillusioned that he quit comedy for a decade, working a variety of other jobs instead. Keenly aware that he was off-purpose, Cohen returned to comedy at age 46 with a new act and persona. You know him by his stage name: Rodney Dangerfield.

Acknowledge your behaviors. Behaviors, or the manners of action, help explain our responses to failure. I have my clients complete a scientifically validated tool that clarifies "who" they are, with respect to how they instinctively act. It explains a lot. For instance, some behavioral profiles want to win and easily accept failure as a cost of doing business. Sometimes they accept it too easily and don't learn from it. Others feel they must always be right and technically correct. They can take failure unduly hard and extremely personally.

Avoid setting unrealistic expectations for yourself. It's common for some people to modify their behaviors to influence how they're perceived. Take the ambitious young man who's most comfortable supporting the team but tries to act more dominant than he is. People begin looking to him to take charge and, consequently, he's assigned leadership roles. These new responsibilities quickly become uncomfortable, like trying to write with a nondominant hand. His chances of failure dramatically increase because this type of behavioral masquerading is draining and, ultimately, self-sabotaging.

Remember that chaos is natural and perfection is impossible. There are many factors outside our control and periphery. This is completely normal because we operate with limited information at any given time. The fact is that we can always count on surprises to trip us up in our pursuits, no matter the amount of planning or forethought. We can either blame ourselves for not anticipating every obstacle or accept the fact that we are not omniscient and must adjust accordingly. George C. Marshall's advice is instructive here: "When a thing is done, it's done. Don't look back. Look forward to your next objective."

Failure is natural and is going to occur whether you like it or not. The better you understand yourself and know exactly what you want to achieve in the end, the better off you are in dealing with it. Don't let failures become an excuse; instead, let them be lessons to better navigate you in your pursuits.



Kevin Black Consulting. His clients range from startups to public companies such as LifeLock, Medtronic, and McKesson. He is the author of the upcoming book *Managing Chaos: The Emergent Leader*, and writes for *Forbes* as a Forbes Coaches Council member. He is certified in the behavioral tool PROSCAN, from Professional Dynametrics Program (PDPglobal).

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