

MATTMCWILLIAMS

Live with Passion. Lead with Purpose. Leave a Legacy.

The Real Reason You're Afraid to Fail

Why are you often afraid to fail? Why does it paralyze you from continuing to pursue your dream, take the next right action, or act on your calling? For most of us, failure is devastating and demoralizing. But it doesn't have to be that way.

A Lesson in Failure from my Father

I'll never forget the day my dad taught me how to handle failure. When I was growing up playing competitive golf, my dad often served as my caddie. He was also a teaching professional who'd played in more PGA Tour events (two) than I ever did (none). So he knew a thing or two about the game.

On this particular day, I'd just hit a miserable putt and immediately hung my head in shame. I knew as soon as I'd hit it that the ball would not go into the hole.

So I muttered something sarcastic to myself, complained out loud about my effort, and pouted while the ball rolled past the hole. That's when my dad asked me, "What are you paying attention to right now?"

I didn't really know how to answer him. I was paying attention to my feelings. I was paying attention to the fact that I had just hit a terrible putt. I was paying attention to my feelings of frustration, anger, and disgust. I was focused on my failure.

I was *not* focused on how the ball was rolling past the hole.

The Opportunity in Failure

Most golfers do the same thing...they only pay attention to the putt until they've determined whether or not the putt will go into the hole. They only pay attention long enough to decipher between success and failure. It's so black and white.

Most people do the same thing in their professional and personal lives. They only pay attention long enough to decide if an activity is a failure or not, then focus on the failure. They get nothing out of it worthwhile.

What my dad was saying was, "You are missing so much right now, Matt." I could have watched how the ball rolled past the hole to get a better idea of how the next putt would roll. That would help me to perform better on the next effort.

My dad was telling me that there is an opportunity in failure, but only if you pay attention.

Like a Child

This concept comes naturally to a child but we lose it over time. Less than a decade after learning to tie our shoes, failure suddenly becomes something to be avoided, something that hurts, something that we no longer learn from.

Think of how a child operates as he learns to do something for the first time. He tries it one way and fails, so he tries it a different way. He forgets step two, remembers step four, does it backwards, sideways, and upside down, but each time he builds on his past failures until one day, it's second nature.

He doesn't get halfway through learning to tie his shoes, fail at it and decide that isn't what he wants to do. He doesn't then decide he'll never learn to tie his shoes, but rather learn to ride a bike. No, he takes what he has learned about tying shoes and each time he starts over, he is at a new level.

This is a concept we're going to explore more next week and I'll share with you the key difference between how the middle class and the wealthy respond to failure. So make sure to subscribe so you don't miss that. You'll also get access to my entire VIP vault.

The Real Reason You're Afraid to Fail

You might think that the reason you're afraid to fail is that it is painful in some way. Perhaps it will cost you money or valuable time. Perhaps it's embarrassment. Others will say "I told you so," and try to drag you down. Or maybe, it's something a little deeper and hidden to most of us.

The real reason people are afraid to fail is that *they think they are going to do it again*. They think it will become a habit.

What If?

If you don't think that is the case, consider this. If you knew for a fact that your first business would completely tank, but that your second one would make you a billionaire, would you be afraid of that first failure?

What would your reaction be after that failure? Probably something like, "Woohoo! That's done with. Next!"

You wouldn't sulk or dwell on the past. You would quickly move on and take the lessons you learned with you to the next business, right?

The lesson here is a cliché but important: Your future is not determined by your past. It is *influenced* by your past but it is not dictated by your past.

The Key to Getting Past Failure

The key to getting past failure (and more importantly, *using* it) is to ask yourself the question my dad asked me:

What are you paying attention to right now?

The hurt? The anger? The embarrassment? The loss?

Or are you focused on what you can learn *right now* that will help you with the next step of this journey we call life?

Here's my question for you...what do you pay attention to after you've failed?