



## FAILURE AS FEEDBACK

*“...fears tell lies. They suggest to the pitcher that the situations he will face are more difficult to deal with than they actually are.” – Harvey Dorfman*

**What Happens in Our Minds:** Fear of failure occurs when *we allow* our minds to assume the worst and think we are in for a big disaster before anything actually happens. In reality, events rarely turn out as poorly as we make them out to be in our minds. It all starts with what your definition of failure is and what your relationship with it entails.

There is a big difference between an athlete who is confident in their abilities and one whose mind is filled with anxious thoughts of *what might happen*. Everyone knows what fear of failure looks like and feels like. But, most athletes have not been taught how to deal with failure in a healthy way in order to soften the fear of failure.

**Keeping Failure in Perspective:** A healthy perspective of failure involves acknowledging that **failure is going to happen in sport and life! It is unavoidable.** Once you understand that, you should already be breathing a sigh of relief. That’s right. Perfection is a pursuit not a prerequisite. So accept failure as a part of the job and do your best to learn from it when it happens. If you aren’t failing at least occasionally, you are playing it too safe, and probably aren’t growing much.

**View Failure as a Gift:** How would you describe your relationship with failure? Although it can be frustrating to fail, what is even more frustrating is not learning from failure. The mature athlete is going to use failure as positive feedback for learning in detail what isn’t working so he or she can make adjustments to find what will produce desired results next time. True failure only occurs when we fail to learn from our mistakes. It is well known that major sports teams want their players to fail in the minor leagues so that when they get to the top levels and experience failure – they already know how to rebound from it because they’ve experienced it before.

### WAYS TO CONQUER FEAR OF FAILURE:

- **Redefine Failure:** Don’t see failure as failure. See it as learning. Then, you never fail. You only learn and get smarter.
- **Consequence Check:** Ask yourself – what is the absolute worst thing that could happen in this moment? Example: Bases loaded no outs would be a Grand slam. Mature Response: “Oh well, new moment. Now the bases are clear and I have a clean slate to work.” At the end of the day – it’s only a game and the world didn’t end.
- **Control your mind** to focus on what you want or need to do to be successful in the moment rather than allow your mind to think up every imaginable thing that could go wrong. What really is the likelihood that you will fail anyway? Not as high as you might think.

- **Compete:** Focus on playing the game and forget about the results. Have fun and be enthusiastic in your sport – enthusiasm tends to put out the fire that fear starts. *Get comfortable being uncomfortable.*
- **Choose your response** to failure: Understand failure is a part of any sport. It will happen. *How you choose* to respond to it plays a major role in how quickly you learn from it, get better, and move on OR if you continue to live in fear of repeated failure.
- **Count on Your Pause:** The power of pausing between what has happened to us and how we will respond (whether rationally or emotionally) gives our brains a chance to catchup and respond effectively in the moment. Train thoughtful responses not emotional ones.
- **Confidence Resume:** Brian Cain in “The Mental Conditioning Manual” (pg. 96) talks about writing a list of wins in sport and life. The point of this list is to help you remember your accomplishments and help build confidence in your abilities to perform well. We often remember the things we do or have done poorly, but a confidence resume helps us to *remember* things that we’ve done well.

#### **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR CAREER**

What is your definition of failure? What is the difference between a failed attempt and labeling yourself a failure?

Give an example of a time you allowed fear of failure to affect your performance?

How would you replay that experience above if you knew then what you know now about failure and how to conquer it?

Describe how you would play your sport if you knew you could not fail?

**Your Challenge:** Find the areas in your game and in life where you have fear of failure – Take 5 minutes a day to visualize those areas or situations and imagine yourself with full confidence that you will succeed. Then perform successful repetitions over and over. Occasionally, see yourself fail and show yourself recovering. If you can see it in your mind’s eye – doing it in real life will be much easier. Practice this a little bit...a lot and you’ll begin to see mental muscle growth!