



Sometimes You Win – Sometimes You Learn

Life's Greatest Lessons Are Gained from Our Losses

John C. Maxwell
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Rating

7
 8 Applicability
 7 Innovation
 7 Style

Focus

Leadership & Management
Strategy
Sales & Marketing
Finance
Human Resources
IT, Production & Logistics
Career & Self-Development
Small Business
Economics & Politics
Industries
Global Business
Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- It doesn't matter how many times you fail; what matters is how much you learn from your failures.
- Your patterns of thought – rather than your possessions or salary – determine how much you learn.
- Life is hard and often unfair.
- The most important question is not “What am I getting?” but “What am I becoming?”
- Focus on the hope of improvement instead of the memory of loss.
- You may know what to do, but until you take action, you have not learned anything.
- Release destructive ways of thinking, accept reality and cut your losses.
- To achieve your potential, you must be willing to say, “I am responsible.”
- Success comes from making a persistent effort and performing several small steps daily.
- Each time you confront what you fear, you feel stronger.

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) How failure can teach important lessons, 2) What aspects of failure you should cultivate for lifelong learning, and 3) How changing your patterns of thought and behavior enable you to learn.

Review

Inspiring, prolific and best-selling author John. C. Maxwell explains how to learn from and cope with failure. Maxwell draws on examples, stories and observations, creating a readable manual filled with practical observations. If you put winning ahead of learning, Maxwell says, you will suffer, because failure is part of life. In the face of loss, he urges, remain hopeful and try to be “teachable.” Maxwell is a breezy, direct writer. His advice carries the weight of hard-earned knowledge and fundamental common sense. Maxwell evokes great thinkers – like psychologist Karl Jung – and the lessons of tiny, everyday experiences. *getAbstract* recommends his uplifting book to managers, entrepreneurs, anyone who is having a hard time, and everyone who believes the self can and should evolve.

Summary

“Life isn’t easy. It’s not fair. We do experience pain. Even the best of jobs includes unpleasant tasks and has times of drudgery. And every one of us will die.”

“Humility does not mean you think less of yourself. It means you think of yourself less.”

Losing Isn’t Fun, But...

You are born into the school of life with lessons to learn. If you do not learn them the first time, you may face the same lesson repeatedly in many different forms. How often you win is not important. What matters is what you learn from losing. The opportunity to learn lasts as long as you live. You may not always win, but you always have an opportunity to learn. Guidelines to a lifetime of learning include:

- 1) **“Learning too often decreases as winning increases”** – You risk becoming smug and self-satisfied if you win too often.
- 2) **Learning is possible only when your thinking changes** – Your patterns of thought determine whether you win. As the writer and philosopher J. Krishnamurti explained, “To know is to be ignorant. Not to know is the beginning of wisdom.”
- 3) **Maintain a positive mental attitude** – Remain constructive, and nothing can get you down. “The worst thing that could happen to you today could lead to the best thing that happens tomorrow.”
- 4) **Embrace creativity in every situation** – Jettison old habits and ways of thinking. The restrictions holding you back are often nothing more than “imaginary boundaries.”
- 5) **Real learning is a change in behavior** – You may know what to do, but until you take action, you have not learned anything.
- 6) **Continual success is the result of failing and learning** – Welcome failure for the lessons it brings. Use your strengths and capabilities to get out of your “comfort zone.” Accept the frustration of taking risks in arenas where you are not competent.

Shield yourself from the corrosive effects of bad times so they don’t mentally weaken or defeat you. Be prepared that some things may not work out. “When you’re losing, everything hurts” – but if you knew you were never going to lose, you wouldn’t take any risks. Most people do not want to talk about their failures. Successful people know that “sometimes you win and sometimes you learn.” You will make mistakes that, in retrospect, seem idiotic. Acknowledge such mistakes to avoid repeating them.

Learning From Failure

To learn from failure, heed these ideas:

“The number one rule of winning is don't beat yourself!”

“Mistakes are acceptable as long as the damage isn't too great.”

“Every time we fail, we can choose to put ourselves in the painful but...profitable place of taking responsibility so that we...take right actions... or we can avoid...responsibility and make excuses.”

“While people are usually ready to talk about their dreams, they are not well prepared to answer a question about their shortcomings.”

“Cultivate Humility: The Spirit of Learning”

Faced with a genuinely disastrous situation, you can cope or crumble. You might want to escape harsh reality by rationalizing. Instead, accept the facts.

Sometimes, “life is hard.” You might want it to be easier, but life is not fair. You cannot benefit by comparing your life with someone else's; your life may be harder or easier – that's just how it is. If your life is going more smoothly than most at the moment, you might feel you can avoid challenging times in the future. That is the message society delivers. Advertisers bombard you with ads about easy ways out, but no one has magic solutions for life's problems.

“People who succeed in life don't try to escape pain, loss or unfairness. They just learn to face them, accept them and move ahead anyway.” When you go through a tough period, remember: It will be harder to endure if you stop “growing and learning,” refuse to learn from your mistakes, hang onto destructive ways of thinking, fail to accept reality or are unwilling to cut your losses.

“Accept Responsibility: The First Step of Learning”

To achieve your potential, you must say, “I am responsible.” If you accept responsibility, you can learn from each failure. If not, you will make the same mistake repeatedly and slip into the role of a victim. Many people take this approach: It is practically an epidemic. They blame everyone and everything except themselves. Choosing victimization makes you look backward, focus on what you do not have and surrender your ability to respond effectively. To benefit from hard times, treat life as it is. The younger you are when you adopt this attitude, the more you will learn and the better you will do. See things for what they are, rather than what you think they should be. Confront bad times and weather them without feeling they are permanent.

Take responsibility for your mistakes. Rather than admit they are wrong, some people “blow up,” “cover up,” “back up” or “give up.” Successful people confront mistakes and learn. You are at risk if you are more interested in success than growth. The most important question is not “What am I getting?” but “What am I becoming?”

You probably do not remember learning to walk. You fell down often. Life lessons work the same way. If you want to succeed, you cannot keep stumbling the same way. You must examine what is going wrong and take corrective action, even if you are somewhat afraid.

Each time you confront what you fear, you feel stronger. As you persevere, you will become more confident and courageous. You have the choice to live with gusto. If you do not accept responsibility and commit to what must be done, you will cling to excuses when things don't work out, and that will undermine your chances to succeed. Be the person you think God meant for you to be, and not someone else. The ultimate responsibility is authenticity: ensuring that your deeds confirm your words.

The Marines call the people who reassemble used parachutes “riggers.” Riggers must make a parachute jump every month, using a parachute selected at random from those they packed. That ensures that riggers know they put their lives at stake every time they pack a

parachute. Always behave as if your life depends on your actions.

“Seek Improvement: The Focus of Learning”

Walter Cronkite, the anchor of *CBS Evening News* from 1962 to 1981, was once the world’s most successful broadcast journalist. He learned the lesson of constant improvement early in his career, when he broadcast University of Oklahoma football games. His first game was a disaster because he could not tell one player from another. After that game, he spent hours training himself and his colleagues until he knew each player on every team at the university. That taught him a lesson that he used for the rest of his career. He always researched all the available material about any event he covered.

No one in business or life can stand still. The pace of change constantly accelerates. Most people are scared of leaving their comfort zones because they fear mistakes. Don’t let your anxieties overwhelm you. Accept that improvement is an ongoing process.

How old you are when you begin your quest for improvement doesn’t matter. You are too old only when you stop learning and improving. Success does not come from a formula. It comes from persistent effort and a number of small steps you perform daily. Two crucial aspects fuel your quest for improvement: the clarity of your intent and the time that you spend in contemplation. To grow, set aside some time every day to examine what you have learned, how you have grown and what you would do differently. Align all the aspects of your life you want to improve. If you strive for a variety of incompatible goals, you will weaken your chances of success. When something goes wrong, try to understand what happened. Your mistake highlights an area in which you need to improve.

“Nurture Hope: The Motivation of Learning”

Hope is one of life’s most valuable assets. No matter what happens, don’t lose hope. Without hope, you rob yourself of motivation and the ability to learn. Author and theologian Paul Tillich said that his book *The Courage to Be* was about real courage: saying yes to life in spite of the hardship and pain that form human existence. It takes courage to find something positive and meaningful about yourself and life every day. That, he said, was the key to living more fully. “Loving life,” he stated, “is perhaps the highest form of the courage to be.”

Hope gives you a reason for living and the energy to do so. To nurture hope, let go of the past. What matters is the future. People who learn from adverse circumstances internalize hope. They understand that hope turns them “from victims to victors.” If you think negatively, your expectations will be low. You can change negative thinking if you renew your sense of hope. Try for some small wins – getting something right is the best way to encourage hope.

“Develop Teachability: The Pathway of Learning”

Winners’ “teachable spirit” separates them from everyone else. “Teachability [is] the intentional attitude and behavior to keep learning and growing throughout life.” Jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong described that lack of intent when he said, “There are some people that if they don’t know, you can’t teach them.”

What you know today will not be enough tomorrow. You must keep learning. Unfortunately, most people stop learning when they leave school. Explore new, unfamiliar areas instead of being satisfied with the worlds in which you are an expert. “We can choose the pathway to a better future by developing a teachable spirit, or we can sabotage that future by pretending that we know everything we need to move forward in life.”

“Anxiety and fear are debilitating emotions for the human heart. So are losses. They can weaken, imprison, paralyze, dishearten and sicken us.”

“Through pride we are ever deceiving ourselves. But deep down below the surface of the average conscience a still, small voice says to us, ‘Something is out of tune.’”

“A loss doesn’t turn into a lesson unless we work hard to make it so.”

“To learn from our losses, we must be able to face reality and use it to create a foundation for growth.”

“To gain the value of learning, we need to be in the habit of executing at a high level, rain or shine, success or failure, setback or breakthrough.”

“Either you deal with what is the reality, or you can be sure that the reality is going to deal with you.”

“Life is a series of problems. Do we want to moan about them or solve them?”

If something goes wrong, examine whether you are the cause. If you are, take steps to rectify what you did wrong. Have people around you who will give you honest assessments of your performance. This is especially important if you are successful. Once you do well, you risk sycophancy – the state in which everyone around you only tells you how great you are. Strive to learn something new every day. Gaining knowledge may not change your life immediately, but everything you learn will serve you over time. Reflect on each upcoming day’s likely course and consider where you could learn the most. At the end of the day, look back to see what you learned and resolve to apply your new lessons where appropriate.

“Overcome Adversity: The Catalyst for Learning”

You write the story of your life, and you choose whether you are the hero. You cannot avoid adversity, but you can choose how you respond to it. If you are optimistic, you can have a positive outcome. Being negative increases the odds of an adverse outcome. Capitalize on the opportunities that adversity provides and you will emerge a better person.

“Leverage Problems: The Opportunities for Learning”

When you face a problem, do not expect it to resolve itself and avoid aggravating the situation. Do not lose yourself in worry. Discuss it with people who support you and understand it. Agree on what the main issues are so you can address them.

“Endure Bad Experiences: The Perspective for Learning”

When something goes wrong, accept that you are only human and are not any less of a person. Think like a scientist. Maintain your objectivity. Do not give up; you might be closer to success than you think. If something goes wrong, determine whether it is because of “stupidity” or “ignorance.” If you do not know about something, you can always learn.

“Embrace Change: The Price of Learning”

Most people resist change because it makes them feel they are losing something. No one can fight change, and for everything you gain you must also lose something. You may be comfortable with your life. You might be willing to make just enough change to address a problem while avoiding the real issue, which might be your actions. Change is opportunity. If you do not adapt, you will pay a price. Learn to profit from change.

“Maturity: The Value of Learning!”

Persevere as you confront loss and adversity, and life will reward you with the wisdom of maturity. You’ll learn quickly from your mistakes and know when you have to take action. You will stick to your decisions and give up instant gratification. If you make tough decisions consistently, you will earn your own respect and strengthen your character and self-esteem. That “happens from the inside out.” As you build your core of integrity, you will come to rely on yourself more and more. “You stay true to who you are to the core, you learn from your mistakes and you keep moving forward.”

About the Author

John C. Maxwell’s books have sold more than 23 million copies. He founded EQUIP and the John Maxwell Company, organizations that have trained more than five million people in leadership.