



How to handle failures at work?

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14-Apr-20

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How to handle failures at work?

How to Handle Failure at Work

Feeling like you failed at work can be crushing. It's important to remember, though, that failure happens to everyone, and everyone has to handle its aftereffects. Understanding that failure happens, owning your mistake, and framing your failure as a chance to learn will help you not only handle your failure, but grow from it and come out stronger on the other side.



Accepting failure

Tell your supervisor directly

- ❖ Telling your boss you didn't meet expectations or made a big mistake is quite tough. Letting them find out from someone else will ultimately make things much worse, though. As soon as you know something is wrong, talk to your boss directly. Briefly explain the situation, apologize to them, and assure them it will never happen again.
- ❖ If other team members were involved, you may need to discuss this with your boss. Avoid throwing others under the bus, though. This makes you look afraid and unreliable.
- ❖ This ultimately shows your boss that you understand the gravity of the situation, that you aren't afraid of accountability, and that you want to work to move past problems rather than covering them up.

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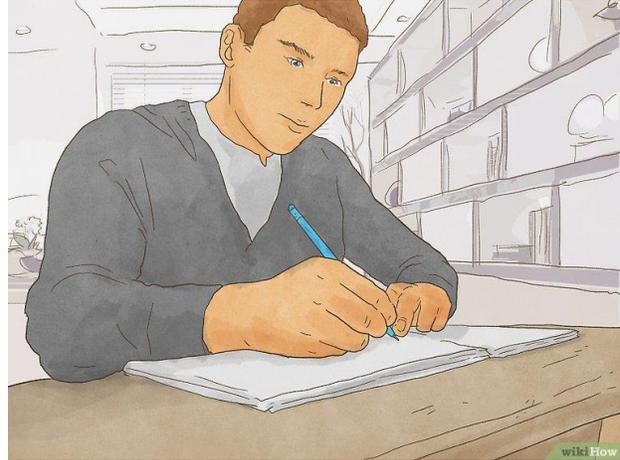
Remind yourself that failure happens to everyone.

- ❖ Stand in front of the mirror, look yourself in the eyes, and say, “Everyone fails sometimes.”
When you first experience a failure, it can feel crushing. The truth is, though, that most people fail multiple times over the course of their careers. Understanding that can help you redirect your focus from your negative feelings.
- ❖ Don’t let a setback define you as a failure to yourself. You may not have succeeded at this goal or task, but that doesn’t mean you’re doomed to fail at everything for the rest of your life.
- ❖ If you’re feeling stuck or finding it difficult to move on after a failure, talk to a mentor or a professional counselor. They may have advice about how to cope.

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Break down why the failure happened

- ❖ It's easy to blame yourself, but failure is rarely personal. Whether you failed to successfully complete a project or got passed over for your dream job, there was a reason you didn't succeed. Write down the reasons you think you failed, then brainstorm any potential root causes or contributing factors for those reasons.
- ❖ If, for example, you got passed over for a promotion, the reason may be that the company wants someone with 5-7 years of experience, and you only have 2.
- ❖ The root cause for your company wanting someone with more experience may be because your industry has a high turnover rate, and they don't want to invest time in an employee that will leave the company soon thereafter. It's not you, it's just the nature of your industry.
- ❖ Conversely, if you were let go from your job because you were routinely late and failed to complete your job duties, the root cause is that you were not meeting the expectations of the position.



Take a break from the task or assignment

- ❖ If you can, take a little time to focus on other things. This helps refocus your attention on something constructive, and may help make dealing with a problem or mistake easier overall.
- ❖ If work seems overwhelming in the immediate moment, get away from your desk. Go for a quick walk around the block, grab a cup of coffee, or take an early lunch.
- ❖ You could also excuse yourself to make a quick personal call if you feel like you need to vent. Call a friend, a family member, or anyone else that offers you emotional comfort. Just be sure not to take more than 5-10 minutes away from your workstation.



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Moving forward

Reframe your failure as a chance to grow

A lack of success doesn't have to be the same thing as failure. Look at a moment where you were not successful as a chance to learn and grow as an employee. Instead of saying, "I failed to write a high-quality report," tell yourself, "I learned that I need do more research into report writing and formatting for my industry."

Ask for additional training or mentorship

- ❖ In some cases, hard work might be enough to move forward. In others, though, it's perfectly okay to ask for help. Don't be afraid to ask for more job training in areas where you aren't as strong.
- ❖ If your sense of failure is caused by struggling to break into or stay relevant in your industry, consider looking for a mentor to help you. Look into business mentoring programs and professional associations in your area to find someone who can help you break through.



Focus on what you can control

- ❖ You can't go back in time or change your actions. It's not worth your time or energy to focus on things like this that you can't control. Instead, move forward by focusing on what you can control, including how you handle the aftermath of your failure.
- ❖ If a client presentation went wrong, for example, something you can control might be your follow-up to your client. Do you need to apologize? Should you try to schedule a follow-up meeting or a new presentation?

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Address your failure with your team

- ❖ Whether you're a manager or an employee, your failure will impact your team as well. If you're a manager, set up a time to talk to your team about what happened, and how your project or team goals may need to shift. If you're a team member, ask your team leader about how they want you to talk to the rest of your team.
- ❖ You shouldn't address your team with fear or shame. Your team members have likely experienced job failure before, too. Letting them know what happened directly, though, shows your respect for your teammates and allows you to move forward as a cohesive unit.



Learning from Past Failure

Commit only to what you can deliver

- ❖ Pushing yourself is good, but committing to more than you can reasonably do can break your career. Use your past failures as a gauge for what you can and cannot reasonably accomplish, and only commit to what you can do completely, correctly, and on-time.
- ❖ Remember that it's completely normal to not be able to do everything. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and everyone will have a different workload. If you don't have the technical skills or time available to complete a task, let your boss know before you take on that work.

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Re-evaluate your approach to new projects

As you take on new projects or challenges, ask yourself if there is anything you would do different having learned from your past failures. If you're struggling to find a job, for example, consider reviewing and re-writing your resume and cover letter, or setting up mock interviews to help you practice your interview skills.

Build on your current skills

- ❖ Doing only what you're good at won't lead to any growth as a worker or leader. However, jumping unprepared into a project or activity where you don't have any background or skills won't help you, either. Instead, try to position yourself to move toward new skills or join new projects by offering up that which you can do well.
- ❖ If, for example, you're a great technical writer but you want to get into the marketing side of your field, volunteer to write some copy for your ad team. This can give you exposure to other aspects of marketing while still drawing on your skills.