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So I decided to retire.<sup>1</sup> Her retirement didn't last long. During the last four or five years, I've had many opportunities to speak to the people in her cosmetics company about leadership. It impacts every aspect of a person's life. So the first question I asked myself was, What does the professor want? M. She decided on a cosmetics business that would give every woman who worked in it unlimited opportunities. In Leadership Magazine, J. If anything, my college experience had reinforced the wrong notions I had about failure. Right now you are getting the chance to sign up with me for a class you were never offered in school. Your relationships make you or they break you. It's the reason I lead my organization, The INJOY Group. To my shock, I heard laughter on the other end of the phone. I misunderstood failure. I did everything the people might expect of me and then some. During that game, Tony got on base with hits four times in five tries. That player was Tony Gwynn of the San Diego Padres. I was unprepared for failure. Two people with similar gifts, talents, and resources can look at a situation, and one person will see tremendous opportunity while the other sees nothing. High percentages of successful people come from broken homes. Fear! Up to that time, I had never failed a class. It will be so much easier than what you are proposing. I want to see people achieve. I was at the point of tears. As I speak around the country, people often ask me why I write books. Maxwell says that if you are like him, coming out of school, you feared it, misunderstood it, and ran away from it. How did you respond? It's a process. She overcame a lot of obstacles in her career, and she never let failure get the better of her. THE IMPOSSIBLE QUESTION When I was growing up, one of the questions I used to hear from motivational speakers was this: If the possibility of failure were erased, what would you attempt to achieve? School became a game that I wanted to win. 3. Opportunity is in the eye of the beholder. • Opportunity? Dad, I lamented, I can't believe it. If she was going to encounter obstacles, they would be there only because she brought them on herself. How people see failure and deal with it—whether they possess the ability to look beyond it and keep achieving—impacts every aspect of their lives. I want to help you train for failure. Wealth is no indicator of high achievement, and poverty is no guarantee of low achievement. • Wealth? Should I leave and go to another church? On the first day of class when I was a freshman, the professor walked into my history of civilization class and boldly declared, Half of you in this room will not pass this class. PUTTING A NEW FACE ON OBSTACLES When I think of people who were able to look trouble in the eye and forge ahead, one of the first who comes to mind is Mary Kay Ash. You have the potential to overcome any problems, mistakes, or misfortunes. No, none of these things are the key. It's the reason I teach conferences, record lessons on cassette, create training videos, and write books. But then a month before she was to open for business, her husband died of a heart attack right at their kitchen table. Her accountant spoke to her in similar terms. If you pick up any one of my books, you can be sure that it seeks to add value in one of these four areas. It doesn't matter what kind of work they do. And kids today don't get it there either. If your perception of and response to failure were changed, what would you attempt to achieve? They find ingenious ways to increase profits for their department in the face of budget cuts. An experience I had in college, along with my response to it, is typical of what many students encounter. And I've known scoundrels who are high producers. If your dreams are great, you achieve them only with a team. Imagine my surprise when the votes came back 31 yeses, 1 no, and 1 abstention. They were making wonderful progress. She sank her \$5,000 life savings into her new business—every cent she had. What does matter is that your life can change if you're willing to look at failure differently. I feared failure. In fact, as I travel around the country doing conferences and seminars, it seems that no matter where I speak, there are always at least a dozen Mary Kay consultants in attendance. I was devastated. Are you going to fail forward or backward? That thinking didn't help me. You know what I'm talking about. Sixty-nine and lower meant failure. Wherever they are, they just seem to make things happen. I found that out in my first job. Is it family background, wealth, greater opportunities, high morals, an easy childhood?New York Times best-selling author John C. is it. . . . By the time a month passed, she was stir-crazy. But I recall that I once memorized eighty-three dates for a test in that class because my teacher believed that if you could cite the dates, you had mastered the material. After I went home that night, I called my father, who was a veteran pastor, former district superintendent in the denomination, and college president. You can remember them by thinking of the word REAL. My desire is that Failing Forward will add value to your life. That in itself is a process, and it begins with a desire to be teachable. Despite adverse circumstances, obstacles, and hardships, she failed forward. No. Did he think he had failed himself or his team? And as I've helped leaders to grow and develop through the years, I've seen that most people are in the same boat. I've known people with high integrity who achieve little. People are training for success when they should be training for failure. TROUBLE! It didn't take long for her to hit her first obstacle. Despite their attempts to discourage her, she moved ahead. In the type of church I led, each year the people voted to decide whether to allow the leader to keep his job. She purchased the formulas to the best beauty products she'd ever found, worked up a marketing plan, and prepared to set up a corporation. So here's a better question: If your perception of and response to failure were changed, what would you attempt to achieve? For every achiever who has avoided tragedy, there's a Helen Keller who overcame extreme disabilities or a Viktor Frankl who survived absolute horrors. Having a good family growing up is something to be grateful for, but it's not a reliable indicator of achievement. That seemed to me to be an intriguing question. When it comes right down to it, I know of only one factor that separates those who consistently shine from those who don't: The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure. • High morals? 1 What's the Main Difference Between People Who Achieve and People Who Are Average? At the time it prompted me to look ahead to life's possibilities. It didn't mean a thing. They discover awesome business opportunities while colleagues don't see any at all. I've been asked that question so many times that I want to give you the answer before you begin reading the first chapter of Failing Forward. To even imply that it might be possible gives people the wrong impression. My expectations were high as I prepared to receive my first unanimous vote. It's not a single event. • The absence of hardship? I've done everything I can. Somebody actually voted against me and wanted me to leave the church! And an abstention is as good as a no. Mary Kay, he said, if you are going to throw away your life savings, why don't you just go directly to the trash can? All you have to do is learn to fail forward. It's in changing yourself. As a child, I thought it was a percentage. It's certainly not something they tried to teach me in school. Realize there is one major difference between average people and achieving people. Are some people born to achieve anything they want while others struggle? I've written this particular book to change your attitude about failure. —KYLE ROTE JR. Haven't you? When she visited her attorney to make legal arrangements for the corporation, he insulted her and predicted her failure. No, some of the greatest achievers come from households of average to below-average means. As the pastor in a small rural church, I worked very hard that first year. They earn a graduate degree while raising two children as a single parent. For example, I'm known to be a very positive person. You can call it luck, blessing, or the Midas touch—call it whatever you want. Take a look at some of my previous attitudes toward failure, and see if your experience was similar: 1. That's a lot of trips to the batter's box without a hit! If a player made all of those outs consecutively, and he averaged four at bats per game, he would play eight seasons (1,278 games straight) without ever reaching first base! Was the player discouraged that night? Attitude: People's attitudes determine how they approach life day to day. Wallace Hamilton states, The increase of suicides, alcoholics, and even some forms of nervous breakdowns is evidence that many people are training for success when they should be training for failure. Yet that ability seems difficult to acquire. Failure isn't a percentage or a test. Redefining Failure and Success 2 Get a New Definition of Failure and Success The difference between greatness and mediocrity is often how an individual views a mistake. But Maxwell has learned to make failure his friend, and he can teach you to do the same. "I want to help you learn how to confidently look the prospect of failure in the eye and move forward anyway," says Maxwell. Step to Failing Forward: 1. Stop falling backward and start falling forward!" America's expert on leadership helps readers change their attitudes and beliefs about failure so they can make positive changes in their lives and achieve their full potential. Read more.. —NELSON BOSWELL On August 6, 1999, a major-league baseball player stepped up to home plate in Montreal and made another out—the 5,113th of his professional career. Certainly all people like to think of themselves as above average. She was ready to start her own business. Maxwell has the answer: The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure. Most people are never prepared to deal with failure. BARRIE What makes achievers excel? I had played the school game successfully, and I had absorbed a lot of information. Most people don't know where to start looking to get it. Your attitude, more than your aptitude, will determine your altitude. From this moment on, make a commitment to do whatever it takes to fail forward. But I wasn't at all prepared for what was ahead of me. What makes the difference? She has built quite an organization. But the truth is that some people just seem to achieve incredible things in spite of tremendous difficulties: They finish in the top 5 percent in nationwide sales for their company after losing key accounts. That's probably the best vote you'll ever receive. I believe that to succeed, a person needs only four things. I managed to avoid the failure I had feared, but I had not really accomplished anything. I want to see each person I meet become a REAL success. Relationships: The greatest skill needed for success is the ability to get along with other people. Read through these two lists, and determine which one describes your approach to failure: Think about a recent setback you experienced. I have dedicated my life to adding value to people. But she also found that it was difficult for a woman to progress in the corporate world, especially in the 1950s and early 1960s—even after twenty-five years of success. Read it, absorb it, and allow it to help you turn your mistakes into stepping-stones for success. I don't know what obstacles you are facing in your life right now. I got an A on the test, but three days later, I had forgotten all of the information. Today, the company has more than \$1 billion in annual sales, employs 3,500 people, and empowers 500,000 direct-sales consultants in 29 markets worldwide.<sup>2</sup> And Mary Kay Ash has received just about every award an entrepreneur could dream of. Seventy and above signified success. 2. And I did not want to start failing all of a sudden. WALLACE HAMILTON Training for failure! That is a great concept, and it's the idea that prompted me to write this book. Or they recruit winner after winner into their organization despite what looks like an anemic labor pool. Why? No matter how difficult your problems were, the key to overcoming them doesn't lie in changing your circumstances. Call them lucky, blessed, or possessors of the Midas touch. She says, I had worked my way up to being a member of the board of the company I was with only to find that, even though our sales force was made up entirely of women, governed by an all male board, my opinions were of no value. Because it takes a person's thinking down the wrong track. When I graduated from college with my bachelor's degree, I finished in the top 5 percent of my class. Leadership: Everything rises and falls on leadership. I wish that were the key, but it's not. But to be honest, I was as concerned about getting everyone to like me as I was with helping people. Why do some people achieve so much? But whatever they are doesn't matter. Nothing else has the same kind of impact on people's ability to achieve and to accomplish whatever their minds and hearts desire. I want you to learn how to confidently look the prospect of failure in the eye and move forward anyway. A NEW COURSE At that moment I realized what an unrealistic view I had of success and failure. —J. WHAT'S THE ROOT OF ACHIEVEMENT? What is failure? Most people would never have been able to go on after that. I worked so hard for those people. • Family background? If you're willing to do that, then you'll be able to handle failure. We are all failures—at least, all the best of us are. What was my first response? But not Mary Kay. You know, opportunity is a peculiar thing. In fact, the school environment often reinforces people's worst feelings and expectations about failure. Failure is far more common than success; poverty is more prevalent than wealth; and disappointment more normal than arrival. What is the real reason for their success? And many of the leaders I knew over the years loved to brag about the unanimous affirming votes they received from their people. WHAT YOU NEVER LEARNED IN SCHOOL Soccer player Kyle Rote Jr. remarked, There is no doubt in my mind that there are many ways to be a winner, but there is really only one way to be a loser and that is to fail and not look beyond the failure. But achievers seem to leave average in the dust—so far behind them that ordinary seems a distant memory. I admire Mary Kay. She put her husband in charge of the administrative side of things as she worked feverishly to prepare the products, design the packaging, write the training materials, and recruit consultants. There is no doubt in my mind that there are many ways to be a winner, but there is really only one way to be a loser and that is to fail and not look beyond the failure. Why do some people skyrocket while others plummet? Because in life, the question is not if you will have problems, but how you are going to deal with your problems. No, son, stay there, my dad said as he chuckled. "Because in life, the question is not if you will have problems, but how you are going to deal with them. But then one day I realized that it was really a bad question. Mary Kay's first career was in direct sales, and she was quite successful. I constantly heard, Mary Kay, you are thinking like a woman again! I felt rejection in the worst form. If you desire to lift the lid on your personal effectiveness, the only way to do it is to increase your leadership skills. There is no achievement without failure. If you are ready to do that, turn the page and let's go! Your First Step to Failing Forward: Realize There Is One Major Difference Between Average People and Achieving People Look at the way any achiever approaches negative experiences, and you can learn a lot about how to fail forward. They would have accepted defeat and faded away. He had made his 3,000th hit. Equipping: One of the most significant lessons I've learned is that those closest to you determine the level of your success. I wasn't properly prepared for it. So that's not it either. She kept going, and on September 13, 1963, she launched her business. Even positive people have a tough time learning how to see failure positively. (My book The Winning Attitude has been in print for more than fifteen years.) But I haven't always been good at failing forward. No. You see, earlier in the same game, in his first plate appearance, that player had reached a milestone that only twenty-one other people in the history of baseball have ever achieved.

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