

5 Ways to Learn and Lead from Failure

It's not really how you got lost as much as how you lead back to the right path.

Every great leader has experienced failure at some point, well... except one glaring exception. So yeah, you are not Jesus, but remember:

Steve Jobs, the man behind the iPhone, iPad and MacBook (likely what you are using to read this), was once fired from Apple

Michael Jordan, the greatest basketball player ever (not even a question Kobe and Lebron), was cut from his middle-school team

Thomas Edison, the inventor of the phonograph (making him the great-grandfather of hipster music), was partially deaf

It is not a question of IF a pastor will fail in some ministry endeavor; it is a question of how they will lead as they learn their way back up.

Some failures in pastoral leadership require a deeper investment in time, repentance and healing to overcome. Especially those failures that erode pastoral authority because of immorality or sexual sin. However, for the majority of pastors, **recovery from everyday ministry failure is a matter of learnership as much as it is one of leadership.**

Because moving beyond a failure involves learning and advancing as a leader, after all:

- Steve Jobs went on to build the NeXT computer with no real customers.
- Michael Jordan went on to miss 12,345 shots in his career, more than half of all he took.
- Thomas Edison went on to build 1,000 light bulbs that didn't work before one finally did.

Failure happens to everyone and for those that refuse to learn and advance, it often happens over and over again. Here are **five sure-fire ways to guarantee repetitive pastoral failure:**

1. Ignore It – Leaders destined to fail again refuse to acknowledge failure when it happens. When the conversation turns toward what went wrong, they become defensive or change the subject altogether.

Advancing leaders talk about their failure openly and freely share what they are learning from it.

2. Prevent It – Do everything you can to never allow failure to happen in the first place and you can be sure that when it does happen, you will never see it coming. If you never allow your leaders to fail, there is actually a better chance that they will never succeed.

Advancing leaders create an environment for safe failure to happen and even celebrate failing forward when it happens.

3. Invite It – It is surprising how many pastors fail to ever plan, and inadvertently plan to often fail. Simple principles of leadership like calendaring, setting meeting agendas or leading toward a consistent vision are a great step toward making sure failure, when it happens, is not repetitive.

Advancing leaders are intentional in their planning, especially if it is not in their nature to begin with.

4. Overlook It – Making excuses for failure, sweeping mistakes under the rug or simply minimizing the reality of the situation is a great way to find yourself with the broom again soon. A great strategy to repeat failure is to not get outside eyes to help reveal critical points of failure and create a plan to move forward.

Advancing leaders invite strategic outsiders in to help see what was unseen and bring fresh perspective toward moving forward.

5. Magnify It – Publicly dwelling on your mistakes and failure seems, at first to be humbling and sacrificial. Under the surface though, giving undue and inordinate attention to ministry failure often masks insecurity and fuels ego. Over-magnifying a mistake happens in cultures where failure is easier to recognize than success.

Advancing leaders define success of their Great Commission calling and celebrate those wins first, while appropriately handling the misses.

You may not go on to revolutionize the digital age, become the greatest basketball player of all time, or hold more than 2,000 U.S. patents, but ***God does have something significant and eternal for you to accomplish...*** no matter how hard it might have been up to this point.

How you learn from failure will directly affect how you lead after failure.

Failure happens in ministry, there is no guarantee against it. Therefore, when failure does occur, we must learn and lead from it, advancing to ensure that it does not happen the same way again.