



The privilege to fail

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Failure has entered the zeitgeist as a key to success — Images of tech giants starting businesses in their garages or thirty ideas that didn't work before an innovator found the one that did.

Failure can lead to success when it's viewed as taking smart risks.

It can also lead to losses and a lack of future opportunity when it's not met with support and advocacy. Learn how to support your employees when they take risks to pay dividends for your organization.

Let's pause and think about this. How do bias and privilege relate to failure? Biases can shape the way we view people and certain events. When someone fails, our bias about that person colors whether that failure was an opportunity to learn and evidence of something they tried, or whether it is evidence that they are untrustworthy, bad at their jobs or unlikely to succeed in the future.

Not everyone has the privilege to fail. Three things need to happen to turn failure into success.

1 You need resources to take a risk.

Starting a business in your garage sounds modest, but only **64% of Americans have a garage or carport** (American Housing Survey, 2019). And you never hear about a business starting in the carport. Some resources are needed to risk it all to start a business in your garage, and resources are needed for the garage, too. Even outside of entrepreneurship, there are some who are able to take risks in their careers those who are less financially stable would not want to take.

2 You need support to recover from failure.

When you fail, how will that failure be received by others?

Our research shows that **35% of U.S. employees do not feel supported when they make mistakes**. Executives and people managers feel more supported when they make mistakes than do lower-level employees. Those with at least a bachelor's degree report getting more support than those with less education. **Inclusive leadership** can drastically improve this outcome — **88% of those with inclusive leaders said they feel supported when they make a mistake**.



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3 You need leaders who will advocate for you.

You've recovered and are onto your next idea or job opportunity. Will anyone support you? **More than one in four U.S. employees don't believe there are leaders in their organization who would advocate for them.** This increases to 45% of those who don't have an inclusive leader.

Are we allowing everyone to make mistakes?

If risk-taking is a key priority for your organization, consider whether people feel safe taking that risk.

Do they have the resources they need? This may not be a garage, but instead be time away from other priorities or leniency with financial goals.

Do they get support if a calculated risk does not pan out? For failure to lead to success, the mistakes need to be identified early and met with support, not retaliation or punishment.

How are previous mistakes viewed by leadership? Ensure new opportunities are evaluated without bias. One person's failure may be seen as another's willingness to try something new. This can become subjective, so ensure you are evaluating with fair, preset criteria.

Failure can indeed lead to success when it is viewed as taking smart risks. It can lead to losses and lack of future opportunity when not met with support and advocacy. If you aren't sure which approach is common at your organization, ask your employees.

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