



Caswell **CORPORATE COACHING** Company
Making companies better places to work - worldwide

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Bill Caswell is an experienced coach of CEOs and senior executives world-wide. He is the author of 14 books including the 12-book series *The Respect Revolution* written, by a CEO for CEOs, as a guide to getting your company to *Excellence*.

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The Benefits of Failure

Failure is the only path to success

The old adage of "The person who never made a mistake, never made anything" is the starting point of a discussion about failure.

Need to Learn Ourselves

Simply put, we learn from failure. Sometimes, we humans have very thick heads. A person may tell us how 'it' should not be done and what to avoid (our parents, for example) yet we go ahead against all odds and try 'it' anyway. We fail (just as they told us we would) but now we have learned. Getting the message in advance wasn't enough.

"I learned through the school of hard knocks."

"I went to university to learn to be an engineer. But I didn't start my real learning until I was on the job."

Societies learn that "war is hell". But each subsequent generation starts its own wars; they seem to need to learn for themselves that "war is hell".

How Many Mistakes to Learn?

An acknowledged managing consulting sage tells the story of his first job. After several months of selling without success, he called back his distant boss in frustration, complaining about his own inability to sell. He received a gruff reply of, "It takes 500 mistakes to learn this business. And the sooner you make the mistakes, the sooner you'll be successful. So, get on with it and quit your complaining!"

He started counting his mistakes, crossing them off as they occurred, predicting to his long-suffering wife that he would be successful by May. And he was!

The Learning Environment

If learning is done through mistakes, then the learning process must accommodate mistakes. In most companies today, it does not. Parents scream at children who seem to deliberately not take advice. Bosses humiliate or even punish employees who make mistakes.

We recommend the establishing of a Learning Environment in companies, where failure is handled as a normal event; it is not handled by increasing the level of fear. The higher the level of fear, the more that mistakes will be hidden (with further negative consequences) and the greater the number of excuses, finger pointing, and dishonesty to justify the failure.

Failures Unlisted

The resume, or bio, we send out for proposals or making presentations, lists our 'wonderful' achievements. Great stuff. Great guy. Well, what about the unlisted failures? It probably is just as long.

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A Failure Example

Three months ago my son came to me rather dejectedly, having missed one of his final exams in his second year of architecture. I explained that failure was a learning experience; you pick yourself up and press on. I passed a note about a politician to him.

Here it is for you.

Lost his job in 1832
Was defeated for the legislature in 1832
Failed in business in 1833
Was elected to the legislature in 1834
Lost the woman he loved in 1835
Suffered a nervous breakdown in 1836
Was defeated for Speaker in 1838
Was defeated for nomination (to run for a seat) in government in 1843
Was elected to government in 1846
Lost his nomination for same role, again in 1848
Was rejected for land officer in 1849
Was defeated for senate in 1854
Was defeated for nomination as Vice-president of his country in 1856
Was defeated again for senate in 1858
Was elected President of the U.S. in 1860.

Who?

Abraham Lincoln

Now pick yourself up and march forward to your level of success.

Bill