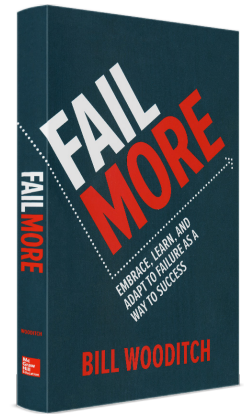


Fail More

Embrace, Learn, and Adapt to Failure
As a Way to Success

by **Bill Wooditch**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Learning from our mistakes is the only way to make sure we don't make the same ones twice. But what if you could use every failure—large and small—to actually create a successful business, career, and life?

You can. *Fail More* provides the knowledge, insight, and tools to do just that. This one-of-a-kind guide teaches you how to take active, strategic measures to turn the sting of failure into the reward of growth. It reveals the setbacks that are both inevitable and valuable, and it delivers practical ways of quickly moving past self-judgment and -recrimination to create large and small goals, establish milestones for achieving them, evaluate your actions, use failing as a core tool for motivation, and much more.

By embracing failure, not just “getting past it,” you will fly past your competition, whether you're building a startup, advancing in your career, or improving your personal life. The most underrated tool for success is failure. *Fail More* provides a pragmatic program for turning failure today into profits and growth tomorrow.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why failure is not just acceptable but essential to success.
- To distinguish rational from irrational fear.
- To acknowledge and move beyond fear in order to reach your goals.
- To set goals and map out the steps to achieve them.

Always Forward: Achievement Is on the Other Side of Failure

At an early age, our teachers, parents, peers, and the rest of the social order teach us that failure is the result of a lack of innate ability. We're taught to compete for perfection—a zero-sum form of induced combat that pits our genes against the genes of others.

When it comes to obstacles that could result in potential failure, people adopt a cycle of avoidance. Avoidance is our natural inclination, followed by frustration, anger, excuses, and ultimately surrender. We carry the vestiges of this thinking into our businesses and homes. It becomes a part of our life, and we have one of two choices: deal with it and navigate forward in spite of it, or succumb to it and say, "I quit."

To escape the regret of what-ifs, you must summon the courage to break the cycle of avoidance. When it comes to courage, Franklin D. Roosevelt's words resonate: "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear."

The First Two Steps

And there it is! The first two steps to failing more productively are to recognize the cycle of avoidance and then have the courage to break the pattern and make the changes vital to growth.

The road to success isn't easy. If it were, we'd all be wildly successful. Herculean feats aren't required for sustained success. What is required is the persistence and willingness to do something every day that brings you closer to the realization of your dreams. Failure doesn't mean your efforts are over. It means they have just begun.

If you want to succeed, you have to fail more. The most significant difference between success and failure is the ability to learn from failure and apply the lessons to create success. Every failure comes with specific teachable moments, each of which deserves your undivided attention. If you don't heed those lessons, your failures are meaningless.

Failure can be a guide; it's a map that shows you where success lives. Think of life as an experimental lab—you are the innovator of your life, creating concepts that you can test in the field. Some of your ideas work and some won't, but each trial will give you a little more information, a little more encouragement, and a little more confidence. Each failed attempt will reveal what you have to do to make things work the next time. There can be no success without failure.

The Poster Boy for Failure

Jack Ma, a Chinese business magnate, investor, and philanthropist, could be the poster boy for failing more. He found ways to fail that boggle the mind. Soul-crushing, hardcore stuff that would cripple even the strongest and most determined. He recalls, "I failed a key primary school test two times. I failed the middle school test three times. I failed the college entrance exam two times."

He applied to and was rejected from Harvard 10 times. Why he applied 10 times is a mystery that to date has been unanswered. He applied to be a police officer, but the police wouldn't even give him cursory consideration—prefacing their decision with three words, "You're no good." KFC was coming to China, and Ma, of course, applied for one of the 23 openings. Of the 24 applicants, only one wasn't hired. Can you guess who that was?

Ma knew that math wasn't his thing. Time after time, it was his issues with mathematics that made universities and employers turn him away. He realized that in order to move forward, he was going to have to leave behind the quantitative and focus on the qualitative aspects of his life.

It worked. Ma became fluent in English and secured his first job as an English teacher at the Hangzhou Dianzi University at the age of 24. Ma traveled to the United States in 1995 on an assignment, and he was introduced to the internet.

His first search was for "beer." He couldn't find any Chinese entries for beer, so he searched "China" and found no entries for the country either. Never lacking for inspiration, Ma channeled the innovator inside him and thought, "Why don't I make a website related to China?" He partnered with his friend Stuart Trusty, who worked as an internet consultant.

They developed a website, and it did well. But one year later, failure struck again. A state-owned enterprise, Zhejiang Telecom, took over Ma's innovative enterprise. He then moved back to Beijing and assumed a role in the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, building websites for the government.

Bureaucracy frustrated Ma, and he left to start a new internet venture, Alibaba, which would serve small businesses and would go on to become one of the world's largest companies. In 2018, Jack Ma's net worth was reported to be \$40.9 billion, making him the wealthiest man in China. If he hadn't switched his focus to languages, he never would have come to the United States. This one success opened

Your dreams and aspirations for a better life can only become your lived reality when you recognize that fear is the ultimate dream killer.

the door to opportunities he never would have had if he just kept applying for the same jobs.

Failing more isn't a license to be irresponsible or to intentionally flunk life one mistake at a time. Instead, the goal is to constantly improve through intentional practice, while embracing the process and learning from the result. Success and failure both leave room for improvement. It's only through trying more that you can become more, learn more, and enjoy more.

Recognize Fear

Anything in life of merit or value comes at a cost, with a sacrifice, and often with the clear and present possibility of failure. Refusal to acknowledge or engage in those activities that include the potential of failure means you're playing it safe.

You play it safe because you fear. Fear can sabotage your career and marginalize your life. Your dreams and aspirations for a better life can only become your lived reality when you recognize that fear is the ultimate dream killer.

It is important to recognize that fear originates from two sources: an avoidance of loss or an aversion to change. Once you understand where your fears originate, you can then weigh the course of action necessary to achieve your goals.

Fear disguises itself as procrastination or distraction. You think to yourself, "I'm not ready. It's not the perfect time. I'm not good enough. I'll be better tomorrow." Most fail to recognize that it's irrational fear that holds them back in life. We tend to blame external obstacles for our internal unwillingness to put ourselves in play.

But how do you recognize that it's fear that's stopping you? First, let's draw the distinction between fear and danger.

Distinguishing Between Fear and Danger

Your ability to distinguish between rational and irrational fear will provide a guide to understanding what can cause physical harm and what is a product of your overactive imagination.

Rational fear is the early warning system that alerts you to danger. Conversely, irrational fear is a product of your imagination. When you perceive a "threat" and project future harm, your body reacts in the same way as it does to real danger. This fight, flight, or freeze response is a product of your genetic imprint.

Today's sabertooth tiger of your imagination can be an angry client or spouse, or it might be a deadline you're running up against.

Fear holds us hostage in a cycle of adrenaline release. The more dangerous the perceived situation, the bigger the buildup and release of adrenaline. Unutilized, adrenaline demands an outlet, and that unspent surge often results in anxiety and, left unchecked, the "black dog" of depression.

When we begin to fear fear itself, the trickle of adrenaline is released from the imagined consequences of confrontation. We feel out of control and helpless and caught up in a web of fear and adrenaline. Hypothetical scenarios create panic, and panic perpetuates feelings of fear and the release of adrenaline. This cycle of adrenaline release resulting in fear is physically and mentally debilitating.

There is a way to stop the cycle. To do this, we need to understand the difference between being aware of fear and accepting it:

- **Be aware.** Become acquainted with the feeling. Fear is a feeling. It holds as much power over you as you permit. Be aware that what you're feeling is human.
- **Accept it.** By accepting fear, you lessen its power. Expect it because it's never going away; then embrace and welcome the feelings that accompany it. This sounds crazy, but when you welcome the inevitable, you steal its power. When you expect it, you're prepared for it. Make a pact with yourself: "I can live with this." By making this statement, you take back your power—and you need this power to perform at your best.

Break Through the Obstacles That Limit Success

Once you understand and rid yourself of the fear of trying something and falling short, you will be able to open doors you never even considered knocking on before.

The question is, how do you handle things? Are you more comfortable with risk? Did you learn from your failure? Have you been able to distance yourself from the emotional pain? Are you now ready to use logic and make a more informed attempt from failure to create a positive outcome?

When you move from emotion (fear) to logic (obstacle management), you can then visualize an outcome by walking through the imaginary steps it takes to achieve it. You have the lessons of failure at your disposal. Now you can rationally use them to avoid the pitfalls that you previously encountered. This is one of the gifts of failure: the ability to anticipate through logic and visualization. Anticipation asks the question, “How do I overcome this obstacle?”

Divide failures into two categories: major and minor. Quitting on your success is a major failure. It’s a category of one. That’s it. You’re renouncing your responsibility to yourself to provide for a better station in life.

Everything else is a minor failure. Not only can you recover from a minor failure, but you already have done so a thousand times in your life. Whether it was attempting to walk, riding a bike, not getting a job, messing up a presentation, or failing a course, these are all things you can come back from.

Your goal is to improve every day, and you have to accept that minor failures are a part of that process.

What Is It That You Really Want?

The purpose of life is to live your life to its most fulfilling promise. Purpose is your why. Purpose creates a passion that envelops, imbues, and creates the compelling how of what you do. To wake up every day with a chance to challenge and change, to improve and immerse yourself in the world.

Ask yourself what it is that you really want and what you are willing to sacrifice to earn it. Once you have the answers, you’ll have a guide, but you’ll still be confronted daily with the fear of failure. Whether it’s resistance, procrastination, or distraction, it will be there in disguise.

Learn to say no to whatever it is—people, things, issues, or agendas—that derails or detracts you from doing whatever

it is that brings you closer to what you must have. Learn the difference between what is important and what is urgent.

Here is where your victory over fear comes into play. It will give you the opportunity to break out of your comfort zone, to learn new skills, to become indispensable. Now that you know how to manage your fear, to embrace it, to use it, you can finally become unstoppable.

In order to get what you want, you have to do those things that give you the confidence to do just a little bit more the next day. Yes, there is an element of risk, but the next day brings the new opportunity that you create or one that you see, seize, and make available from your applied competence.

Career development holds personal responsibility as a non-negotiable trait. Making a better way in life for yourself and others is an obligation. Don’t cede your power. Don’t give it away so someone else can dictate your fate. Your power resides in your personal responsibility to learn more, do more, and become more.

Become a Master of Failure

Adam Kreek is a two-time rowing Olympian with a degree in geotechnical engineering and hydrology from Stanford University. Rowing is a mentally and physically demanding sport that revolves around the fact that the sum is greater than the individual parts. It’s a team sport, but every person in the boat has to not only work together but do the work alone at the same time.

Kreek is a professional speaker today, and he informs his audiences that the most important thing he learned at the Olympics was a lesson on failure.

Kreek was the fastest starboard on the team until, he says, a “big, bald, Viking-looking guy named Jake Wetzel” started to kick his butt. Kreek didn’t like being displaced as the fastest. His ego was dented, and he immediately thought Wetzel to be an idiot and someone he wanted to physically harm.

But Kreek stepped back from the emotional sway and reverted to the logic that served him well at Stanford: “Wait a minute—here we are competing against each other, but we’re on the same team. Maybe I can learn from him.”

One day Kreek approached Wetzel and asked him to have lunch. As they sat in front of a pile of bagels and a dozen eggs, Kreek asked Wetzel point-blank, “Jake, what’s your secret to success? How are you so successful?”

Kreek didn't expect the answer Wetzel gave him. "I seek failure." Kreek was in shock and asked Wetzel if he was putting him on.

Wetzel went on to explain a Monday-through-Saturday step-by-step approach. He explained that he would pick one workout every week and train to his current limit, that boundary right before failure.

In his words, "I willingly push myself through my known limit, and know I will embrace failure. My body will fail on me and for the rest of the week as well. I will know what my limit is, and I will hover below it, and in fact, the greatest point of growth occurs right below your limit."

The lightbulb went on. Kreek found the brilliance in the method and embraced it as a way of consistent improvement. It became his edge. He embraced the process, method, and importance of failure, and it made all the difference. His team later won the gold medal at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

Failure is a powerful punch in the gut, but it is not as painful as the sting of regret.

Use All Emotions as a Tool—Even the Negative Ones

To fail forward, you have to distance yourself from emotions. You're only human—you will feel emotions first—but you need to react strategically, not emotionally. Feel your emotions, move beyond them, and start using logic instead of feeling. Here's how:

Take a deep breath. Before you do anything else, take a step back and breathe deeply. Only when you start to slow down will your emotions start to quiet. Focusing on your breathing will help you to get out of the instinct part of your brain (the bottom) and into the rational part of your brain (the top).

Feel your emotions; then check them. After giving your feelings a little space for acknowledgment, it's time

to let them go, to make the switch to strategic thinking. Ask yourself, "What is really happening here? How would I rather feel?" These cues will aid you in making the transition. Forgive yourself and forgive everyone involved.

Create an objective framework. It's important to evaluate the failure dispassionately. Take a step back and look at all parts of the equation. What kept you from your goal? What steps can you take to avoid the pattern of failure? From there, each specific failure will provide you with an opportunity to improve by giving you clues on how not to fail.

Test-drive your new direction. Once the clouds are cleared, you can start to see the answers. How can you move forward? What new steps do you need to take? What old ones do you need to abandon? Be specific and intentional about your goals, and visualize yourself making them a reality.

Assign a value to failure. Now that you see the results evolving, you will start to value failure as the tool it can be. Continue to be vigilant for signs of failure, and start tweaking your direction along the way.

Create your success profile. Once you've figured out what works, get out your journal and make detailed notes. Write down everything that brought you closer to a successful outcome. You can refer to this "success profile" to avoid slipping back to the old ways and the ineffective methods that failed to produce a successful result.

Be grateful. Make it a point to practice gratitude for opportunities that come your way. Sure, failure is a powerful punch in the gut, but it is not as painful as the sting of regret. Having the opportunity to change and move forward is something to be thankful for.

You might have to repeat some steps in this process if you feel you are not moving forward or if your new steps aren't working for you.

It's Goal Time: Define and Plan for Success

Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither is success. Great accomplishments take time. Whether your "big goal" is crafting your next masterpiece, planning your ascent to the Oval Office, or positioning yourself for your next raise, focus on the fundamentals that make your big goal a reality. You must build your empire just like the Romans, stone by stone.

The laying of stones embodies a process. It's a systematic approach that is subject to disciplined habit, resolve, patience, and retrospection.

Experts define goal setting as the selection of a target or objective you intend to achieve. Rather than asking yourself what it is you want to achieve, ask yourself what it is you can endure to achieve it. What kind of pain threshold can you tolerate in pursuit of your goal?

The cost each of us must pay to enjoy the fruits of a better life is the pain of failure. The most significant advantage that failure provides resides in the lessons it doles out in the process. These lessons will shorten the distance between where you are now and where you intend to go, while lessening the pain of the next experience. The first lesson you can learn from failure is to avoid setting yourself up for it.

While you need crystal clarity about the nature of your goal, you need to break down the small steps you have to take to achieve it. If you are to approximate your potential, you have to start and stick with fundamentals.

Stage 1: Play it forward by looking back. Think about your time of demise. You're on your death bed reflecting on your life. Do you have regret? What would you have become if you had no self-imposed limits? Take the limits down, let your imagination run wild, and describe what that reality would have looked like.

Stage 2: Get specific with your goals. Create a "to-do" list that supports the goals drafted in Stage 1. For example, if you want to run a full marathon (26.219 miles), what do you need to do first? From the shoes you buy, to the partner you run with, to the pace you run at, you need to work up to a 5K, a 10K, and a half marathon before striking out for your big goal, the full marathon.

Use the same principle in your financial endeavors. If you want to be a millionaire, you first have to find your way to \$100K in personal income. How do you get there? What do you need to do? Who around you is doing it now? And who has done it?

Stage 3: Limit competing distractions. When you have too many goals, you have no goal. What you have is a bunch of objectives, wishes, or wants but not a real "dig in, do what it takes, make it happen" goal. Competing goals look like this: "I want to be the star salesperson in my company, but I also want to be a triathlete. And, oh, by the way, I think a gourmet chef sounds good, too!"

Time, energy, and focus are vital in the pursuit of what you deem to be most important. You need to establish one major goal and separate that goal from all the other hobbies that seem like a goal. What are your competing distractions, and what do you need to do to limit them?

Stage 4: Identify who, what, when, and where. Who are those people who can help you achieve your goal? What can they contribute? When can they begin their contribution? And where do they begin?

Stage 5: Keep track of your progress. Start a success journal. Create two columns: one column for those accomplishments that brought you closer to your goal and another column for those distractions that impeded you from the tasks you needed to complete to make your day a success. Look for the lessons in your past successes and failures. What worked and why? What obstacles stopped you and why?

This is where honesty provides direction. If you're willing to learn from both columns, you have what it takes to make that progressive journey forward.

The Road to Success

Your road to success is a process and a journey, not a destination. You can't pause along the road and hope improvement will ensue from lack of activity—success is always under construction.

The author Stephen King's road to success was anything but a straight line. As a matter of fact, his story is one of self-belief, perseverance, and talent. King wrote constantly and was rewarded with rejection slips after each submission to Alfred Hitchcock's *Mystery Magazine*.

Over time, King started to make a game out of the rejection. Instead of throwing the slips out, he nailed them in a stack to his bedroom wall. Imagine going to sleep at night, looking at rejection, and waking up, only to face it the next day.

The rejection slips continued piling up, and soon the nail wasn't big enough to hold all the letters. So he got a bigger spike and kept on writing. In a capsule, this is the essence of *Fail More*. Rejection will slap you in the face, not once, not twice, but so many times that you'll lose count. But like King, your purpose will compel you to keep going, adapt, and grow.

After myriad impersonal rejections, King found hope in the one personalized response he received after eight years of

Surround yourself with people who offer moral and intellectual support and feedback. You need assistance to become successful in life; you can't do it all alone.

failed submissions. Even though his manuscript was rejected, he found hope in the unsigned message that read, "Don't staple manuscripts, loose pages + paper clip = cor-rect way to submit copy." Although it was cold water to the face, King did find it useful. Often in the midst of failure, there is that ray of light that, however dimly, provides direction.

Even though the rejections kept coming, King was progressing, getting better and better. He was steadfast in his resolve to be published. His persistence would pay off again, when one of the magazines wrote back, "Your stuff is good, but it's not for us: Keep submitting."

King viewed rejection as a learning process, and he stayed with the process until he began learning, improving, and finally getting published.

Channeling Your Inner Stephen King

Your goal needs to be clear and present, focused to the extreme. You must never lose sight of it. King found his purpose early. He loved to write; he wanted to be published, and nothing would stop that from becoming a reality.

King engaged in that intentional practice that leads to mastery. Are you ready to enter the 10,000 hours+ of practice that mastery requires? There are no overnight successes. You've got to do the work.

Do you have what it takes to be rejection-proof? Do you understand that rejection is a prerequisite for success? Accept that immediately, and get used to it!

Self-doubt and lack of confidence will derail you. No one will believe in you unless you first believe in yourself. Grow your confidence with small steps, little things that give you the impetus to try more. Don't run from rejection; use it as fuel.

Surround yourself with people who offer moral and intellectual support and feedback. You need assistance to become successful in life; you can't do it all alone. King had a major advocate. His wife believed in him, supported him, and encouraged him to keep going when he thought *Carrie* was a failure—and we should all be thankful she did.

Embrace Risk

Every time you make a choice in life, you're taking a risk, and your life is a series of the choices you have made. When you assess the pain-gain game, know that to risk blindly is foolish.

Taking intelligent risk is a skill. Use the past to inform the present and positively influence the future. In order to risk intelligently, you need to

- **Be clear**—what is the worst thing that can happen if you fail?
- **Be real**—can you accept it?
- **Be practical**—is there a smaller risk you can take that will provide the momentum and experience you will need to take those bigger chances?
- **Be objective**—is the greater pain of failure emotional or financial?
- **Be prepared**—do you have what it takes to pursue the risk now? If not, when? Make a commitment to a timeline, do what it takes to prepare, get in position, and go forward.
- **Be aware**—as you're moving through the process, taking risks, and doing what needs to happen to win, conduct a "process audit." What is effective, and what can be improved upon? Adapt and apply on the fly.
- **Be reflective**—start a success journal and stay with it. This is where you can write what worked and what didn't work for you during the course of the day. Each day, you can learn from what happened the previous day if it's written down in a straightforward manner. No excuses, no bias—just straight-up facts. You'll find that what you learn every day will impact the week, the week the month, the month the year, and in time, it will make your career.

Nothing can happen unless you put yourself in play and take a risk. There's no perfect time, no magic formula. It's you and your willingness to either do or don't.

Maintain a Mindset for Continued Success

Most of us reach a certain point in our journey—maybe it’s a point we never thought we’d approximate—and then we tend to try to hold on to what we’ve accumulated. It may be a title, a salary, or a relationship, and we lay off the gas. We quit doing what enabled us to enjoy the life we currently have, and by doing this, we start to stagnate.

Stagnation pulls you back, so you have to work every day to keep improving—whether it’s physically, emotionally, or intellectually.

Nature doesn’t support the static: Nature, by definition, is dynamic. You evolve and adapt, or you become obsolete. It’s often a rude wake-up call for those who think they can sit on success. You can’t. Success is always under construction. It’s always going to demand you do something to prove that you deserve it.

Perhaps you’re at that point where you’re motivated to make the change. Before you move forward, it may be beneficial to reflect. You’ll find lessons in both success and failure hiding in plain sight.

Once you’ve reflected, it’s time to ask yourself the questions that only you can answer:

- What is holding me back?
- Am I being honest with myself in my current assessment?
- Is there a common theme in the patterns of my past

behavior that I can replicate or eradicate?

- Realistically, where can I set my bar of expectations?

Personal responsibility creates momentum, and momentum is the antithesis of stagnation. You generate momentum when you lose excuses and swing into action.

If you’re going to create a better way of life and enjoy true happiness, you have to seek levels of improvement every day.

As you seek better, you’re going to encounter setbacks, you’re going to have missteps, and you’re going to fail. Understand the nature of your fear, and use the tools outlined here to break through the sting of rejection and the despair of defeat to enjoy the deepest levels of true success.

IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- *Derailed: Five Lessons Learned from Catastrophic Failures of Leadership* by Tim Irwin
- *Why Decisions Fail: Avoiding the Blunders and Traps That Lead to Debacles* by Paul C. Nutt



Bill Wooditch is the founder and CEO of The Wooditch Group, a risk-management and corporate insurance firm. He is on a mission to help people improve their lifestyle options. He mentors those who are hungry for success, teaching them skills to harness the lessons of failure to create new opportunities. His approach is a physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional journey based on 25 years in the trenches, from rough-hewn job sites to highly venerated Fortune 500 boardrooms.

Adapted by arrangement with McGraw-Hill Global Education Holdings, LLC, from *Fail More: Embrace, Learn, and Adapt to Failure As a Way to Success*, copyright © 2019 by Bill Wooditch. 208 pages, ISBN 978-1-2604-4151-2.

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