

Mistake is the mother of success

by Michael_Kinsman

What company wants to deal with failure?

The answer to that question is simple: only the smart companies.

Yet, American business really isn't very good at accepting failure, let alone encouraging it as part of the learning experience.

A new survey for the Princeton-based consulting firm BlessingWhite

finds that only 26 percent of workers feel they are regularly free to take risks in performing their jobs.

Another 33 percent say they sometimes think it's OK to take risks, but 41 percent admit they don't feel their companies will accept their failures.

"Everyone wants innovation in their organization but no one wants to deal with failure," says Christopher Rice, chief executive of the consulting firm. "Creating a culture that fosters innovation and risk-taking means that managers need to reward failure as well as success."

When is the last time you witnessed that?

American companies just don't like failure because it isn't included on their business plans and because it is seen as a weakness.

Yet, in an economy that is being driven by technological breakthroughs, it seems like the way we handle our failures today is more important than ever. Do you think Thomas Edison, for instance, ever backed off experimenting because he had a string of failures in the challenges he undertook?

We tend to focus on that as lost opportunity. At the same time, we are not quick to savor the benefits brought by one of those risks that paid off. The benefits would never be realized if the worker hadn't taken up the

challenge, and that means accepting that failure is possible.

We all have heard stories of remarkably successful people who had made their own missteps.

Albert Einstein is prized for his intellect today, yet he failed his entrance exams at the Swiss Polytechnic Institute.

Before he became a famous writer, Charles Dickens once was relegated to a factory job, where he pasted labels on bottles of shoe polish.

And, David Letterman once was fired from his TV weatherman's job when he described hail as "the size of canned hams."

You'll find lots of companies who say they encourage risk-taking and are willing to accept some failures as part of that process. That's what they say.

But let business pressures mount, let productivity slip a notch or watch short-term profit attempts erase that in a moment.

Middle managers in particular seem to panic when something goes wrong. That's because they think it will be held against them and some will go to great lengths to remove that possibility, even if their company says it has a commitment to risk-taking.

Everyone is going to make mistakes on the job. But you don't want to see them repeating the same mistakes, or making mistakes so large that it damages the finances, business prospects or integrity of the company.

It is a rare company that accepts mistakes as part of their business model, yet it is also a successful company.

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