

Are you a good leader? Can you face challenges head on?

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Many would say if you're in the leadership business, you're also in the business of dealing with adversity. Regardless of where you are in your life and your career, you will consistently be faced with challenges and obstacles along the way. Let us look at the beliefs that cause some to succeed where others fail.

Life isn't easy, nor fair, and it's certain to challenge even the best of leaders. You will face physical, mental, financial, relational, and resource challenges among others. Instead of beating yourself up or giving in, it is critical you develop the ability to learn from setbacks. In a nutshell, dealing with barriers, obstacles, and setbacks requires both attitude and aptitude. So, do you have the skills and perspective to thrive under pressure and to succeed, or will you implode when faced with a challenge?

Sir Edmund Hillary was unsuccessful on three different occasions in his attempt to climb Mt. Everest before his successful summit in 1953. People who lauded the praises of Sir Edmund's ascent said, *"You've conquered the mountain,"* and Sir Hillary said, *"No, I've conquered myself."* The bitter experiences of the three failed attempts did not hold back Hillary from a fourth one. With a focused vision, clarity of purpose, a passionate outlook, and a great team, he pursued his goal and achieved it. He was competing with himself.

Anyone who has ever launched a new initiative understands the inevitability of running into numerous barriers over the life-cycle of any project. The difference between those who succeed, and those who fail, is their perspective on how to deal with the barriers they encounter along the way. People often stumble over even the smallest of obstacles, while all too easily considering these routine speed-bumps as rational excuses for their failures.

Setbacks and difficulties are an inevitable part of life. While they will often challenge your skills and temperament, it is those who are willing to spend the time assessing the obstacles as they arise, and who refuse to submit to their various trials who will succeed. The ability to blow through barriers must become a passion if you want to achieve sustainable success in any business world.

We could certainly paint a more complex picture of what it takes to overcome challenges by citing esoteric theories, but the truth of the matter is the only thing required to get beyond barriers is to stop complaining about the challenges and obstacles, and spend your time solving problems & creating outcome based solutions. If our objective is to get to the other side of the wall, we don't really care if we go over the wall, under the wall, around the wall or through the wall... we should just care we get to the other side. While we might spend a bit of time evaluating the most efficient strategy for getting to the other side of said wall, it will ultimately be our focus on the tactical execution of conquering the challenge that will determine our success. A bias toward action is always a better path than falling prey to analysis paralysis.

Generally speaking, there are only two ways to address difficulties:

1. You can either change the circumstances surrounding the difficulty, or;
2. Change yourself to better deal with the circumstances and/or the difficulty itself.

You can deal with difficulties properly and leverage your experience (or better yet the experience of others) to enhance your confidence, or you can deal with them incorrectly and let them seriously damage your confidence, performance and ultimately your reputation and future.

Following are 4 things to consider when setbacks do occur:

1. Recognize: Be honest enough to acknowledge what has happened. Don't hide from the reality of the situation at hand. Setbacks happen – don't be discouraged, learn from them, deal with them, and move on.

2. Learn: Turn setbacks into development opportunities by asking positive questions such as: What are the positives surrounding this situation? How can I make the most of this situation? What can I learn from it? What are the facts underlying this problem? How can I avoid this situation next time?

3. Acknowledge: Setbacks are part of life – they happen to everyone. When they happen to you, it's important to understand you are not being singled out. Don't take it personally, deal with it, and move on.

4. Perspective: View setbacks as a challenge to overcome rather than an issue or problem.

Just as a diamond cannot be polished without friction, neither can you fully develop your skills without them being tested by adversity. Use obstacles and failures as an opportunity to polish your skills.

Winston Churchill said it best when he noted, *“The pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; the optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”*