**A Life Lesson for Children: Failure**

**(Slide 1)** We all know that time management is a big issue for teams, and we talked last year about teams that start with lots of great ideas, but the thing they really want to do is too hard, so they do something easier. But maybe this is not a time management issue. It may be something more insidious.

Johnny Wells said something that really resonated with me at the Ignite Conference. He was talking about one of his teams that came to him and told him they didn’t think they were going to finish in time for tournament. Johnny told the team that the only thing wrong with them was they had not failed enough. They needed to figure out a way to fail more. The team reported back the next week that they were failing four and five times a day, and they felt like they would finish on time.

I just got back from Tennessee where I spent some time with my newest grand-niece. For the two days I was with her, Bella failed constantly, consistently, hundreds of times, and she refused to give up. She just kept trying and trying. It was exhausting to observe, and she’s spent the majority of her short life as a failure – all eleven months of it. To her, it’s not failure. She’s learning how to walk, climb, talk, sing – just like you did and I did.

So, I’ve done a bit of rooting around on the topic of failure. I found a lot of information on how I can learn to succeed – academically, at investing, in growing a business, but no one wanted my money to teach me how to fail successfully. I did find that the inability to fail and keep trying is a big concern in education and in business. It’s a hot topic, and, my friends, our program offers an answer. So, let’s spend a few minutes looking at failure.

**(Slide 2)** Let them fail! Huh? Why? We don’t want our kids to fail. We want them to fulfill their talents, strive for their best, and accept new challenges. Accepting failure or performing poorly is not what we are about, is it?

Actually, failure is one of the best lessons we can give to our children, and it’s better if it comes early. Think about it. If children are not given the tools to face a challenge, and they never struggle, and they never fail, then they will not learn to persist and become resilient.

**(Slide 3)** So, what is resilience? Simply put, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines resilience as "an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change." The American Psychological Association expands this definition to include both a process and a learned behavior. According to the APA, “Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity….

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.” Instead of fearing failure, we need to let our teams know that is it necessary for growth. Mistakes and errors are the way we learn. Many of the world’s greatest successes learned how to fail their way to the top. Let’s take a moment and meet some failures.

Our first failure went off to the Black Hawk war as a captain, and he came home a private. And just in case you are not familiar with military rank, private is as low as you can go. He didn’t stop failing there. He had numerous failed businesses, went bankrupt twice and was defeated in 26 campaigns for public office. **(Slide 4)** Yep, it’s Abraham Lincoln, thought by many to be one of the greatest leaders of our nation.

Our next failure - During his lifetime, his ideas were rejected and mocked by his scientific peers who thought they were outrageous and impossible. The New York Times said that he seemed to lack a high school student’s basic understanding of rocketry. **(Slide 5)** Today Robert Goddard’s rockets and space travel don’t seem far-fetched at all. He persevered with his research and experimentation with liquid-fueled rockets in spite of the feelings of the time.

A more terrifying failure – His first book was rejected 30 times, so he finally threw it in the trash. His wife fished it out and encouraged him to try one more time. **(Slide 6)** Today, the iconic thriller, Carrie, has been published in almost every written language, is a movie that still makes me twitchy, and it launched Steven King’s career as one of the best-selling authors of all time.

Our next failure was rejected from the University of Southern California School of Theater, Film and Television three times. He eventually went to a school at another location, but he dropped out to become a director. **(Slide 7)** Thirty-five years after starting his degree, Spielberg returned to school in 2002 to complete his work and earn his BA.

Our last failure summed up his career by saying, “I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.” **(Slide 8)** Just imagine if these folks had stopped trying. Their failure was a gift – shaping them into what they were really destined to be.

**(Slide 9)** In DI **t**eam managers are asked to teach the skills of critical thinking. The Roadmap helps build the skills of problem solving and decision making if team managers follow the meeting plans that are included, and instant challenge is the best place to utilize those skills where epic fails happen so quickly. It’s the perfect time to analyze what went wrong, what worked and reason through and evaluate.

Stuff will go wrong, and while a team manager can give supportive encouragement, they need to teach the team to question what went wrong? What have we learned? Where do we go from here? If the team practices these skills in instant challenge, the same behavior will carry over to their central challenge.

So, how do we help them become more resilient? **(Slide 10)** Well, we encourage them to take risks. Every year I hear one or two new team managers say, “I’m going to encourage the team to do . . . it seems like the easiest to understand. Encourage your team managers to get out of the way. Telling the team to, “Make it happen,” is empowering, and achievements are so much more satisfying if they were hard to accomplish. Don’t encourage shortcuts or the easy way, and don’t lavish praise on the ordinary.

**(Slide 11)** Another way we can help out teams become more resilient is to teach them the difference between process and outcome. DI is a process that involves uncertainty, excitement, confusion and a range of unsolved mysteries. We apply critical thinking and creative thinking skills to a challenge and we learn and grow. Yes, there is a tournament and competition, but that is not the real point. The real point is the process where we are teaching life skills, one of which is bouncing back when things go awry.

**(Slide 12)** A third strategy to help our teams become more resilient is to teach and model coping strategies. Team managers need to help the team, and sometimes the parents, understand that there will be disappointment and mistakes will be made, but it should be faced with grace – no blame of others or self.

I am the oldest of four girls, and I’ve shared some of my mother’s strategies for dealing with us before when I gave you her “two bit” solution for settling disagreement, but she also raised us with an, “Oh, well,” philosophy. I know it’s hard to believe, but I can be very intense, and when didn’t work out as planned, I had a vicious temper. It took her years to get through to my strong-willed self, but basically, she taught us that you can only count on one opportunity to do something – build something, make something, react to something – whatever. But, if you do the very best you are capable of in that one moment, then there is no shame if you fall short of the mark. It’s an “oh, well” moment, and you start at the new point and begin again.

It takes the emotion from adversity, and you can get back to work. Teaching the team to get back into the game after a setback is an important psychological part of their ultimate success.

**(Slide 13)** One last thing we can encourage our team managers to do is to emphasize values. I know we sell the program on the development of creative and critical thinking skills, but think of the values we are also teaching – cooperation, collaborative work, responsibility, respect and reliability. It is important for our teams, and their parents, to understand that actions and behaviors speak more about us than our accomplishments, and how we behave is more important than being the best.

We started with a definition of resilience, and I would like to close by putting to rest our old vision of failure. **(Slide 14)** Review slide – Failure – old definition: A negative, fatal, and final result indicating an inability to perform and a lack of success, a falling short because of ineptness, deficiency, or negligence, a bad, bad thing that should be avoided, mourned and punished.

**(Slide 15)** Let’s replace our concept of failure with a new definition. No one expects failure, but it will happen and it should be viewed as a stepping stone to success and an opportunity for learning and development.

Failure is a natural part of everyday life. It offers the gift of learning, the means to become stronger and grow as persons, the possibility for change and innovation and the chance to see whole new opportunities. We need to teach our teams to have the courage to take on new worthwhile challenges and steadily fail toward success.

**(Slide 16)** So, be bold, be audacious and embrace failure.