

37. Attitude Activity: Failing Forwards

American journalist Dan Coyle (author of *The Talent Code* and *The Little Book of Talent*) argues that mistakes are information. He says that those who have become brilliant at something have got better at it quickly because they have made a lot of mistakes and they have paid attention to their mistakes and drawn the learning out from them.

So, failure is important if we are ultimately going to succeed. There are, however, different attitudes to failure. Some students hate it and avoid it at all costs. It makes them feel embarrassed, humiliated, worthless. They hide mistakes, don't complete tests or skip hard homework so they can avoid failing. As a result they make slower progress.

Other students recognise the importance of failure. Your job is to try to become one of these people. John Maxwell puts it this way in his book *Failing Forward* (2012): some people fail backwards (the failure takes them in a backwards direction), whereas some people fail forwards (the failure accelerates their progress).

Have a look at the characteristics Maxwell associates with these different types of failing in the table below.

Failing backwards	Failing forwards
Blaming others.	Taking responsibility.
Repeating the same mistake.	Learning from each mistake.
Expecting never to fail.	Knowing failure is part of the process.
Expecting to fail continually.	Maintaining a positive attitude.
Accepting tradition blindly.	Challenging outdated assumptions.
Being limited by past mistakes.	Taking new risks.
Thinking 'I am a failure'.	Believing something didn't work.
Withdrawing effort.	Persevering.

Now try to adapt your thinking so that it takes in the statements from the right-hand column.

- » Take a recent failure and describe it in a paragraph. It might be a test, essay or homework that went badly.
- » Now look at your teacher's feedback. What are they picking out as areas of weakness? Make some notes about this, rephrasing their feedback in your own words.
- » Finish by making a simple list: what are you going to do differently next time?

Attitude

A recent failure:

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The feedback I got:

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Next time I need to:

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Final Thoughts

Look at Maxwell's descriptions of 'failing backwards'. Which of these are most like you? If you could pick one that you feel you need to stop doing which would it be? What are you going to do instead?

Using Maxwell's suggestions as a starting point, list possible actions you could take.

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