Black Box Thinking Summary

1-Sentence-Summary: _Black Box Thinking_ reveals that all paths to success lead through failure and what you can do to change your perspective on it, admit your mistakes, and build your own black box to consistently learn and improve from the feedback failure gives you.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:
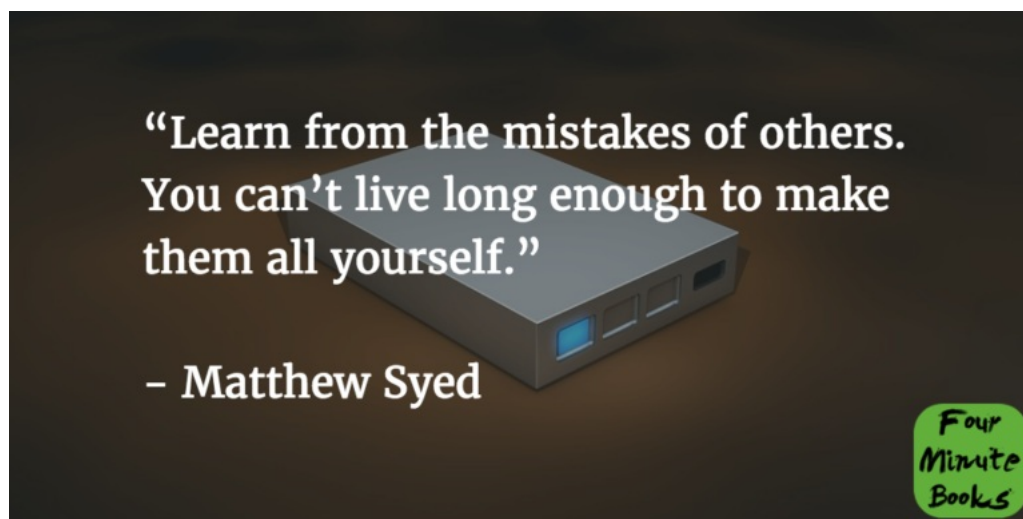
We've talked a lot about deliberate practice on Four Minute Books already. It's the concept many books debunking talent and looking at world-class performance promote, some including _So Good They Can't Ignore You_, _The Talent Code_, _Talent Is Overrated_ and the very predecessor of this book, Matthew Syed's _Bounce_.

If deliberate practice is the way to become world-class, then failure is the way to get there. Learning from your mistakes is the whole idea of deliberate practice, but doing so is hard. Why?

Because most people don't like mistakes. They shun them, they hate making them and if they do, they hate admitting them. _Black Box Thinking_ is about changing that, so you can do what's necessary to get where you want to go.

Here are 3 lessons about failure:

1. We hate admitting mistakes even more than we hate making them.
2. Look for opposing evidence by treating your ideas as hypotheses.
3. Develop a positive relationship with failure to stop avoiding it.

Are you ready to make failure your friend? Let's do this!

Lesson 1: The only thing we hate more than making mistakes is admitting them.

What's worse than forgetting to send off your monthly status report to your biggest client? Having to show up the next day and admit it to your boss.

Failure is never cool when it happens, even though the culture of entrepreneurship is trying hard to tell you otherwise. Having a failed startup has almost become a badge of honor, but what it really means is that you let too much small failures accumulate, until you eventually had to suck up a huge one: that your company's not working.

Imagine having to tell your investor that you just cost them $3 million. Shouldn't make for a good day. While the goal remains to avoid failure on a grand scale, **this can only happen if you admit as many small mistakes as you can**.

Case in point: Juan Rivera was falsely convicted for rape and murder in 1992 and spent the following 13 years in prison. Even though DNA testing had been used as early as 1984, it took until 2004 until police finally agreed to test the evidence from the case – and found he was innocent. Incapable of admitting their mistake (because it was a grave one), it took another 7 years until Rivera was finally released (and paid a $20 million settlement).

For the prosecutors, admitting their serious mistake would probably have meant they'd lose their jobs, on top of destroying their confidence – so they didn't.

Admitting mistakes is tough, but it's the only way to prevent making even worse ones. If you can start by admitting to *yourself* that you made one, you're one step ahead.

Lesson 2: Treat all of your ideas as hypotheses so you can look for opposing evidence.

So how can you make it easier to admit your mistakes?

One way would be to treat all of your ideas and conclusions as hypotheses. The world is a scary and complex place, so naturally, we tend to oversimplify things. If we considered every problem in our lives all the time, we'd probably end up paralyzed and not doing anything. Simplifying is a way for us to survive everyday life and navigate the world. But sometimes, it doesn't work.

For example, bloodletting was a common medical practice for centuries, but it actually ended up killing people, instead of curing them. Doctors never tested the validity of the practice, assuming that this "cleansing act" *must* be the right way. It never occurred to them that people might need their blood the most when they're sick. Their view was flipped: If someone couldn't even be saved with bloodletting, they were probably doomed from the outset.

Don't be a bloodletting doctor. If you think of a new kind of faucet that you think is the best in the world, test it. Build a prototype and let people tell you if you're right. Maybe it's not as intuitive as you think, or your reasoning was faulty when designing it.

Seek opposing evidence instead of confirmation, so you can improve your hypotheses over time, instead of assuming what you know is a given fact.

Lesson 3: Change your relationship with failure to a positive one so you'll stop avoiding it.

If being successful means living and dealing well with failure, then a positive relationship with mistakes is a precondition for success.

It's the difference between <u>a fixed and a growth mindset</u>, only one of which allows you to accept mistakes, admit them and then take responsibility for them so you can change them.

For example, I'm sure when you were in school there were a bunch of cool kids who never studied before a test, or maybe even went out to party the day before. **People like these are usually so worried about falling short of expectations that they deliberately sabotage themselves in advance**. If they do fine on the test, then things are okay, but if they don't, they can at least blame it on partying.

That's a loser's attitude and you know it. So try to see failure in a more positive light and take responsibility for it whenever you can.

Black Box Thinking Review

<u>Black Box Thinking</u> goes one level deeper on deliberate practice and explains how you can actually make that practice work for yourself. For this reason alone, I can recommend it, because as many books as there are promoting the idea of deliberate practice, as little are there about actually making it work.

Matthew Syed knows his stuff, go for it!

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- How many iterations of nozzles Unilever had to go through before coming up with the best one
- Why astrology hasn't made any progress in thousands of years
- Which industry costs 40,000 people their lives each year, because they can't admit

their mistakes
- An easy way to determine bloodletting doesn't work
- How failure drives solution (it's how the ATM was invented)

Who would I recommend the Black Box Thinking summary to?

The 15 year old girl, who doesn't tell her Mum about her bad grades, the 33 year old political campaign manager, who's trying to hush up his candidate's mistakes, and anyone who recently found out an opinion they held for a long time was wrong.