



Learn from your successes as well as your failures

The stakes

Even the most commonplace professional situations can be excellent learning opportunities. There is a lot of talk about the need to learn from failures. However, drawing lessons from your successes is just as important, whether they be major wins or small everyday victories. You must ask yourself which behaviors and decisions behind a given success you might be able to reproduce. That said, learning from experience is difficult, because it is very easy to misinterpret the underlying reasons for success or failure and thereby draw the wrong conclusions—hence the importance of using a methodical and disciplined approach.

Three important disciplines

Careful analysis is essential to draw reliable lessons from your experience.

Carefully distinguish the impact of your actions from that of external factors

We tend to believe that our successes are due to our own actions and decisions, and attribute our failures to external causes! This mechanism, designed to protect our self-image, is a major obstacle to learning.

➤ When you succeed, ask yourself:

- What **external events or third parties** contributed to the success? e.g.: Weakness of a competitor, favorable context making it easier to win support, etc.
- **Without these factors, what might have happened?**

➤ When you fail, ask yourself:

- **What did you do** to affect the outcome of the situation?
- **What other factors** contributed to the failure? e.g.: A change in legislation.

Analyze the facts, not just your perceptions

We easily misinterpret events, because we tend to retain only the facts that support our assumptions. Systematic analysis can help to reduce this risk considerably.

➤ When you succeed, ask yourself:

- Are there any **downsides**, even though the outcome was generally successful?
- **Are any stakeholders or observers critical** or unhappy with the results? Concerning what points in particular?
- **What moments or decisions could have tipped things the other way?**

➤ When you fail, ask yourself:

- Are there any **upsides**, even though the outcome is generally considered to be a failure?
- **Are any stakeholders or observers happy** with the outcome or certain aspects of it? Which aspects?
- **What did you learn** from or achieve during this experience upon which you can build in the future?

Systematically challenge yourself

The heady pleasure of success, or conversely, a self image weakened by failure may prevent us from analyzing the situation objectively. Using a disciplined approach to put things into perspective makes our conclusions more reliable.

➤ When you succeed, ask yourself:

- Even though you succeeded, did anything **go wrong** or fail to meet your expectations? e.g.: Total sales volume lower than expected, compensated by a higher average shopping cart.
- What happened that you did **not anticipate**?
- What role did **luck** play in the success?
- If you had to do it again, what would you do **differently**?

➤ When you fail, ask yourself:

- How could you have anticipated the **unexpected** factors that led to failure?
- In retrospect, could you have acted **differently**? Under what conditions?
- What did you **learn** and what would you do differently in a similar situation?