



NAPOLEON HILL

Principle 13: Learn from Adversity and Defeat

Your Attitude Toward Defeat

Throughout this book I've reminded you to look for the seed of an equivalent benefit in every defeat you experience. This isn't always easy when you've suffered a setback, but it is an important part of the science of personal achievement. The time to begin mastering this skill is now, instead of while you're licking your wounds. Failure and pain are one language through which nature speaks to every living creature, pointing out mistakes. Animals may become timid so that they avoid a threatening situation when it arises again; you must become humble so that you can acquire wisdom and understanding. Realize that the turning point at which you begin to attain success is usually defined by some form of defeat or failure. With this realization, you need not accept defeat as failure but only as a temporary event that may prove to be a blessing in disguise.

Everyone Faces Defeat

No one who has attained success has not met with some form of failure comparable with the scope of his or her success. Edison "failed" with more than ten thousand different attempts to create a light bulb before he hit on the formula that worked. Jonas Salk tried countless different media to cultivate the polio virus for a vaccine before he discovered that monkey brain tissue did the job. Debbie Fields founded the high-profile Mrs. Fields Cookies chain with a single store and expanded it worldwide very quickly. Too quickly, in fact. The costs of expansion crippled the company, and Fields found herself deeply in debt. She learned that trying to own and run all the stores was simply too much. Now she franchises operations instead of running them herself, and the company is profitable and growing once more. Defeat should be accepted merely as a test which permits you to discover the nature of your thoughts and their relation to your definite major purpose. Knowing this modifies your reaction to adversity and keeps you striving toward your goal. Defeat is never the same as failure unless and until it has been accepted as such.

Emerson said:

Our strength grows out of our weakness. Not until we are pricked and stung and sorely shot at, awakens the indignation which arms itself with secret forces. A great man is always willing to be little. While he sits on the cushion of advantages he goes to sleep. When he is pushed, tormented, defeated, he has a chance to learn something; he has been put on his wits; on his manhood; he has gained facts; learned from his ignorance; been cured of the insanity of conceit; has got moderation and real skill. Defeat, however, does not promise the full-blown flower of benefit, only the seed from which some benefit may be coaxed. You must recognize the seed, nurture, and cultivate it by definiteness of purpose; otherwise it will never sprout. Nature looks with disfavor on any attempt to obtain something for nothing.

You need to thank your faults when they are revealed to you because you cannot truly understand them until you have fought them.

Adversity Becomes a Blessing

Milo C. Jones operated a small farm in Wisconsin. He was barely subsisting at it when disaster struck: He suffered a paralyzing stroke. His relatives were so convinced that he was a hopeless invalid that they put him to bed and left him there. Unable to use his body, Jones turned to his mind. Almost immediately he had an idea that was destined to compensate him for his misfortune.

He summoned his relatives together and charged them with planting his entire acreage with corn. That corn would be used to feed a herd of pigs. Those pigs would be slaughtered and turned into sausage.

Within a few years Jones's sausage was being sold in stores all across the nation. You know it as Jones Farm sausage. Milo Jones and his family became wealthier than they had ever dreamed. This happened because Jones was forced by adversity to turn to a resource he had never really used: his mind. He formed a definite major purpose and a plan for realizing it. He created a mastermind alliance with his family, and with applied faith they carried out the plan that a stroke had brought to a poor farmer. When defeat overtakes you, don't spend your time counting your losses. Save it to count your gains and assets, and you will realize that they are greater than any loss you have suffered.

You may wonder why Milo C. Jones had to be overcome by a debilitating ailment before he discovered the power of his mind. Others might say that his compensation for that ailment was only financial and therefore not equivalent to his loss of mobility.

But Jones also received spiritual benefits in realizing the power of his mind and the strength of his family. His success, to be sure, did not restore control of his body. But it did give him control of his destiny, which is the highest form of personal achievement. He could have lived out his life in his bed, worrying about himself and his family. Instead he was able to bring them security they would otherwise never have known. Prolonged illness, like any crippling defeat, often forces us to stop, look, and listen. We learn to understand that still, small voice which speaks to us from within and leads us to take inventory of the factors which have led to defeat and failure in the past.

Again Emerson points the way in these matters: A fever, a mutilation, a cruel disappointment, a loss of wealth, a loss of friends, seems [*sic*] at the moment unpaid loss, and unplayable. But the sure years reveal the deep remedial force that underlies all facts. The death of a dear friend, spouse, brother, lover, which seemed nothing but privation somewhat later assumes the aspect of a guide or genius; for it commonly operates revolutions in our way of life, terminates an epoch of infancy or of youth which was waiting to be closed, breaks up a wonted occupation, or a household, or style of living, allows the formation of new ones more friendly to the growth of character. It permits or constrains the formation of new acquaintances, and the reception of new influences that prove of first importance to the next years; and the man or woman who would have remained a sunny garden flower, with no room for its roots and too much sunshine for its head, by the falling of the walls and the neglect of the gardener is made the banyan of the forest, yielding shade and fruit to wide neighborhoods of man.

Time is relentless in preserving the seed of an equivalent benefit that hides within a defeat. The best time to begin looking for that seed in a new defeat is now. But you can also examine past losses for the seeds they contain. Indeed, sometimes the weight of the loss prevents you from searching at the time. But now, with your increased wisdom and experience, you are ready to examine any loss for the lesson it can teach you.

The Major Causes of Personal Failure

To give you some perspective on the losses you face, I have below listed the most common and powerful causes of failure. When you recognize any that have hampered you, it is important that you do not berate yourself for their presence in your life. Instead you must resolve to do something about them, and do it now!

1. The habit of drifting through life without a definite major purpose
2. Meddlesome curiosity about other people's affairs
3. Inadequate education
4. Lack of self-discipline, manifested as both uncontrolled appetites and indifference to opportunity
5. Lack of ambition
6. Ill health that results from negative thinking and poor diet
7. Unfavorable childhood influences
8. Lack of persistence and follow-through

9. Negative mental attitude
10. Lack of emotional control
11. The desire to get something for nothing
12. Failure to reach decisions promptly and firmly when all the facts needed for the decision are available
13. One or more of the seven basic fears: poverty, criticism, ill health, loss of love, old age, death
14. Poor selection of a spouse
15. Over caution or the lack of caution
16. Poor choice of a vocation or occupation
17. Indiscriminate spending of time and money
18. Lack of control over the tongue
19. Intolerance
20. Failure to cooperate with others in a spirit of harmony
21. Disloyalty
22. Lack of vision and imagination
23. Egotism and vanity
24. Desire for revenge
25. Unwillingness to go the extra mile

That's quite a list. But the causes of failure are many, and often you will find more than just one has led to your downfall. In my youth I founded a magazine in Chicago dedicated to exhorting readers to strive for success. I lacked the capital for this venture, so I entered into a partnership with my printer. The magazine was a success, and even though I had to work long, endless hours, I was happy.

But I was not paying attention. My success threatened another publisher, and without my knowledge he bought out my printer partner and took over my magazine. I was out of work and separated from my labor of love in a most humiliating way.

Many of the above causes for failure were responsible for my defeat. The most important was that I had neglected to cooperate with my partner in a spirit of harmony; I bickered with him often about trivial details of publication. When the opportunity came to be free of me--and to make a profit doing it--he jumped at the chance. My egotism and vanity were responsible for much of this, as were my general lack of caution in business affairs and my sharp tongue.

But--and this is an important "but"--I did manage to find the seed of equivalent benefit by seeing these flaws in my way of doing business. I left Chicago for New York, where I founded a new magazine, one over which I retained control. To achieve this end, I truly had to inspire cooperation in my new business partners, who were risking their money without the power my former partner had kept. I also had to be much more cautious in my business planning since I depended more deeply on my own resources. The result was a magazine that, within a year, had more than twice the circulation of my previous venture. And it was as a part of my efforts to build the profits of that magazine that I conceived a series of correspondence courses which were the first codification of the science of personal achievement.

I stood at a fork in the road when I was dethroned from my Chicago magazine. I could have given up and returned to the quiet lawyer's job wife's family urged on me. Instead I recognized the seeds of equivalent benefit in my defeat, and I nurtured that seed beyond my wildest dreams.

The Benefits of Defeat

- Defeat reveals and breaks bad habits, releasing your energies for a fresh start with better habits.
- Defeat supplants vanity and arrogance with humility, paving the way for more harmonious relationships.
- Defeat causes you to take inventory of your assets and liabilities, both physical and spiritual.
- Defeat strengthens your willpower by providing it with a challenge to greater effort.

Bodybuilders know that it isn't enough just to jerk the barbell up; it has to be returned to its original position twice as slowly as it was raised. This principle is known as resistance training; it requires more control and effort than the showy work of actually lifting the weight. Defeat can be your resistance training. Every time you return to where you started, do it deliberately, concentrating on the process, so that you train yourself to make even stronger and more powerful progress the next time.

Your Attitude Toward Defeat

Again and again I've stressed that your attitude toward defeat is crucial to mastering it. You can see it only as a loss or as a chance for gain. The negative attitude toward defeat is effectively summarized by Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar* when the murderer Brutus says:

- *There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries*

The Magic of Humor

In *Think and Grow Rich*, Napoleon Hill tells us, "A keen sense of humor will keep one from taking himself too seriously."

Humorist Robert Orben, who publishes a newsletter called *Orben's Current Comedy*, says business and political leaders use humor because humor works. "Humor enhances and projects a favorable image," he says, "eases tensions, influences thinking and attitudes, helps reassert control, reduces the embarrassment of mistakes and awkward moments, serves as a useful teaching tool, is a potent and hard-to-defend-against weapon, usually conveys good will, and, perhaps most important of all -- humor makes your listeners feel better."

Actress Shelley Duvall, who has starred in such movies as *Popeye* and *The Shining* and has also achieved notable success as a producer, uses humor as a "rudder" to steer through the rough spots of life. She views life as an adventure envisioning herself going down a river, with control only over how the boat makes the journey. She prefers to enjoy the ride, not just be thinking about her destination.

New problems arise around every bend. But Duvall is always "working on something": trying to overcome something or trying to achieve something. Since things never are, nor will be, "perfect sailing," she tries to enjoy the process of life. Duvall has faced numerous disappointments and failures, but accepts them and maintains a positive viewpoint.

She relates her outlook to a memorable conversation she once had on a plane while sitting beside an elderly man. She likes to talk to people, so she brashly asked, "Tell me, how'd you get to be as old as you are?"

"I'm 92," he replied, "and let me tell you there are three things in life you can't live without -- money and health and a good sense of humor. Now which one of those three do you think is the only one that you really can't live without?"

Duvall said, "I think I know. It's a sense of humor."

"You're right," the man responded. "Many people are in poor health. They have a lot of pain to deal with in life, physical and emotional pain, but if they have a sense of humor they'll survive it, and they'll have a good attitude."

"The money you can live without. There are lots of poor people who barely get by, but some of the poorest people are some of the happiest people because they can laugh and they appreciate things."

Napoleon Hill, Robert Orben, Shelley Duvall -- motivational expert, comedy writer, actress -- in their own ways, they all learned that a good sense of humor is the one thing you can't successfully live without.

Overcoming Handicaps

"When I look at the children in our school, I see myself and remember how I yearned at their age to 'be the same' as other people."

The speaker is Dr. Henry Viscardi, famed founder of Long Island's Human Resources Center for disabled children and adults.

The first phase of his nationally acclaimed program began in a garage in 1952. The center now nurtures five innovative divisions within a multimillion-dollar complex in the Albertson suburban area outside New York City.

Viscardi, now 76 and retired from active management of the center, still spends most of his time garnering support for it.

Through the years, he has received dozens of awards and honorary degrees and has advised every president since Roosevelt. He counts many notable and wealthy men and women among his friends.

But when he speaks of the challenges that face the 240 severely disabled children who now are learning to make their own way in the world at the center he began some 36 years ago, it is as if he were small child again.

Born Without Legs

He speaks with an emotion and empathy few other professionals can muster. For he has been there.

Henry Viscardi was born without legs and spent his first seven years in the charity wards of various hospital. For nearly two decades afterward, he walked on stubs encased in leather pockets and struggled to cope in a world of relative giants.

He even attended Fordham University for three years, all the while enduring the stares, the jibes, the apathy and the pity of unthinking children and uncaring or embarrassed adults.

The year Viscardi was 26, Dr. Robert Yanover, a physician friend who looked past his 3-foot, 8-inch stature and saw the titan of a man who lived within took his case to heart.

He contacted a wizard craftsman who took on the challenge of making young Henry Viscardi a pair of artificial legs -- something others repeatedly had said couldn't be done.

Standing on those legs opened up a new life -- a life of reaching public telephone dials and the mantel clock, looking down on his mother's head, seeing the tops of the cars that whizzed by -- filled with the daily miracles other people took for granted. Viscardi worked with the Red Cross at Walter Reed Hospital during World War II,

helping armless and legless veterans. While there, he met Eleanor Roosevelt, who'd heard of his work. She became a fast friend.

Later, married and the father of four daughters, he entered private industry. In 1952, he was personnel director for the Burlington Mills textile company when the inner urge to find a way to help physically challenged people like himself to live meaningful lives became too great to resist any longer.

He resigned and with a loan of \$8,000 began Abilities, Inc., in a renovated garage on Long Island. Beginning with five handicapped workers, he set out to prove that disabled people can be efficient and productive members of society.

Teaching Belief in Self

Since then, thousands of physically challenged people have learned to believe in themselves -- that they can do anything they are willing to believe they can do -- because of Viscardi. Abilities, Inc., now located on the current Human Resources Center grounds, is a vital, productive unit that has inspired scores of clones worldwide.

But Viscardi and his wife formed an energetic team, and they didn't stop with Abilities, Inc. In the early '60s they sponsored a summer camp for about 30 handicapped children. The special programs that are available today were unheard of then, and even those physically challenged children who could attend public school rarely had the opportunity to participate in recreational activities.

The summer was a great success, and the Viscardi began to wonder what their young campers would return to when it ended. Many could not attend school and spent long days separated from other children, taught by a special teacher who might spend part of one day a week with them at home.

Never Lose Hope

Out of their ponderings came the idea for a special school that would teach children to make the most of their handicaps -- to teach them, as Viscardi puts it, almost in the very words of Napoleon Hill, that "they can do anything they want to do -- if they are willing to make the sacrifices to do it!"

The Viscardi's got a grant to make a census of children who badly needed more educational services and special equipment than they were getting. When the school opened, though, it gave the children something far more important than new services and equipment. The school gave them hope.

Today Viscardi says, "We must never lose hope -- to hope is a duty, not a luxury."

And hope is the magic ingredient in the motivation to success.

Although many handicapped children today may be mainstreamed in public schools, the Human Resources Center school is there for severely handicapped children who cannot handle the rigors other schools demand.

There, children without hands learn to write or paint or type with their feet. Children, without legs learn to maneuver from class to class in wheelchairs or on artificial limbs.

First Seniors Graduate

The school in the past three decades has grown to include kindergarten through 12th grade. The first class of seniors was graduated this year from a new \$10-million high school that bears Viscardi's name. The building will be dedicated this fall.

The Human Resources Center reaches out to industry, government and education, proving through demonstration and research that handicapped children and adults can be active, contributing members of their communities. The five facets of the center today include:

- The Abilities Work Demonstration Center
- The National Center on Employment of the Handicapped
- The Human Resources School (K-12)
- A Research and Training Institute
- An Industry-Labor Council

Those who have been touched by Henry Viscardi's life know that he will never get his wish to be "the same" as other people. The loving, caring, courageous spirit inside his different physique dispelled that possibility long ago.

He looms -- with other giants -- above most of us.

Dr. Viscardi received the Napoleon Hill Gold Medal Award in 1983 for Meritorious Achievement.

Points to Ponder

1. Everyone faces defeat. It may be a stepping stone or a stumbling block, depending on the mental attitude with which it is faced.
2. Failure and pain are one language through which nature speaks to every living creature.
3. Defeat should be accepted as a test allowing you to discover the nature of your thoughts and their relation to your definite purpose.
4. You are never a failure until you accept defeat as permanent and quit trying.
5. Defeat doesn't discourage the man who knows he is right.
6. Success comes only to those who try and keep trying.
7. Edison failed 10,000 times before perfecting the electric light bulb. Don't worry if you fail once.
8. In the hour of defeat, many have discovered their true greatness by accepting defeat only as a challenge to try again.
9. You've got a problem? That's good! Every time you meet a problem and solve it with positive mental attitude, you become a better and more successful person.
10. Problems are only opportunities in work clothes!