



HOTSHOT
For more work
wins, embrace
mistakes—they
sharpen your skills.

MARK HANAUER/CORBIS

the only way to SUCCEED ...is to fail, fail again.

Scoring big in your career means being off-target more times than you hit the bull's-eye. Learn how to make all those misses lead to success. By Sarah Mahoney

The biggest job I ever lost was running a national magazine. Word that I'd gotten fired spread like wildfire in the industry. It even rated a headline in the local paper; my parents knew I'd been canned before I had the chance to call up and tell them.

I wallowed, I ugly-cried, I indulged in revenge fantasies. I felt sure I'd never work again. Then I reached out to a good friend for consolation. Instead, I got an unexpected perspective. "Now that everyone has seen you flat on your ass, you won't ever be afraid of failing again," she told me.

That completely flipped my mind-set. It wasn't so much that I mourned the job, big deal though it was; it was more that I felt so mortified by my perceived fail it paralyzed me. Our discussion freed me up to start calling contacts and setting up interviews. Within weeks, I had a new job—same field, better money and refueled confidence. I got hired so fast I never even missed a mortgage payment.

Without knowing it, I'd embraced a strategy called "failing forward," one that has shrinks, career coaches and business gurus buzzing. Failing isn't a catastrophe, the

newthink goes; it's an integral part of success. Let me repeat: *Failure is integral to success.* "It's perfectly normal to feel terrible in the moment when it happens," says Carol Dweck, Ph.D., a psychologist at Stanford University, who has spent her career studying success. "But failure can propel you to do great things."

The concept of failing forward is powered by the tech-scene sensibility—test/fail/move on—and the realities of social media, where your layoff is immortalized on Google and your newly single status is broadcast on Facebook. "Thanks to the Internet, we know about everybody's stumbles as well as their successes, and they know about ours," says Scott Adams, author of the new book *How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big*. "We all just look human now, so failure becomes less embarrassing."

And while it used to be that you simply learned from your mistakes, today experts understand that you can get so much more out of what may seem like the crappiest moments of your life. These are the exact ways to fail forward—happily, smartly, successfully and with no regrets.

how to aim to win

First, take control

Whether you're hurting about a promotion you didn't land or a project that ended in disaster, owning it will help stop the shame. Acknowledge this: *Yes, it happened. Yes, it felt awful. I can't change the past, but I can move on.* This isn't just a pep talk, says psychologist Ryan Babineaux, Ph.D., author of *Fail Fast, Fail Often*: It means taking control of the situation so it doesn't control you. It might bolster your ego to know that people are flocking to conferences like FailCon to embrace failure. So join the proud! And then...

Feel entitled to fail

"You've had successes in your life. You're a smart, competent woman. You've earned the *right* to fail once in a while," Babineaux says. "And you need to preemptively build in acceptance for your flops." Even major companies are doing it these days. The new policy is giving staffers *permission* to make mistakes, effectively empowering employees to take risks, repeatedly goof up and ultimately produce better work. The president of Pixar Animation Studios has described the process there as getting the product from "suck" to "non-suck." It's expected that teams will go through countless versions of projects before arriving at the final one. And research by Stanford's Dweck shows that the more you believe in the value of failure, the better you'll do. In one of her studies, 91 percent of college students who thought that failing could help them learn and grow were willing to stay with a complicated task; for the group who suspected that failure mostly meant they weren't good enough, only 53 percent had the mojo to power through. It pays to be reminded of your strength and nimbleness at navigating strategies, so having coffee with an old boss or former colleague can give you that encouragement and perspective.

Stop the replay loop

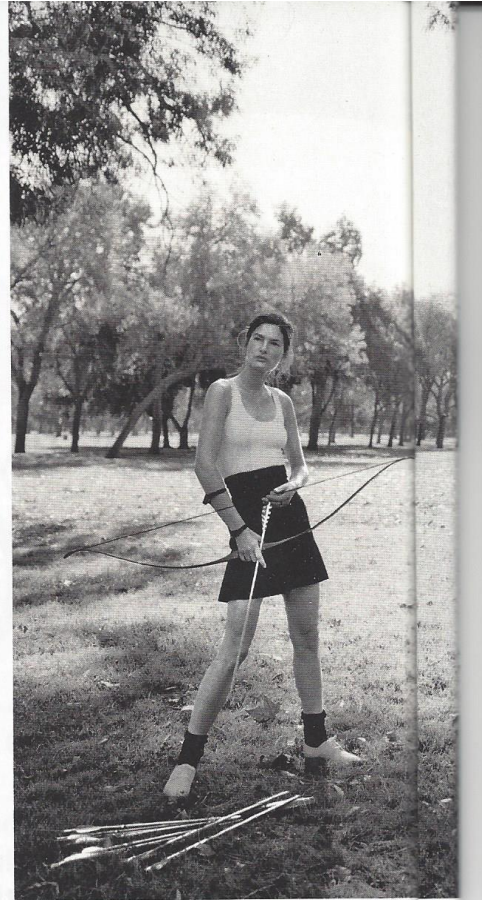
Psyching yourself up is key, but that doesn't detract from the fact that it can be hard to quit ruminating about

what went wrong. So do two things: Contain the worry, and make it positive when you go there.

"Dedicate 30 minutes a day to analyzing the fail for a week or so after the event," recommends Michael Otto, Ph.D., a psychology professor at Boston University. "It prevents obsession from eating up your life. The other critical benefit is that when you contemplate what happened in an organized way, you'll be a lot more rational about it and learn from it." If you catch yourself starting to dwell at any other time, tell yourself, "Nope, not now, I'm doing that later." At the designated worry time, sit at a desk or somewhere you can really focus. Instead of feeling defensive and brooding over how you got screwed, consider the event from the POV of how you reacted and handled things—that's encouraging, because you have the power to change that going forward. If you soldiered through your nightmare assignment alone and crashed and burned, next time consider enlisting help from the get-go. With practice at seeing the issue as a *process* that can ultimately lead to a positive outcome, Babineaux says, "you'll realize that no single act or event defines you. Fails don't determine that, say, you'll never get a new job. A misstep means something didn't pan out and you can try *other* things now." A philosophy Thomas Edison, that little old inventor, lived by: It's not that you've failed—it's that you've found thousands of ways that *didn't* work.

Now give it a good spin

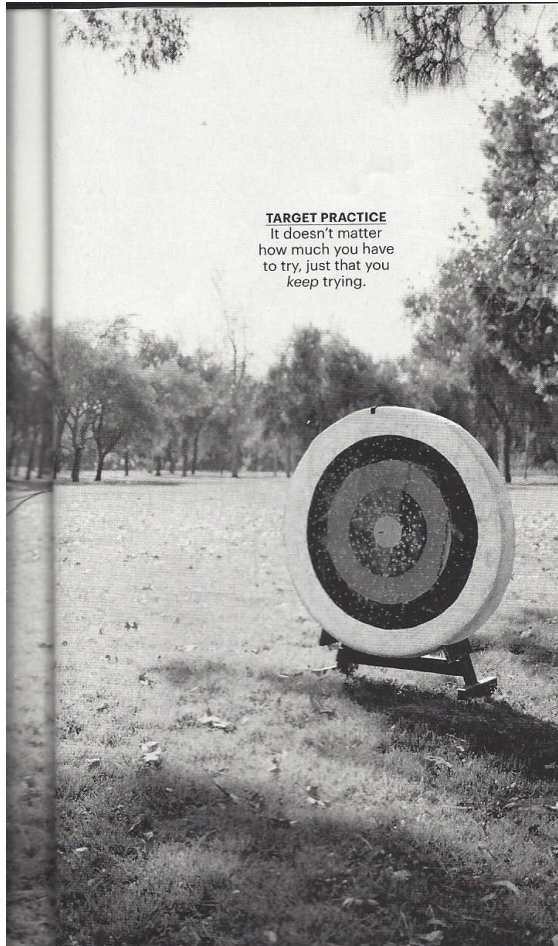
Don't think of spin as something only Kardashians do. Coming up with a positive summary that you believe helps you make sense of what happened without stressing over it. "A shorthand way to tell the story without excuses, self-pity or pointing fingers puts you in a winning frame of mind," says Pamela Mitchell, a career coach and CEO of The Reinvention Institute in Miami. The more you tell it, the



easier it is to forget negative versions of the story—and the faster you'll move on. Although "Maybe if I'd taken on a few extra projects, they wouldn't have let me go" and "The company needed to cut costs" might both be true, why choose the one that makes it personal? Even better, try: "The time was right for me to move on." As you talk with friends or family about what went down, you won't repeat the trauma because you'll be coming from a place of confidence. Having a ready answer is also crucial when a headhunter or prospective boss questions you about your last job.

Inch, don't leap, forward

Try viewing your setbacks as turning points and see where they lead you. But take it one step at a time. "Little victories give you ego boosts, keeping you motivated and forward-focused," Babineaux says. Breaking a big goal into small, doable tasks also



TARGET PRACTICE
It doesn't matter how much you have to try, just that you keep trying.

epic #fail? not these ladies

When J.Law tripped up the steps at the Oscars and got a standing O, she joked that the audience just felt sorry for her. She showed the importance of instant damage control. So did these women:

JOB REVENGE 2.0

During yet another late-night shift at her soul-draining job, video editor Marina Shifrin recorded herself at 4:30 A.M. doing an "I'm outta here" victory dance around the office. It became a YouTube sensation, proving Shifrin's viral-video cred, and Queen Latifah even offered her a new gig.

SEXTING MALFUNCTION

After she accidentally shared a boob pic on Twitter with nearly 14,000 more people than she expected to, actress Alison Pill fessed up on *Conan*—not with a big mea culpa for her X-rated selfie, just acknowledging her CrapBerry skills.

VICTOR, NOT VICTIM

"Your clothes are where we first met! Your video games are where we first kissed!" read the letter from a girlfriend to her cheater BF. She'd set up a scavenger hunt with his dumped belongings. The note went viral. Justice: served. —Tegan Reyes

makes a comeback more manageable and prevents stress. "After a big failure, I've seen young women get so panicked about going for the next win that it becomes paralyzing all over again," he adds. Make a list of things you can quickly do, such as updating your LinkedIn profile or emailing a contact. Each day, assign yourself a few of these tasks, then tick them off as you accomplish them. Success: check. Success: check.

Leave your comfort zone

Don't just keep hammering away at what you've been doing. "After a failure, it's common for people to stick with stuff they're sure they're good at, to avoid challenging their limits and repeating failures," Dweck explains. "But this is a prime time to explore possibilities." At fault for our aversion to braving the unknown may be FOMO (fear of missing out). Being aware of what others are doing at any given

moment, according to Priya Parker, founder of the strategy and consulting firm Thrive Lab, "has turned us into people who are fearful of making decisions about jobs because we're afraid there might be something better around the bend." Push yourself: If you've been let go, check out options with a headhunter, or browse sites like SimplyHired (at last count it listed 8,671,961 jobs, so *something's* gonna sound good). If you're still in the same job, try taking on different types of projects or pitch a new kind of idea. This is also a good time to try a new activity; picking up a skill can be a motivation booster and teach you to look at a subject from a whole new angle. It doesn't even have to be related to work—just head to the gym, Otto says: "Forty minutes of a new class takes all your focus, clears your head and gets you revved." All of which are good things after a setback.

You're more than a job

Inherently, you *know* that having a traditional big-deal job doesn't define who you are, but that can be hard to keep in mind when you're fixated on your next career move. "Tap into your other passions, and what's really worthwhile to you," Babineaux says. Bringing in that fervor and applying those skills changes how you approach a project. You might just find it's possible to make a living off something you do for fun. About a month before Kara Manos, 25, lost her job at a Washington, D.C., media company, she'd started a beauty blog called The Politics of Pretty. After the layoff, she threw herself into it. "The blog reminded me that I'm good at social media and networking, and it helped me clarify what I wanted in my next job," she recalls. Her happy ending: "The marketing company that hired me was just as impressed with the blog as with my last job." So do what you love—and enjoy the payoff. ■