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Manage failure.

If a parachutist falls badly when landing, he may hurt himself. A parachutist therefore practices falling safely. But how about the rest of us? Do we practice falling safely in our daily lives, in our careers and when we deliver speeches? Do we manage failure?

Last week I had the pleasure to listen to the American Dr David Birch, a leading authority in the area of employment, business growth and economic change. From back in the 60th he has followed up data about 40 million companies and come to the conclusion that everything and everybody has a failure rate of 67%, i.e. 2/3. Perhaps that is a comfort to all those who dedicate their lives to perfection. That strive for perfection is the most restraining mistake of all, namely to think that mistakes and failures are not acceptable. It is good to finally get reasonable scientific support for the fact that failure is a normal part of life. All talk about success has historically not contributed to more success. We continue to fail and that is precisely what creates success. Failure must therefore be upgraded!

Dr Birch could be understood saying that 1/3 consist of successful people who have always done everything right and that 2/3 are incurable failures. But that's not the way it is. In stead, those who have succeeded have first gone through a multitude of trials and errors. Those unsuccessful trials are the ones which have led to success. It simply goes together. The question is now, how to evaluate constant failure? Is that worthless? No, absolutely not! Many scientists and inventors never had the time to come to a final positive end result. BUT they have, often unconsciously, added a small piece to the puzzle which later was completed by others. Without that piece, the puzzle would not have been complete. Also, a discovery, invention or theory, has not seldom been rejected by the world, because it was launched before the world was ready for it. Dr Birch even recommended actively teaching failure. Why? Well, because there is a vast majority who experience failure but who have difficulties managing it. Case studies and analyses of failing businesses are made in business schools but these do not include the impact of failures on people. How does the world around react? How do we react to the condemning attitudes of the world around? How can we minimize the lack of error tolerance? Why are we so afraid of failure when it is an indispensable part of success?

Perhaps it would be a good idea to have Princess Victoria (of Sweden) not only present an award for the most successful new company of the year but also to present one for the most successful failure of the year. Perhaps then, the negative attitude of the world around to those who are unsuccessful, but who never stop trying, may change from patronizing condemnation to respect and appreciation. We should respect people who have learnt to fall and who bravely and patiently continue to take risks, who keep trying and who are prepared to fall. They are the opposite of their critics, who say nothing, do nothing and ARE nothing.

Those critics have parachutes which would probably not even open if they at all dared to jump.

*Speech Tracker AB, Kronhjordsgatan 8, S-412 68, Göteborg, Sweden, Tel. +46 (0)31 7034520, Mob. +46 (0)708 242888,
info@speechtracker.net, www.speechtracker.net*

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