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Clarity of Action. Peace of Mind.

Success for the Athletic-Minded Man Podcast

Action Plan Episode #512

How 5 World-Class Performers Turned Failure into Success

Success doesn't come to the man who never fails. That man doesn't exist. Success comes to the one who knows how to turn failure into fuel.

In this episode of "Success for the Athletic-Minded Man," I dive deep into the role of failure in success and why it's not just inevitable— it's essential.

From Tom Hopkins' bold take to Tim Ferriss' reminder that failure only matters if you learn from it, I unpack powerful insights and research from the Kellogg School of Business and Harvard Business Review that prove failing fast and trying again is one of the greatest predictors of long-term success.

You'll hear stories of world-class performers who turned their struggles into stepping stones: bestselling author Steven Pressfield battling decades of rejection before writing "The War of Art," Olympic champion Helen Maroulis overcoming self-doubt to win gold, and blind adventurer Erik Weihenmayer conquering Everest and the Grand Canyon.

I even share my own business failure, what it cost me, and why it ultimately made me more qualified to succeed.

If you've been holding back because you're afraid to fail, this episode will flip that fear on its head and show you how to leverage failure as your greatest advantage. Listen now!

Top Quotes From This Episode

"You're not afraid of failure. You're afraid that others will see you fail."

"Your failure positions you for success on the next attempt."

"Failure is an option. Go for it. Try it anyway. Move forward."

"Failure is a necessary step on your path to success."

Show Notes

This episode touches on the following key topics and ideas:

- **Facing the Fear of Failure (0:36):** Tom Hopkins said it best: "I'm not judged by the number of times I fail, but by the number of times I succeed. And the number of times I succeed is in direct proportion to the number of times I can fail and keep on trying." Your task is to stop worrying about judgment and start focusing on what each attempt makes possible.
- **Why Quick Recovery Matters (2:21):** Studies show that the single biggest predictor of eventual success isn't avoiding failure— it's how quickly you try again. Shorten the time between attempts and your odds of success rise dramatically.
- **My Business Failure: Riot Sports Marketing (3:50):** I once believed a failed tech startup proved I wasn't "good at tech." Years later, I realized that failure actually gave me the skills and perspective to move faster and smarter. Your failures don't disqualify you— they qualify you for the next opportunity.
- **Why You Must Start (and Start Again) (6:04):** Early failures increase long-term chances of success. Don't wait for perfection. Start now. If you fall short, get up and go again quickly.
- **The Concept of Productive Failure (6:45):** In a [Cognitive Science](#) research, students who were tested before instruction— forced to fail first— actually learned more deeply. The principle applies to you: lean into the struggle. It's the struggle that cements the lesson and prepares you for the next win.
- **Wrestling With Failure (8:39):** In high school and college wrestling, I once believed my failures defined me. Over time, I learned that setbacks weren't proof of inadequacy— they were preparation for success.
- **Turning Losses Into Wins (9:20):** One of my clients, Bob, shared not just his wins but also his failures—and what he learned from them. That mindset is the model: acknowledge the loss, extract the win, and move forward stronger.
- **Five Stories From World-Class Performers:**
 - **Steven Pressfield (10:55):** Rejected for decades before publishing at 55. He kept going, and resistance lost.
 - **J'den Cox (13:14):** Breakthrough came when he accepted that failure was an option— and competed without fear.
 - **Helen Maroulis (14:15):** A month of terrible practices didn't stop her from winning Olympic gold. Bad prep does not predict your future.

- **Jon Gordon (16:53):** His first book signing was a flop. Today he's a bestselling author of more than 30 books.
- **Erik Weihenmayer (17:52):** Blind, he summited Everest and kayaked the Grand Canyon. Every attempt required failing, adjusting, and trying again.
- **Looking in the Mirror (20:31):** It's easy to tell kids or teammates that failure is part of growth. It's harder to believe it about yourself. But if you can look in the mirror and declare that your setbacks qualify you— not disqualify you— you unlock the resilience required to succeed.
- **Your Next Step (21:28):** Choose one action: journal about your last failure, identify the lesson, and decide how soon you'll try again. Don't let failure keep you stuck. Let it qualify you for what's next.

List of Resources Mentioned in the Episode

[HBR IdeaCast: The Tipping Point Between Failure and Success](#)

[Cognitive Science: Productive Failure in Learning Math](#)

[The Daily Northwestern: New Kellogg research shows early career failures lead to future success](#)

Steven Pressfield books:

["The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles"](#)

["Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae"](#)

["The Legend of Bagger Vance: A Novel of Golf and the Game of Life"](#)

["Nobody Wants to Read Your Sh*t: Why That Is And What You Can Do About It"](#)

["Turning Pro: Tap Your Inner Power and Create Your Life's Work"](#)

[WATCH] ["The Legend of Bagger Vance"](#)

["The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel Your Life, Work, and Team with Positive Energy"](#)
by Jon Gordon

Other Episodes Referenced

[#246 & #247 Interview with Tim Ferriss: Secret \(or Not-So-Secret\) Routines, Experiments, and Absurd Questions from a World-Class Performer](#)

[#290 Steven Pressfield on the Warrior Ethos and Winning Your Inner War So That You Can Finally Achieve Your Potential](#)

[#372 Steven Pressfield on Commitment, Self-Reinforcement, and Getting Yourself to Do What's Necessary to Achieve Your Goals](#)

[#442 The Daily Pressfield: A Hero's Journey through Life's Grind with Steven Pressfield](#)

[#176 Finding Your Place in the World: From Rock Bottom to World Champion with Jden Cox](#)

[#143 Fear, Doubt, and Achieving Greatness: The Unlikely Story of Olympic Gold Medalist Helen Maroulis](#)

[#117 How to Find Your Purpose with Author, Speaker Jon Gordon](#)

[#96 Summiting Everest, Kayaking the Grand Canyon... Blind: Erik Weihenmayer](#)

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