

Success Ingredient #8: Accountability

In spite of all our planning and preparation, unexpected challenges are certain to arise. The outcome will depend on your willingness to take responsibility for your success instead of blaming other people, events, and circumstances for your failures. You can't keep waiting, hoping, or wishing for external circumstances to change. Are you waiting for some terrible wake-up call to make you change your ways? Great persuaders take 100 percent responsibility for their destiny. Are you hoping for a miracle, like winning the lottery, unearthing a long-lost inheritance or being Publisher's Clearinghouse's latest multi-millionaire, to change your life and income? It's time to stop wishing and waiting. The bumps in the road are unavoidable, but you'll never get to your destination if you aren't willing to remain in the driver's seat and drive over them. The difference between catastrophe and triumph lies in whether or not you're buckled up, prepared and willing to weather the storm. If you're ready, those bumps will become stepping-stones. Though you will have to endure some discomfort along the way, you'll ultimately end up on higher and better ground.

I have identified three critical areas where you must be sure to take accountability:

1. Stop Rationalizing and Take Action

Are you stuck in neutral? Are you only using first gear? Is your car not getting you where you need to go? Do you resist leaving your comfort zone? You know what you want, but you don't take action. Much of the time, this inaction is due to a game we play with ourselves called "rationalization." See if you play any of these mind games with yourself:

- I just don't have time right now.
- I'll get to it as soon as (x, y, or z) is taken care of.
- I can focus on that after I've tucked away some more savings.
- I can't take on any more projects until I get caught up on what's in front of me.

- My spouse isn't enthusiastic about it.
- I'm too tired.
- I need to wait until the weather improves.
- I'll do it when I've lost twenty pounds and I feel better about my appearance.
- I don't know where or how to start.
- I don't know anyone to guide me or answer my questions.
- I have to plan it out perfectly first, then I'll get to it.
- I tried once before.
- It is too expensive.
- It just won't work.

When we use these excuses, even if only with ourselves, they start to gain some validity, and we start to lean on them too much. We use them to pardon our lounging in the comfort zone instead of giving them fair consideration and then actually doing something about the situation. Rationalization only encourages inaction, so stop the "I would, I could, I should" stuff and do something to take ownership. When you expand your comfort zone, you expand yourself.

Comfort zones are most often expanded through vision and discomfort. We have to go where we are unfamiliar and uneasy. The irony is that this is precisely why you will experience so much growth when you face these new challenges. You will want to do everything possible to balance and neutralize the discomfort. You will be motivated to overcome the obstacles, so that you can find comfort again. It is by pushing back the line again and again that you will grow to incredible heights. You can't ever let yourself get too settled.

2. Stop Blaming Everything and Everybody—Except Yourself

Great persuaders take full responsibility for every part of their lives. We are usually much better at finding fault in others than we are in ourselves. It is easy to get stuck in the blame game because it diffuses our sense of responsibility. If we can place the blame on

other people, events, or circumstances, we can relieve ourselves of the guilt we feel when we don't do the things we know we should be doing. We also use blame to heal our frustration and disappointment when things don't go our way. We delude ourselves by thinking that the apparent comfort of laying blame is going to make things better.

The truth is, placing blame outside yourself pacifies matters only temporarily and does little to correct the problems that are upsetting you in the first place. In the end, you will feel worse because, not having been dealt with them directly, the same issues will continue to haunt and plague you. Elbert Hubbard once said, "It has always been a mystery to me why people spend so much time deliberately fooling themselves by creating alibis to cover their weakness. If your time was used differently this would cure the weakness; then no alibis or excuses would be needed."

Nobody is defeated until he starts blaming someone else.

—COACH JOHN WOODEN

These are some of the most common ways I hear people using blame to excuse their problems:

- If only I had better tools to work with.
- My training didn't prepare me for this.
- The economy isn't doing very well.
- The industry is slow right now.
- I got stuck with the worst territory.
- My boss just doesn't like me.
- The cost of living is too high.
- My spouse doesn't understand.
- No one supports me.
- They just don't understand.

3. Begin to Acknowledge and Own Your "Failures"

Sometimes, in spite of the best planning and the best effort, things seem to crumble around us. Things don't go our way. How do we respond? How do great persuaders respond? Most of us rationalize why the project went the way it did, or we try to downplay the shortcomings. We don't want to deal with the reality that maybe we blew it. But the best persuaders not only acknowledge where there was a failure, they're willing to step up to the plate and own their mistakes. As scary as this may be, it has the best long-term benefits. How can you learn from mistakes and failures if you won't even acknowledge them? The key thing to realize is that even though we often fail, that does not make us failures. Systems fail, or plans fail, but the individuals behind them are not failures. They just need to figure out how to adjust the system.

A fall into a ditch makes you wiser.

—CHINESE PROVERB

Failures and setbacks will either make you or break you. They will either give you grief or make you grow. They will either stretch your potential or cause you to stagnate. But a failure or setback is an event; it does not define the person facing it. A failure results from not learning from your mistakes and from not using that valuable education to invest in your future. Rest assured that the universe will test you to see if your goals and dreams are mere fads or a true, burning desire. No one is exempt. Don't ask yourself, "Why me?" Ask yourself, "Why not me? What do I need to learn?" We obtain great experience from our setbacks and our obstacles. We have to learn this way because it is essential for success.

Negative and bad things will happen to anyone. It is how you deal with those events. What will you learn from those experiences? Great persuaders know how to move on and make the next experience a better one.

Failure is not an event that happens overnight. You don't fail in one sitting. A few different things happening every day are what make you fail. Failure and neglect happen

over time. Neglect compounds itself exponentially. It's just like interest that compounds itself with other interest. Before you know it, you are deeper in debt. Over time, failure grows into a huge problem. Don't ignore the initial problem. Like with a small wound, if you ignore it, it may turn into a festering infection, and you could lose a limb.

Some reasons intelligent people fail:

- Lack of motivation
- Lack of impulse control
- Lack of perseverance
- Fear of failure
- Procrastination
- Inability to delay gratification
- Too little or too much self-confidence

The most successful people have been through multiple failed plans and endeavors. It is only by getting out there, rolling up your sleeves, and making a few mistakes that you're really going to figure things out. Life is not a textbook exercise. You have to learn by doing, and by risking the mistakes that will be an inevitable but necessary part of your learning curve. When you can learn and grow from your failures, then they will not be failures at all. Rather, they will be major building blocks in your climb toward success.

So how do you adjust your attitude about your "failures"? A huge step in the right direction would be to stop dwelling on the gloom-and-doom aspects and start thinking about solutions. Just because you have failed in the past does not mean you will fail in the future. Also, you may want to remind yourself of the fact that we are often way too hard on ourselves. Nobody gets it totally perfect the first time. I love what soccer coach M. H. Alderson said, "If at first you don't succeed, you're running about average."