

Professional Setbacks Often Lead to Personal Transformation

Description

We all go through tough times. Very few of us would choose hardship. The smoother, more successful parts of life are a lot more fun. But itâ??s during those times when we are deeply challenged that we can learn the most about ourselves.

In a recent Busy Leaderâ??s Podcast, I spoke with Harold Dawson Jr.â??who is the president and CEO of The Dawson Company, a highly successful real estate companyâ??on this subject. (Click here to listen.)

Harold talks about how his father, a legend in the industry, helped him get a great education, brought him into the family business, and really set him up for success. Harold worked hard and proved himself, and, eventually, ended up managing three quarters of a billion dollars in development. Then came the crash of 2008, and everything changed.

Almost overnight, Harold lost nearly everything, including his own home. The company dropped from nearly forty employees down to three employees. They had to totally change their structure, and it took the next ten years to claw their way back. During this time, his father passed away, and Harold had orthopedic issues that led to several surgeries and really threw him off his game. (Training and working out have always been a huge part of his life.)

All of this was devastating. Then, last year, Haroldâ??s very close friend and business partner, John Myslak, passed away suddenly from cancer. And now, like most business owners, heâ??s being disrupted by COVID-19.

But whatâ??s so inspiring about Harold is that he has chosen to learn from his setbacks, find the opportunity in adversity, and refocus himself on what really matters. And everything he has learned on his journey is helping him cope with the pandemic in a different way.

This week Iâ??d like to share some of the lessons Harold has learned over the years.

A few of his insights:

Listen to your parents (or someone else who knows you well). They see things you donâ??t. Harold tells a story about how a couple of years after the 2008 crash, he was really struggling. And he went to his father and kind of humbled himself and said, â??Iâ??m really at a loss. I donâ??t know what to do. Do you have any advice?â?• And his father said, â??Youâ??ve been preparing for this your whole life. Iâ??m sure youâ??ll figure it out.â?•

This was the last piece of professional advice Haroldâ??s father gave him. At the time, he was really angry and disappointed. But in time, he came to see that this was so valuable. His father saw something in him that he didnâ??t see in himself.

Success can breed complacency. Harold says that for years he had been on autopilot. When things are going really well, sometimes you donâ??t have to find super creative solutions. Because he had been able to step into an already-thriving family business with a very strong brand, there were a lot of things that fell into place. His dad told him, â??You spent many years learning how to fly; now turn off autopilot and get back to flying.â?•

Get intentional about the person you want to be. Most of the time, we donâ??t make changes unless we have to. Harold says he wishes he had turned off the autopilot with a little more cushion, when things werenâ??t so tough. Unfortunately, thatâ??s not usually how it works.

When things are really bad, get back to fundamentals. Harold references a famous Martin Luther King Jr. quote: â??If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry.â?• When things fell apart in his life, he humbled himself and went back to the basics. He demanded excellence in everything and did his best work. And it paid off.

Being a victim makes bad circumstances worse. For a decade, Harold shared he was bitter and focused on â??what had been done to me.â?• He says he had a chip on his shoulder and was consumed by anger and disappointment. It made him tough to be around. He was able to leverage that anger to keep his nose to the grind. In the same way that Tom Brady worked so hard because he was a sixth-round pick in the 2000 NFL Draft, he let that fuel him. Yet as positive as the professional outcome was, it wasnâ??t so great from a personal perspective.

Pay attention to where the credit goes. Harold admits that itâ??s easy to look in the mirror and think, *The credit obviously goes to me*. Yet he came to realize that while he was a very hard worker and had talent, he had benefited from a lot of opportunity. For the longest time, he had this illusion of control and predictability. But life showed him there are external circumstances none of us can control. We need to give up that false sense of control that tells us we can make it on our own.

We use progress and success to justify bad behavior. Recently Harold had dinner with a former employee who told him that the old team had gotten together for a reunion and were talking about old times. He expected to hear about what a great leader he was and about all the great projects they had built. Instead, she told him they were laughing about how mean he was and how he used to holler at them. He realized he had been using the stress of his job to justify his behavior. And there is no justification for treating people badly.

Relationships matter more than anything in life. This truth coalesced when Harold attended the memorial service for his friend John Myslak. There was a lot of talk about how John had always

focused on how he made people feel. This brought to mind the Maya Angelou quote, â??Iâ??ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.â?• It was then that he made his big personal pivot. He realized he needed to focus less on himself, less on fear and anger, and more on love. He also realized thereâ??s no separation between life and business. Itâ??s all relationships.

Setbacks upset our plans, but they also help us create a sweeter kind of success. By going to work for his father, Harold got to benefit from the brand his father had already built. He had the privilege of getting to grow the company and add to it, the privilege of seeing things go really well. But when he was forced to start over, he got to experience what his dad had experienced in the â??60s. He got to build a business from scratch. This was a different kind of success.

Harold says this quote from Viktor Frankl changed his life: â??When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.â?• This is great advice for all of us, especially in light of the fear and uncertainty so many of us are feeling.

In a few weeks, weâ??ll dig into how Harold weathers stress and stays on track to becoming the kind of person he wants to be. Heâ??ll share mindset shifts, resilience hacks, and other tactics. As always, thank you for reading. I have learned a lot from Harold and I hope that you will too.

Date Created
November 16, 2020
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