



We All Lose Eventually. What Matters Is How We Handle It.

## Description

No one goes undefeated. We will all face a disappointment, failure, or some other form of loss at one time or another. How a loss is handled says a great deal about a person. For me, it took longer than I would like to admit to mature to the point where I could handle a loss or disappointment in a more adult way. Now, though, I see how much it matters. How a loss is handled may set you and your company up for something positive in the future.

When COVID-19 hit, my companies looked for ways to handle the crisis. Like most, we looked at many options: grants that might be available, the steps that could be taken to get funds (loans, selling personal assets, etc.), changes to products and services, and different ways to deliver. We looked at how much cash we had on hand to evaluate how long we could handle closures. And of course, we also considered expense reductions.

In looking at expense reductions, we examined the services we were currently spending dollars on to determine what we could stop, decrease, or move in-house. Making such a decision is tough. While it may keep your people employed, it will certainly cause a hardship to the company losing the revenue. I have been involved in these types of decisions over the years on both sides, and I have found that people's reactions can differ greatly.

One action we took to reduce expenses involved a company called Impact Campaigns. It is owned by Travis Peterson. Travis has worked with us for a number of years. His is a very small company. Thus, reducing what we spent would have a significant impact on his company and family. On the day we gave him the news along with taking expense reduction steps with a number of other companies, I received a call from Travis. He was calling to say thank you for the business over these many years and to say if he were in our situation, he would be doing the same thing. I thanked him for the call and understanding.

Some weeks later, a project came up. The first person I called to hire for this project was Travis. A major reason was the professionalism he had shown when the decision was made to no longer use his services.

The best people and companies tend to get this. The same holds true with a disappointment in a job. Maybe someone else got the promotion you wanted. Or a decision was made to go outside to recruit versus considering you. Or an award or recognition went to someone else. How these situations are handled will set the tone for future success.

Not too long ago, Visit Pensacola was hiring a new executive director. The choice came down to two talented people. The job was offered to one of the final two candidates and was accepted. The finalist who did not get the job was notified. They thanked Visit Pensacola for the experience and then wrote thank-you letters to every person they had interacted with, including the staff. The person who *had* accepted the job later decided against keeping it due to family considerations. You can guess what happened: Due to the way the other finalist had handled the situation, they got the job offer and are now working for Visit Pensacola.

Here are some tips to remember when you don't get the job, the promotion, or the award; when you lose the project; or when you receive other disappointing news:

**Pause, pause, pause.** I have written before about the power of the pause. (Click [here](#).) Pausing is vital when you experience a loss or disappointment. If you feel you must write something to vent, don't send it right away. Odds are, in a day or two, you will either not send what you wrote, or you will change the message considerably. Never post a social media attack on the situation. It will have a much bigger downside than upside. Always discuss with the person or organization you are upset with before taking other action.

**Look for ways to be positive. (Don't be a sore loser.)** You will be tempted to complain bitterly or badmouth the company or person you feel let you down. Don't. If you can be positive when you tell the story, it makes a great impression on others. Graciously say thank you for the past opportunity or the chance to apply. (I very much appreciated the call I got from Travis, and it reinforced my admiration for him.) You might even send a note to the person who got the promotion, job, or award instead of you.

**Ask yourself: *How can I use this loss as an impetus to improve?*** Many times in my life, I have gotten to the finals then fell just short. Once, after coming in second for an internal promotion, I told the person making the decision they had made an excellent choice with the person who got the job, and asked what I could do to better my chances the next time an opportunity came up. The subsequent discussion was very helpful to me.

**Don't take your ball and leave.** I am reminded of the story of a young man who had the only ball for a baseball game. If he did not get his way, he would threaten to leave and take his ball with him. While this behavior is hurtful in business, in my recent work in communities, I've found it also separates those communities that thrive from those that don't. In Pensacola, a group of us thought the best place for a new Y was next to the stadium at the Community Maritime Park. It did not happen. The first reaction was to say, "Forget it, then!" However, while we were disappointed, we continued to help. Another spot was found, and today thousands of people benefit from the new Y.

It is so important to keep supporting causes we believe in (especially when they make others' lives better) even when we don't get exactly what we want. Sometimes those who do not get their way turn to a referendum. This divides the community even more. It is a case of, "Yes, I lost, and I want you to lose, too."

**Don't wish ill will on those you are disappointed with.** Years ago, a chief medical officer at a health system was very upset with the decision by corporate to let him go. This is natural. He called me for career advice and to see if I would be a reference. It was clear in each conversation that he was angry. In fact, it was to the point of seeming like he hoped his past employer would not do well—that this would show what a mistake they had made letting him and some others go.

So, I asked him if he liked the chief nursing officer at his old place of employment. He said, "Yes, very much." I kept asking those types of questions. For instance, I asked him, "Do you want the patients to get excellent care?" He said, "Of course!" I then said, "If you feel this way, why are you hoping the organization does not do well?" I also shared that my experience is potential employers will feel his anger and it will hurt his effectiveness.

These are stressful times. There is so much uncertainty. There is so much disappointment. There is so much opportunity to get on social media and post mean-spirited things. Yet there is also much opportunity to look in the mirror—to see how well we handle disappointments, how we might get better at that, and how we might use tough experiences to learn and grow.

How one handles defeat, loss, and disappointment is a good indicator of future success or failure. It's always best to choose success. And it feels a lot better to respond to life's letdowns with positivity and grace than with bitterness.

A saying I like is, "Would you rather be right or happy?" I would rather be happy. No sense of righteous anger is worth your inner peace.

**Date Created**

July 27, 2020

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