



# Mea Culpa- Reflections on Failure

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It is never an easy task to admit failure, to be the one at fault. So for an editor to admit such failing, an act that must be done in print, it is even more difficult. It is with disappointment that I admit my failure on this particular issue of the **e-Quarterly**. There are factors that explain it but the reality is I did not get the job done nor would I be able to get it done.

I know that confession is good for the soul and perhaps there is a lesson for the business community as well, though I trust more the mercy of God than that of the competitive business world. I do have some reflections on failing that I would like to share.

In our success driven world there is widespread denial of failure. It is all too often defined away or assigned to causes beyond our selves. But failing, like falling, demands a relocation of one's self. We pick ourselves up and get our direction again, and start on our way. In a spiritual and moral sense this is renewing, but can it be so in a corporate sense?

My observation is that failures bring us face to face with three realities: humility, honesty, and hope. In failure I face my limitations and inadequacies in this particular situation. It is important to remember that failure in one area is not to fail in life. The challenge is to face failure and meet the flaws that can make us better. This requires honesty, a good look at the truth of one's life. It is a chance to ask what needs working, where did I go wrong and what needs to be done. Such moral responsibility is never a bad thing. It

separates the wheat from the chaff. Only in such honesty does real hope take shape. It is the honesty that gives new vision and new direction. It calls us to change and change calls us to a future. Hope is not about easy fixes but about the difficult and arduous, but it is about the doable in life.



So given such personal lessons found in failure is it possible for this to be true in a corporate sense? Most of us I think would immediately say "No!". But if we look at it as the ledger of life we might not be so quick with our reply.

Any healthy corporation must keep an eye on the bottom line. It is about value and worth. If the dollar amount is your only indication of worth you've not learned much. The real worth is value and in this light humility, honesty, and hope do make corporate sense, they have value!

If we have created a sense of fairness in the workplace then forgiveness will have greater value. The active and passive quality of mercy is "twice blessed" as Shakespeare observed. It benefits both those who give and those who receive. But it must be forgiveness not of the failure as though nothing matters. It is about the response to failure that proves a company's worth. It requires a vision of the future that adapts to the deficits and changes accordingly. Such change benefits from the same sense of humility, honesty and hope we saw in personal failure. A great corporation knows its limits, is honest in its operations and will work toward a hopeful future. Someone once told me that the fact of the matter is that we don't learn a darn thing from our successes, but we learn the most from lessons that have been born of failure.

To fail is but half the task on the way to success. Why not go all the way? For not to do so is real failure.