FOUNDATIONS OF INTELLIGENT FAILURE

The pace of change in our world requires that we learn and adapt quickly. Intelligent Failure enables us to use our missteps as a means of accelerating our ability to learn through trial, failure, and adaptation. This resource outlines seven core tenets of this idea. Let's get started on your journey to failing intelligently!

Start ▶ Productive Conversations

NOT ALL FAILURES ARE CREATED EQUALLY

Failures range from blameworthy to praiseworthy[1] and often change with time and perspective. We want to create space for praiseworthy failures and clarify what is blameworthy in our context.

FAILURE & YOU

We must choose to avoid our instinctive reactions -- to blame, ignore, self-criticize, or deny -- and focus instead on curiosity and appreciation for what might be learned, particularly with respect to our own role in a failure.

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Failing Intelligently means identifying the **causes**: what we did, or what we didn't do (watch for failures of missed opportunities!) and the **consequences**: the losses and gains, often fluid with time.

1 Amy C. Edmondson Strategies for Learning from Failure, Harvard Business Review April 2011.

For more resources like this, visit
www.failforward.org

Add ▶ Skills for Failing Well

PRACTICE 'WHY'

Failing Intelligently requires we assess the root causes: push yourself to look for trends, norms, assumptions, and systemic factors that lead you here. Best practice? Ask yourself 'why' five times.

TALK ABOUT IT

It's important to find ways to share your reflections on what happened, and what you learned. You may find you learn even more, or help another uncover deeper learning.

GET TO KNOW YOUR EGO

To truly maximize learning, we must learn to separate our sense of self from a failure. Remind yourself to let go of dwelling on your mistakes and to listen openly to others.

Add ▶ Organizational Change

EMBED THE PRACTICE

Discuss failures at weekly meetings; look at learning and adaptation in performance reviews; publish a Failure Report. Make practicing Intelligent Failure part of your business.

TAKE RISKS; TRY NEW THINGS

We must keep innovating to stay relevant and sustainable amidst external influences and disruption. Intelligent Failure is about knowing how much risk is viable in the pursuit of innovation -- and what the goal of that innovation effort is.