

Dealing with defeats

Despite our best planning and hard work, events don't always turn out fairly or meet our hopes and expectations. Life is full of disappointments, ranging from small daily annoyances to large, life-altering crossroads. Think of these common examples:

Your planned job promotion went to a less talented colleague; Your teen student's team made the national playoffs, only to lose in the final game; After months of family counseling, your spouse files for a divorce; You lose an important court ruling even though you were in the right; You are turned down for the mortgage on your dream house.

Suffering defeats and frustrations is part of being human. Everyone experiences painful failure and disappointment to one degree or another. A large defeat can make us question ourselves and our goals. It can shake our sense of self-confidence and propel us into paralysis or depression.

We tend to define wins and losses as opposites rather than as a process or a continuum, yet failures often pave the way to success. Best-selling author on leadership John C. Maxwell calls defeat the stepping stones to success and suggests we think of loss as "failing forward."

One of the great business icons of our time, Steven Jobs, suffered the bitter defeat of losing the company he founded. He went on to launch several successful companies and to reclaim and reinvigorate Apple. Nelson Mandela suffered decades locked in a jail cell only to emerge as an international inspiration who embraced his enemies and led his country to a new era of freedom.



While we can't all be a Jobs or a Mandela, we can learn from how they handled failure and disappointment. Here are steps that leaders suggest to cope with a defeat and move on in life:

- Allow yourself time to mourn the loss, but don't get stuck in the past; be forward looking.
- Recognize that life is a process and progress is not always a straight line.
- Accept that failure is a learning experience that will help you grow and become stronger.
- Take responsibility for failure, don't blame anyone else. Don't forget to thank people who helped you.
- Reframe your loss. There's deep wisdom in the saying that it isn't about winning or losing, "but how you play the game."
- Read about how great leaders and athletes handled losses or defeat with dignity and grace.
- Get feedback and support from family, friends and respected colleagues.
- Don't give up. You may want to adjust your goals or plans, but don't lose hope.

If you or a family member is having trouble moving on from a failure or disappointment, your EAP can help. Log in to your Member site for self-help resources or call the toll-free number 24-7 to speak with a counselor.