

"At the end of the day, Lloyd forces you to dig deeper than you ever wanted to dig, and gets you to think about things in a new way just by continuing to ask questions. Anyone who really wants to see their business in a new way would benefit from something like this."

**MARK GILBREATH,
CAPROCK BUILDING
SYSTEMS**

**REFINING
THROUGH
FAILURE**

THE GUIDE

C. LLOYD BROWN

REFINING THROUGH FAILURE
THE GUIDE

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THE GUIDE**

C. LLOYD BROWN



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This is a work of creative nonfiction. Some parts have been fictionalized in varying degrees, for various purposes.

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This book is dedicated to all the people in my life who have been with me through my failures, and still choose to be with me. Especially my wife, Lora.



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Foreword

When I was finished writing this guide, I knew I needed to find someone to write the foreword. I had a list of people that I was considering—several kind, thoughtful, and accomplished people. During this time, my editor, April Kelly, was interviewing several clients of mine to get a feel for how their coaching experience was.

When April sent me these interviews, I was blown away reading about the impact coaching had on them. Frankly, in some ways I regret not knowing the impact for so long—some of these clients have been with me for two years now. And I know it sounds cliché, but I was so humbled by what they said. After reading through the interviews, it became clear to me who should write my foreword—my clients. This book wouldn't exist without them, after all.

My hope is that anyone who reads this book and implements what they learn will experience the same impact.

“Most business books are stories about how the CEO is such an amazing leader, and their company is thriving, and if you do everything the way they tell you to, you’ll succeed. Reading Lloyd’s book and finding vulnerable stories about all the times he broke his own rules, and the failure that came about as a result, and then the valuable lessons he learned from those situations was a breath of fresh air.”

“Lloyd has forced me to really think about things deeply as he helps me bring different aspects of the business into focus. He challenges me to go deeper and think of the larger picture, the bigger impact. Why I am doing what I’m doing. I’ve learned to be more intentional in my actions. Every scenario we go over comes back to my ‘why.’”

—JOHN DAVID TERRY, 3923 MANAGEMENT

“... it was time to grow and improve. We knew we needed the right coach to do that. Without someone who had experience growing a business, we were just making it up as we went along. Having someone who has been through this process before challenges us. He asks questions nobody else would ask, questions no one would even think of asking. Lloyd keeps us accountable, and we trust him with that.”

“It has really impacted our team as a whole. One of our employees told me, ‘Now we really know what you want!’ So we’ve been successful in communicating our vision with the team.”

—JACOB MORENO, ALTURA ENGINEERING AND DESIGN

“I didn’t expect to be able to talk to Lloyd about everything in my life, not just the business. Lloyd is a business owner and an entrepreneur, so he deeply understands our experiences and how they shape our lives. Because of that, we delve into all facets of life whether business or personal. He shares things he’s done in his own life that have helped him, like improving his fitness. That’s been really inspiring for me. Coaching has helped my business but also my personal life.”

—DAVID SALAS, ALTURA ENGINEERING AND DESIGN

“Lloyd helped me specifically with something I was bad at. It was tied to the imposter syndrome that plagued me when I first started this position -- I used to say, ‘we’re going to try’ or ‘we hope’. People use the words ‘try’ or ‘hope’ to build in a gray area, and he’s helped me to stop doing that. Before, picking a direction and committing to it was difficult for me. Now, if I’m not confidently moving forward I know there is a problem somewhere.”

—BRIAN ENEVOLDSEN, WT ENTERPRISE CENTER

“Coaching with Lloyd has greatly impacted our hiring process. We’ve also learned to work with key employees in our business to help them grow, and help them become better at managing people and hiring people. We’re learning to help our key employees become leaders in their own right who can help the business grow. Lloyd is actually coming in for our second quarter meeting to meet with our leadership team.”

—COY MCKAY, TURKEY CREEK HDD

“Coaching with Lloyd has reduced my stress at work. Also, it’s lit a fire under my whole team. Everyone knows where we’re headed now and they’re either on board, or they aren’t. But there’s no ambiguity now, people have been pulled out of their complacency.”

—MARK GILBREATH, CAPROCK BUILDING SYSTEMS



Introduction

Why did I write this guide? That's as good a place as any to begin introducing you to the following pages. After my first book, *Refined by Failure*, was released, the number of clients I was coaching increased quite a bit. As I met with these CEOs and leaders, I realized that it would be helpful to have a series of videos to use as a companion to my coaching. Some guidance is unique to specific clients, but a lot of information applies to all of them, and it would be convenient to have it all in one place, in the order in which I would be using it.

I began this process on my own, writing out what I wanted to say and recording myself as I presented the information. After the first several videos, I found myself stagnating. I was procrastinating, putting off doing the things I needed to do. That's when I read *Who Not How*, by Dan Sullivan and Dr. Benjamin Hardy. Everyone should read this book, whether or not they are in a leadership role. The basic idea is that if you are having trouble with the "how" aspect of a project, you may need to start looking for "who" instead.

We all have strengths, and one of my strengths is in-person coaching and building relationships. I thought that skill could seamlessly translate into creating a video series, but I was wrong. Because script-writing isn't a skill of mine, my brain was responding by putting it off, feeling frustrated, and feeling bad about myself for procrastinating. You know, that voice that says, "You should be doing this," or "You should be doing that."

When you realize that a project's "how" isn't in your wheelhouse, you need to find a partner with the skill you need. When your ideas partner with someone who has the skills to bring them to life, there's a synergistic energy that just doesn't exist otherwise. You may be good at your skill when you work on your own, and they may be good at their skill, but when you come together with a shared vision—magic happens.

So I contacted April Kelly, one of the editors who helped me when I wrote my first book, and asked if she'd be interested in helping me create a script for a video series based on that book. She was

thrilled to be a part of the continuation of that project and came on board immediately. What happened next? It blossomed. Content just poured out of me and April translated it into script material.

As we made our way to the end of the video scripts, we went over all of the content we created and she joked, “It’s like we wrote another book!” And a lightbulb went off. We HAD written another book! We had written the perfect companion guide for *Refined by Failure*. What did we do at that point? We pivoted. April began revising scripts to book content, and we worked together to flesh out things that were supposed to have been jumping off points for coaching in the videos.

Writing this book was an unintended result of creating a video course. There are great blessings that come from unintended results.

This book is a collection of things I’ve learned through my clients in coaching sessions, from insights that came to me when pondering the content in my first book, and from really great teachers. My wish is that you can avoid making the mistakes I did, and most importantly, to become aware of areas in which you are not being intentional. If you don’t live your life with intention, it simply moves forward with no real direction.

The greatest influence on this guide has been from Stephen MR Covey and Simon Sinek. It starts with “why” you want to lead, and then “how” you lead. Simon Sinek addresses how to find your why, while Stephen MR Covey helps you understand how to be a transformational leader as opposed to a commanding leader.

I’m so glad that I’ve had the opportunity to coach others, because I’ve found through the writing of this book that I have learned more through our coaching sessions than my clients have! There is a great quote about this phenomenon by Yogi Bhanjan, “If you want to learn something, read about it. If you want to understand something, write about it. If you want to master something—teach it.”

I want to encourage you not to hurry through this guide and the exercise contained within. These concepts can take time to really sink in, and it takes a lot of self-reflection to get the most out of this process. If you need to complete a chapter and then put the book down to process what you’ve learned, then do that. However you learn best, just make sure to be intentional about this.

What is Your Story?

During the course of this book, we're going to go through a series of activities that reveal your true values, then look at why you value those things, and then how you live those values at work and at home. We are also going to identify failures, and redefine them as learning events.

If you haven't seen the introductory course, I want to welcome you. This book is meant to be a practical guide to living the principles outlined in my first book, *Refined by Failure*. To completely understand the process we're going to go through, it would be helpful to have read that book first. However, anyone can benefit from the information, activities, and self-discovery contained in this book.

This book and the principles within are about the process of being refined. My own experience started a process that I'm going to share with you on redefining **failure** as **learning**. For me, it was being fired that was the catalyst that revealed my challenges with relationships. I learned that most, if not all, of my relationship issues were caused by a lack of clarity.

I hope these revelations help you reframe your own failures as lessons, to help clarify how you lead.

My Story

As I mentioned before, this book is a practical guide to implementing the ideas from my first book, *Refined by Failure*. When I wrote that first book initially, that wasn't the title. My idea for the book had centered around outlining my 10 Rules for business, how they each came to be, what they meant to me, and how to implement them. Well, I started writing, and story after story just poured out of me and I realized as I read them—all of these stories were about how I DIDN'T follow my rules, and what happened as a result. I wasn't writing a how-to, I was writing a how-not-to. In doing some soul-searching it became clear to me that each of these "failures" refined me into the person I am today.

My failure to ask for help, to **trust** others, drove a wedge between me and my wife, to the point that she asked me point-blank if I was having an affair.

My failure to hold a dear friend and team member accountable to the 10 Rules, and my subsequent refusal to engage in **vigorous debate** about the issue, drove a wedge between me and my team.

My failure to create clarity in my **commitments** led to diminishing trust with my partners and my team.

Those are just a few examples of the valuable lessons I learned along my journey so far. They certainly aren't the only ones, and they certainly won't be my last. These failures damaged my relationships, and if you don't have strong relationships with your family and business partners, you don't have a strong foundation, which creates a shaky vision. This leaves your relationships open to doubt and fear. If they don't trust you, they'll doubt your word. This is the basis for Rule 1, Give Trust, Earn Trust.

What I learned from these failures:

- Give trust, earn trust, rather than giving blind trust.
- Define plans for both success and failure—not just success.
- Being a know-it-all is a weakness, not a strength.
- If you lead with only your words and not your actions, you're a hypocrite—and hypocrites are not trustworthy.

Our Relationship with Failure

My goal in walking you through the process of creating values, and redefining values, is to help you reduce shame and have less regret when you get to the end of your journey.

- Failure is not who you are, it's an event.
- Failure is part of the journey—not the end.
- Learning from both your failures and your successes is how you improve.

We learn through failure, as it reveals what we didn't know and gives us the lesson needed for our future success.

Let's start by slowing down and asking yourself: what do I need to stop, what am I doing right and need to repeat, and what needs to be adjusted?

One thing that has helped me tremendously in my journey has been the support of a mental coach. When you want to be a better leader, you hire a business coach, when you want to get fit, you hire a physical coach. How much more important is your own mind? That's where every action begins.

In addition to my mental coach, I've also utilized the [Kolbe A Index](#). When you know how your mind works, not only can you work with it to improve your life, you can also understand why certain things don't "click" for you the way they seem to with other people. Part of clarity is knowing yourself as well as possible.

Activity: Write Your Story

The first big activity will be to write your own story. You might be wondering, "Why is this important? I'm here to learn how to be a better CEO, not write a book."

First, sometimes we can't fully understand the path our life has taken until we write it all out and look at the big picture. That's where we see the themes and overarching patterns we may not have noticed before.

And second, it's important for you to know that you really can write your own story. What do I mean by that? Think about this: **your story up till now has, in essence, written itself. Moving forward, you have the opportunity to write it yourself, intentionally.**

So dive in and be brutally honest. We will write a different story at the end of the course, and you will be able to see how your perspective has changed. You will benefit most from this book if you complete this exercise before moving forward. I know that life gets in the way and you may not be able to do that, and that's okay. Complete as much as you can, and come back to it as needed.

Before you write, open up a blank document, or a blank journal page to work through the following prompts.

First, think of any events in your life, both business and personal, that you identify as a failure and write them down.

Remember that no one but you will see this brain dump, so please be brutally honest with yourself.

After you've gathered these stories together, begin to work through this next section.

PART ONE

For this activity, either enter the text after the prompt, or, if you're handwriting your coursework, simply write out your answers on paper.

If there is someone you really care about that you would want to share your story with, what are the most important life lessons they should know?

What would you want them to understand about you? Why?

What one, big, overarching idea do you believe your life story conveys? Why?

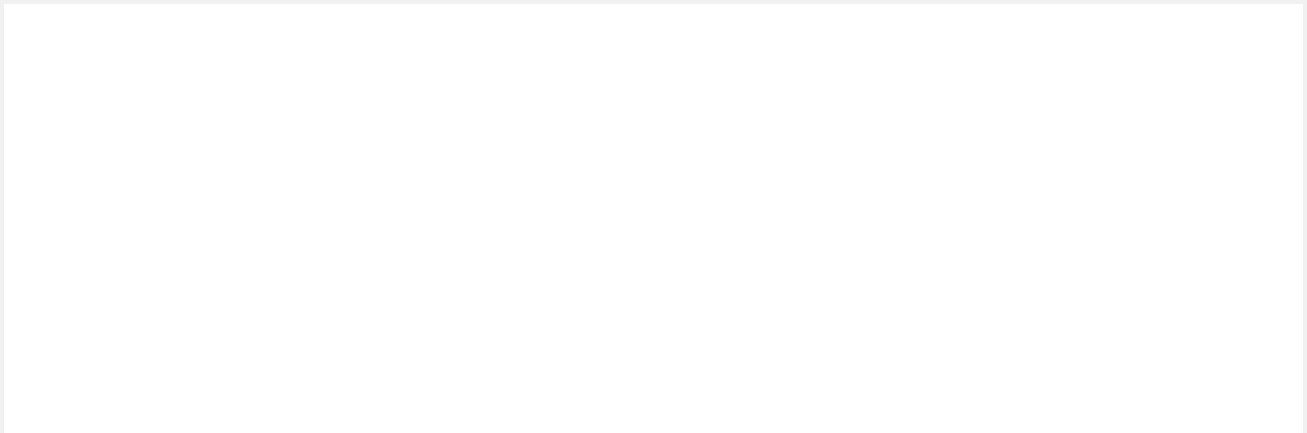


PART TWO

What is your biggest regret?



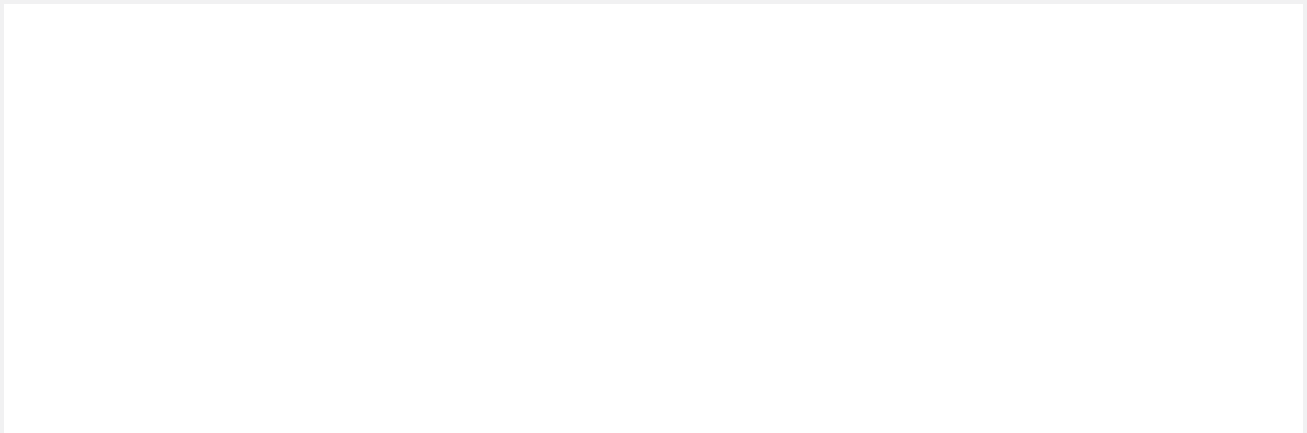
Why?



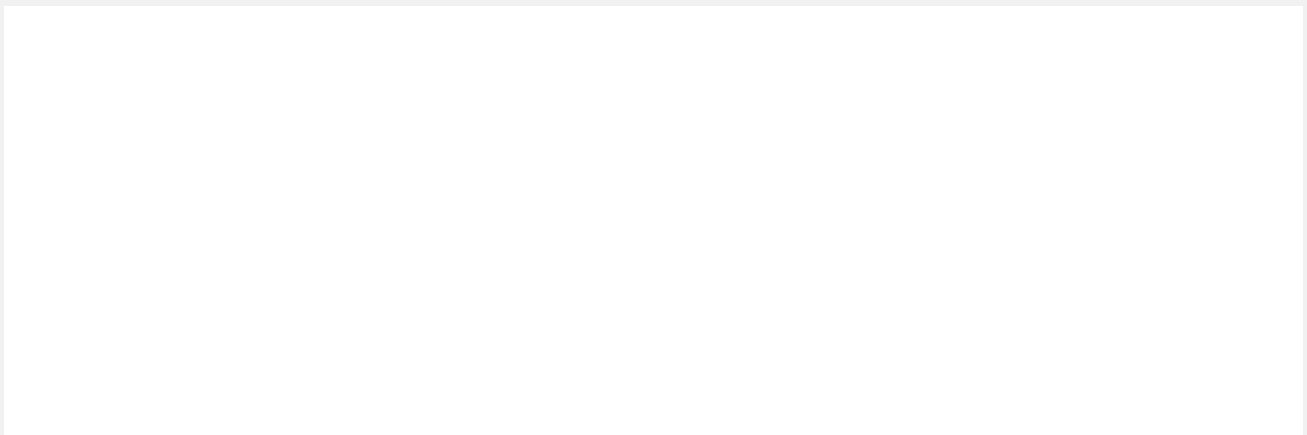
What were the impacts on your business and personal life?



What was the cost?



List the benefits in your life.



**Repeat the five questions above for any event in your life that you want to reframe, from “failure” to “life lesson.”*

Take your answers to the questions in part two, and write out the stories associated with these events as a narrative. Pretend you're telling these stories to someone out loud. How would you express them? Tell them in whatever order makes the most sense to you, it doesn't have to be chronological. Write them in a way that illustrates the path your life has taken.

I've included some examples of this from *Refined by Failure*.

Learning to Incorporate the Possibility of Failure When You Make a Commitment

"One million dollars!"

I was hoping I'd heard him wrong.

"The forecast wasn't accurate." The panic emanating from my CFO was palpable. "I didn't account for all the franchise taxes we'll have to pay."

I knew what he was going to say next before the words left his mouth.

"Lloyd, we're not going to be able to make our numbers."

The words hit me like a punch to the gut. Only the month before, I'd promised our partners a large equity distribution, and negotiated bonuses for myself and the team. The board had already approved and paid out that money in good faith, based on the last financial report from our CFO.

My credibility with the board was already in question based on the underperformance of the Mid-Continent Group, and this was just one more straw on the camel's already strained back.

You Are Not A Lone Wolf

This should have been one of the happiest moments of my life, but I felt numb and empty. I had just closed on the \$60-million sale of my company to a private equity group, and that evening there was an impromptu celebration with my—now former—partners...

The next morning was no improvement when my CFO, Jim, burst into my office. "Lloyd, we're out of money! When the investors closed, they didn't leave us any capital to operate with and we'll need to make a draw on our line of credit. Payroll is due tomorrow."

Shock turned to dismay as I let out a heavy sigh. "OK. Let's get on the phone with the new bank and see if we can get some cash in the account."

You see, I had re-invested 80 percent of the cash from the sale back into the new partnership. The new partners had emphasized the importance of showing the investors that our management team was committed to the company, and this was especially true for me. To appease them and close the deal, I committed more resources than any of the other managing partners. I'd done this on my own, thinking it was the right decision, without first asking my wife or any other trusted

advisors for their input. Then, there we were, already looking at being out of compliance with our new bank...

How was I going to tell my wife that I was going to lose 80 percent of the money from the sale of the company and just as important, what I'd spent the last twelve years building? All the time spent away from both her and my daughter, consumed with the business and nothing to show for it!

How would she respond? Would she forgive me?

The Problem With Sacred Cows

Have you created sacred cows in your life? People or decisions that cannot be questioned? This may be something to evaluate.

I was 17 when a blizzard hit our town, and when the Red Cross asked for volunteers with four-wheel-drive, it sounded like the perfect excuse to take my GMC Jimmy on a joy ride through the snow. As I rolled in, ready to help rescue stranded families and brave the elements, I started to see myself as a bit of a hero. That's when I met Jay, the Volunteer Commander of the local Red Cross. He was in his element: cool under pressure, able to see the whole picture, develop a plan, then calmly and clearly distribute orders to the eager, but inexperienced, volunteers running around the parking lot.

These same qualities would, many years later, make Jay an excellent executive to have in a crisis.

After many years of friendship and trust, Jay was my first choice when I needed to bring in a new VP of Environmental Health and Safety. Whenever a crisis hit, it was like being back in that blizzard. Jay was stoic, like the captain of a ship; he stayed focused on getting us through the storm. His orders came quickly, without any excess emotion, until the crisis was over.

This made him an invaluable asset during a crisis, when every second counts.

However, for most businesses the goal is to minimize the number of crises you have to face as an organization. This meant that for the vast majority of any given year, the same characteristics that made him such a great leader in a crisis, made him a difficult leader to work with outside of those circumstances.

I knew this intellectually, but would often find myself defending the tradeoff as worth it, because on the rare occasion we did have issues, I knew I could trust him to handle it.

It wasn't until I started reviewing his team evals that I started to recognize I had a problem.

Now write an outline using the rules that you live by. I used my 10 Rules as my outline, as you can see from the book. You can use them as an outline for your own, or if you have a set of rules or guidelines you live by, that's a great place to start. You can organize your stories based on these rules, OR, if you don't have rules, your stories may help you see what you may need to implement in your life.

I've included my [original book outline](#)¹ in the course materials for reference if you need some inspiration.

Below you'll find an outline template that you can use as a jumping off point. If you have more than four stories, feel free to keep going!

Your Outline

STORY 1

1. Opening
2. The story
3. What was the decision?
4. How did it go wrong?
5. How did it end?

STORY 2

1. Opening
2. The story
3. What was the decision?
4. How did it go wrong?
5. How did it end?

STORY 3

1. Opening
2. The story
3. What was the decision?
4. How did it go wrong?
5. How did it end?

¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GSCEF3SA100GzCEiZ7kl1t767t7VIY7/view?usp=sharing>

STORY 4

1. Opening
2. The story
3. What was the decision?
4. How did it go wrong?
5. How did it end?

How Failure Impacts Our Decisions

I hope you were able to complete the “Writing your Story” activity. I can’t tell you the revelations I had about myself when I began to write my own story, I mean REALLY write my own story, the good and the bad, not just the parts that made me look perfect.

What were the failures you identified when writing out your own story? Are there any that you ended up using as a learning opportunity?

I definitely had a moment like that in my journey. At Smart Chemical, we always said rule #1 was the safety rule and that people mattered, but we weren’t practicing that.

One morning I woke to a call telling me our crew had a car accident. Our driver had fallen asleep at the wheel en route to the job site that morning but had miraculously woken up at the last minute, barely swerving away in time to avoid a head-on collision. Had he not woken up when he did, he would have driven into the oncoming tractor trailer, likely killing everyone on board.

When I heard this recounting, I was immediately transported back to my dad’s funeral, thinking about the hundreds of people in attendance. Quickly doing the math in my head I realized that our crew of four, plus the driver, could have easily represented almost two thousand lives impacted by their deaths.

That was the impetus for changes made. One of which was that I would attend each new employee orientation. I needed to know each person to remind myself how much it mattered to honor rule #1. The wreck, remembering how I felt when my dad died, and thinking about how their families would feel if someone passed away—that’s what changed everything.

When we make decisions and take action that ends up failing, it doesn’t just affect that situation, it affects future decisions as well. In this case, that failure impacted future decisions in a positive way, but that’s not always the case.

An important distinction to make is to ask: Am I failing due to a mistake or just a lack of competency? I had a client recently who was feeling like a failure because he had to let someone go. This was a person who had worked for him for nine years and he felt like he didn’t handle it correctly. I asked him, “How many times have you had to fire someone who had worked for you for that many years?” His answer was, “Never.” You see, he felt like a failure even though he was doing something he had never done before. When he looked at it that way, he realized he actually did a great job considering he had no experience. We do that to ourselves all the time, criticize ourselves for things we’ve never done.

When you first started riding a bike, it was new. When you were very little you probably didn’t even know what a bike was. Then you saw the kids in the neighborhood riding their bikes and asked your parents to teach you. They bought you training wheels, and you got really good at riding with training wheels. Then you decided you wanted to learn to ride without them, and they taught you how to do that. Over time, you became unconsciously competent. That means, you knew how to ride that bike without thinking. You could make decisions about bike riding based on your competence and not fear from past

failures. But what about back when you were first learning and weren't yet competent? If you fell, that would absolutely affect your decisions the next time you got on the bike.

Ask yourself: Am I making decisions based on self-awareness? Or am I making decisions that are influenced by my shame from my past failures?

Exercise: I would encourage you to make a list of decisions in your life, whether they were made with awareness, or made based on past failures. Would those situations have turned out differently if you had made the decision based on your current reality at the time? Are you being overly critical because you expected results when you weren't fully competent? How would you avoid that in the future? Learn to know the difference between a bad decision and a lack of knowledge by completing the next activity.

Make a List

Make a list of decisions in your life, and consider the following questions:

- Was this decision made with awareness? What I mean by that is, did you make this decision based on past failures? Being aware of your past failures is good, as long as you don't allow your view to be influenced by shame. Did you make the decision because it was comfortable—what you were used to doing—or did you analyze your past failures WITHOUT SHAME and choose a different path based on what you learned?
- What would have turned out differently in this situation if you had objectively assessed past failures first?
- How are you being overly critical because you expected results when you weren't fully competent?
- Reflecting on your answers above, how would you avoid that and/or change your decisions in the future? Learn to know the difference between a bad decision and a lack of knowledge.

My List

1.
2.
3.
4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

You Are Not Alone

As humans, we tend to believe our experiences are unique, especially our failures. But the truth is we have all made bad decisions, whether they were made out of fear, ignorance, lack of competence, or simply wanting to do something on our own without help from trusted friends and partners.

As a CEO, it is important—no, vital—that you have trusted advisors you can go to when you need to work through a problem.

When I learned that I was being asked to step down as the CEO of Smart Chemical, my first thought was “I can’t tell my wife!” and my second thought was “I feel so alone.” After getting that news, I was numb and in shock. At that point, I decided to call my coach, Mike, from [CEO Coaching International](https://ceocoachinginternational.com/)². Of course, he gave me great advice: I needed to tell Lora. Then he shared that he had been through something similar, that he would help me walk through this, and that eventually it would be okay.

After talking to Mike, I called my best friend Kurt, who is also my pastor. He confirmed everything Mike had advised and said that we would make it together. That evening when I got home, Lora had made dinner. I waited until after we ate to tell her the news. In true Lora fashion, she took a moment to gather her thoughts before reassuring me that we would get through this together.

I no longer felt alone!

Choosing the right Trusted Advisor(s) is so critical. Who are your advisors? Are they effective in your life? I would encourage you to complete the activity, Choosing a Trusted Advisor, to evaluate who is helping you make decisions.

² <https://ceocoachinginternational.com/>

Who makes a good advisor, and who does not? The answer might surprise you. Most people think of their family and friends when it comes to advice. However, family, friends, investors, and employees are not good Trusted Advisors because they each have an emotional or financial connection to you and your decisions.

Other CEOs from peer groups like Vistage, CEO Coaching International, Strategic Coach, or YPO (Young Presidents' Organization), or any other local or online CEO peer group or coaching group you may be a part of are the best choices. These are people who understand your day-to-day life in a way no one else does, and they're unbiased since they have no stake in your decisions.

Use this sheet to list people you already go to for advice. What is your relationship with them? How trustworthy are they? Based on those answers, are they a good Trusted Advisor? Next, list people who you believe could become advisors in your life.

PERSON	RELATIONSHIP	TRUST	GOOD ADVISOR
Ex. Joe Carpenter	A colleague from my local CEO peer group	Yes	Yes
Ex. Tom Davis	A fellow CEO, and a friend I've known since I was 12	Yes	No

Be Refined, Not Defined, by Failure

Failure is part of the journey—not the end. Slow down and ask yourself: what do I need to stop, what did I do right and need to repeat, and what do I need to adjust? Learning from both your failures and your successes is how you improve.

Some of the best lessons in my life were also the most painful. My first divorce taught me a lot about what I don't want in personal relationships. Being fired as the CEO of Smart Chemical showed me what I shouldn't do as a leader. Those were two of the best learning times of my life.

The biggest part of learning is not to wallow in shame. Accept responsibility for what you can change and let go of what you cannot. Remember that guilt is a good thing because it tells us that we need to make a change, but shame is not because it defines you by the failure. It's self-focused rather than being focused on change. It makes you define yourself by what went wrong rather than who you are as a person in that situation.

What's The Point?

Failure is part of the journey—not the end. Are you identifying with the shame and allowing it to negatively influence decisions? Or are you learning through failure?

Takeaway

Slow down and ask yourself: what do I need to stop, what am I doing right and need to continue, and what needs adjustment? Learning from both your failures and your successes is how you improve.

Resources

- *Refined by Failure*, C. Lloyd Brown
- CEO Coaching International – www.ceocoachinginternational.com
- Vistage – www.vistage.com
- Strategic Coach – www.strategiccoach.com
- Young Presidents' Organization (YPO) – www.ypo.org