

Failure is an inside job

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By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—When we learn to accept responsibility for ourselves, our problems and our failures, we are better prepared to fail forward.

But what about when we are faced with overwhelming difficulties that we didn't create and we can't control?

It is true that we are more prone to allow failure to overcome us when external circumstances cause extreme hardships or grief. But, ultimately, no matter whether the difficulties of life are self-created or are from somewhere outside of us, failure is created within us. It is an inside job.

Just as failure is an inside job, so is success. If you want to achieve, you have to first win the war in your thinking. You can't let the failure outside you get inside you.

Notice the following expressions.

- "You can't control the length of your life, but you can control its width and depth."
- "You can't control the contour of your face, but you can control its expression."
- "You can't control the weather, but you can control the atmosphere of your mind."

Someone could easily say: "Those platitudes sound good, but you haven't experienced what I have."

Let me share with you the story of Roger Crawford.

Roger is in his 40s. He makes his living as a consultant and public speaker. He has written two books and travels all across the country working with Fortune 500 companies, national and state associations and school districts.

Before becoming a consultant, he was a varsity tennis player for Loyola Marymount University and later became a professional tennis player certified by the United States Professional Tennis Association.

Here is what makes Roger's physical accomplishments so impressive: He has no hands and only one foot.

You see, Roger was born with a condition called ectrodactylism. When he was born, the doctors saw that he had a thumblike projection extending out of his right forearm and a thumb and finger growing out of his left forearm. He had no palms. His legs and arms were shortened. And his left leg possessed a shrunken foot with only three toes. (The foot was amputated when he was 5.)

Various medical professionals told Roger's parents that he would never be able to walk, probably would not be able to take care of himself and would never lead a normal life.

After recovering from the shock, the parents were determined to give Roger the best chance possible for living a normal life. They raised him to feel loved, to be strong and to develop independence. His father told him: "You're only as handicapped as you want to be."

When Roger was old enough, the parents sent him to regular public schools. They involved him in sports. They encouraged him to do everything his heart desired. And they taught him to think positively.

It was during Roger's years in college that he had an experience that made a lasting impression. He had received a telephone call from a man who had read about his tennis victories, and he agreed to meet him at a nearby restaurant.

When Roger stood up to shake hands with the man, he discovered that the other fellow had hands that were almost identical to his. Roger became excited because he thought he had found someone similar to him but older who could act as his mentor.

After talking with the man for a few minutes, Roger realized that he was wrong about the person.

Roger Crawford described this encounter in his book, *How High Can You Bounce? Turn Setbacks into Comebacks*: "Instead, what I found was someone with a bitter, pessimistic attitude who blamed all of life's disappointments and failures on his anatomy.

"I soon recognized that our lives and attitudes couldn't have been more different ... He had never held a job for long, and he was sure this was because of 'discrimination'—certainly not because (as he admitted) he was constantly late, frequently absent, and failed to take any responsibility for his work. His attitude was, 'The world owes me,' and his problem was that the world disagreed. He was even angry with me because I didn't share his despair.

"We kept in touch for several years, until it dawned on me that even if some miracle were suddenly to give him a perfect body, his unhappiness and lack of success wouldn't change. He would still be at the same place in his life."

That man had allowed failure to seize him from the inside, while Roger Crawford had mastered the art of failing forward.