



Keyword: Failure

## Getting Greater Creativity by Getting Past the Fear of Failure

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by Kevin Eikenberry

Most all of us would like everyone on our teams to be more creative (including ourselves). We celebrate the creative genius, dream of the breakthrough product or service idea, and marvel at those who can make these things happen.

As a leader you know that higher levels of creativity can make your teams more successful, productive and feel more satisfied in their work. The upsides to high levels of creativity are many. The downsides are few, but the biggest one is people's fear of making a mistake, being wrong or failing.

As a leader you can increase people's creative output by reducing this downside risk. When you can reduce people's fear of failure you unleash their ability and willingness to try something new, to think differently, and to solve problems more creatively.

Here are seven specific suggestions that will help you reduce the real, and perceived, risks of failure and therefore skyrocket the creativity of those around you.

### Seven Suggestions

**Celebrate ideas (even though you know they won't all work).** The first step to greater creativity and innovation is *more ideas*. If you want great ideas you must have a larger pool to draw from. In order to get those ideas you must celebrate, value and appreciate them. People feel ownership to their ideas, so you must treat them with the same deep respect that they have for them. So, the first step toward reducing the fear of failure is getting the ideas to start with!

**Let people try it in a small way first.** The idea doesn't have to be implemented across the globe. Let people try their ideas in a small test; with one division, one department or in one office. Let them try it themselves first. Give people the confidence to try in small ways. This lowers the risk of failure *and* allows them to hone the idea for greater future success. Many people do this for the second reason, but the first reason – to make people comfortable in trying it – it just as important.

**Give people a test budget.** Why not give a person or a team an amount of money, resources and/or time to try out their ideas? Give them free reign to innovate and try things that are in alignment with your team and organizational goals. Their ideas, their budget, their results – be they success or failure. When we feel more complete ownership, we are less likely to be stymied by the fear of failure.



## Getting Greater Creativity by Getting Past the Fear of Failure (continued)

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**Let go of your perceived notions.** You can be a big barrier to your group's creativity. Let's face it: others are trying to come up with good ideas, but they are likely filtering them (consciously or not) based on their perception of whether you will like, agree with or support those ideas. You are a block to the process! If you are willing to let people test things out, you need to get your opinions out of the way. Can you have an opinion? Sure. Can you even share it? Of course! What you don't want to do is allow your opinion to be the block to the idea. Give people the go-ahead to test and then share your concerns so that those ideas might help improve their test. Share your thoughts first and you run the risk of them abandoning the fragile idea too soon.

**Model by failing yourself.** Am I suggesting you fail? Yes. More than that I am suggesting you *let people know when you fail*. If you show your willingness to fail and your openness to mistakes you will gradually make other more willing to try as well. You are a leader and you are being watched. Model the behaviors you want to see in others – take a risk!

**Celebrate the failures as well as the successes!** Consider an award for failures or mistakes. Many organizations have recognition for great ideas that are implemented successfully. Why not have a travelling trophy that celebrates a mistake done in pursuit of team or organizational goals? Even the best baseball players only get a hit one out of every three tries – likewise the more tries your team takes – the more hits they will get. Celebrate tries – even if they lead to failures.

**Redefine failure.** Failure need not be final, though that is how many view it. Model using your failures as fertilizer for future success! Teach others how to learn from their mistakes by asking reflective questions (ask yourself the same questions too). When we use well-meaning failures as learning opportunities, we take much of the emotional sting out of them.

Pick one of these suggestions and implement it today. You may see immediate results, but if you don't realize that people have built up their fear over a long period of time – and not just at work. Stick with these suggestions; practicing them regularly. You will chip away at the fear and uncertainty, and unleash the new ideas, approaches, and solutions that you have always dreamed of.



Kevin Eikenberry is a bestselling author, consultant, trainer, speaker, coach, leader, learner, husband and father. He is the Chief Potential Officer of the Kevin Eikenberry Group ([www.KEVINEIKENBERRY.COM](http://www.KEVINEIKENBERRY.COM)) and the Creator of the Remarkable Leadership Learning System ([www.REMARKABLE-LEADERSHIP.COM](http://www.REMARKABLE-LEADERSHIP.COM)), both of which are dedicated to life-long learning and helping Clients unleash their remarkable potential. Interested in becoming the remarkable leader you were born to be? Go to [www.REMARKABLE-LEADERSHIP.COM](http://www.REMARKABLE-LEADERSHIP.COM) today!

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