

Hi, everyone. This is Wayne Rivers at Performance Construction Advisors. And what do we do? *We Build Better Contractors.*

This week I want to talk about why you need to fail 16% of the time. That's a rather precise figure so you knew it came from an academic study. This is an article from Adam Alter in a newsletter called Smart Skills from back in May of '23. And before I get started with that, don't forget about our August Boot Camp in Denver. Contact Charlotte for more information.

Now, what about this is important to you? Alter says that success is impossible without some degree of failure. So, let's analyze that for a second. Let's say that we took future Hall of Famer, Mike Trout, and we placed him in a Little League baseball setting. So that's the context. Mike Trout, one of the all-time great hitters in baseball, is going to hit Little League pitching. He would be successful 95 to 99% of the time, wouldn't he? But is that success? Is he truly successful? Is he competing at the level at which he should be competing?

So, success ... I don't think in this article, they never define success. But I remember Earl Nightingale, gosh, ages ago, said that his definition of success was the progressive attainment of a worthy goal. And to have Mike Trout hitting against children. Okay, success, yeah. His batting average would be nine 990, but is that really success? Because he's not competing at his level.

And the reason I talk about that is contractors compete at different levels. And it depends on if you're a trade contractor or a general contractor or a heavy civil. You've got to be playing in the right sandbox in order to really judge your success and to allow yourself to fail occasionally. Now, he says that paradoxically, if you want to succeed, the best way to do that is to occasionally ease up.

Now that flies in the face of conventional wisdom for contractors, because as Dennis always said, contractors think they have to be 110% busy 110% of the time. And the idea of easing up and relaxing and letting the pressure abate so that you can think through problems and challenges is kind of ... Well, it's paradoxical in the thinking of contractors. So, Alter talks about two people, and I'll bring up a third later. Einstein and Mozart. Everybody knows. Creative and intellectual geniuses and household names to people all around the world. He said that Einstein's productivity came in bursts and Einstein himself said when he ran into an intractable problem, he would lie down and just let his imagination run wild. And he said he listened to his imagination. Well, you can't listen if you're busy and you're talking and you're efforting to try to get at the heart of a problem.

When he talks about Mozart. Mozart himself wrote, "When I am, as it were completely myself, entirely alone and of good cheer, say traveling in a carriage or walking after a good meal, or during the night when I cannot sleep. It is on such occasions that my ideas flow best and most abundantly." Ease up in order to succeed, if that makes sense. Alter writes ... I'm going to quote this. "The quickest way to guide a derailed mind is not to exert brute force." Brute force is the way contractors solve problems, right?

"But to seek space and solitude, and you have to accept that some failure is necessary." Now, in terms of construction, I'm not talking project failure so much. But the thing that came to mind quickly was something that's easy to measure is business development. If you are getting work on a hundred percent of your proposals or a hundred percent of your bids, something is not right. It's too easy. There's a spectrum, a hundred percent success on one side and a hundred percent failure on the other. Well, nobody wants to be at a hundred percent failure.

But what I'm telling you based on this article, is that experts say you don't want to be on the hundred percent success side because that means you're not competing in the right sandbox. Something's not right, and they say the optimum failure rate is not 16%. Again, academia. 15.87. 15.87% of the time, you should fail. And that means you're stretching. That means you're really working hard to attain stretch goals and to put creative pressure into your organization. If you're failing more than one out of five out of six attempts, then you're probably trying ... You're not in the right sandbox there again either. Something is not right. You're not calibrated properly.

Again, I'd like to know what you guys think. Is it business development? What other contexts can you think of where you should be failing 16% of the time? BD is easy. That's low-hanging fruit. In what other areas of construction should you be trying to fail, paradoxically, in order to succeed?

He closes with, "The pursuit of perfection guarantees failure," right? Because even Mike Trout hitting Little League pitching is not going to hit a thousand. So think about that. The pursuit of perfection guarantees failure. Ease up when you run into an intractable problem and let your imagination run wild, and maybe that'll advance the ball for you in terms of success. What do you think? Let us hear from you.

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