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Fail, Adjust, Succeed

BEST PRACTICES

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I would wager that those of us who have experienced failures in our personal lives and careers often focus far too much on the negative aspects of failure instead of what we can learn from it. A quote that we've all heard but rarely take the time to appreciate is: *"I have not failed 10,000 times - I've successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work"* - Thomas Edison. Project failures are normal, expected, and lay the groundwork for success.

Errare Humanum Est

This concept is simple, to err is human. All of us make mistakes, we are fallible, and keeping this concept in the front of our mind when someone makes a mistake can be difficult. It is much easier to react negatively, and while I believe that most of us don't intend to react that way, I know for myself it is quite hard. But two wrongs don't make a right, reacting

to failure with poor communication is a great way to cement that failure and not improve from it. Your team member likely already feels defeated by their mistake, so use the opportunity to empathize with them and understand the circumstances that lead to it.

Encourage Some Failure

While failures often have negative impacts on a project, every project has the capacity for some missteps along the way. In the software world, the "fail early, fail often" practice is encouraged. While teams certainly need to be given guard rails to ensure that they don't jeopardize project milestones, they also need to know that failing in small ways is acceptable. If perfection is the enemy of progress, then the team needs to know when it makes sense for them to take risks. If team members are not sure exactly how to proceed with their work

and feel like they must wait for approval to move forward, they can easily waste large amounts of time. This situation happens a lot in software development, and we encourage our team members to keep pushing forward. It usually takes much less time to make an adjustment to their implementation than to have them waiting around for additional guidance.

Learn and Adjust

At home or in the office, we must take the time to learn from our failures and make the appropriate adjustments for the future. Understanding the circumstances that led to our failure, documenting the scenario if necessary, and when appropriate, developing a corrective action plan for moving forward. Sprint Retrospectives are Agile ceremonies that allow us to look at our wins and failures within each sprint. It's a time for the team to reflect on our faults, document them, and determine which steps we are going to take as a team to help prevent them from happening again in the future. Remember, the symptom of a failure is often not the root cause, so open discussions as a team are crucial for uncovering the best path forward.

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