

This is the Real Secret to Success – How to Lead Even When You Are Losing



Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Recently, my team and I lost a client – a large client. And it hurt a lot. We don't like losing; call it our competitive nature or just the fact that we pour everything we have into these client engagements, our ideas, and our time.

In just over a decade, we have landed in New York and grown from a team of under ten to an organization with more than 500 people globally. We've won incredible clients – driving their businesses forward and delivering upon ambitious growth plans.

We've done a lot of winning. So, losing naturally stung. But that sting quickly morphs into something far more powerful: motivation to learn and grow.

Related: 8 Tips to Help Entrepreneurs Find Success After Failure

On the pitch

The challenge with always winning is that you will feel like you are succeeding. As if you've earned the title "best in the business." But in reality, that feeling is somewhat of a falsity because you're actually not really learning. Yes, you're winning. But you're not growing.

This is why I'm here to remind ourselves that the real secret to success is learning how to lose. To lose with grace but also fire. To lose with conviction and a promise to learn, grow and continuously do better.

Don't believe me? Just ask David Beckham and Sir Alex Ferguson.

Close your eyes and reflect on the 1998 World Cup in France. England faced their old enemy, Argentina, in the first knockout rounds. David Beckham started for England in midfield. At this moment in time, he was a young man with the world at his feet. He was a fast-emerging superstar. He was dating a superstar. And he was playing for England and Manchester United.

Life was looking good for Becks. Until, with the game tied at 2-2, Argentina's notoriously tenacious midfielder Diego Simeone committed a cynical foul on Beckham. After Beckham hit the floor, Simeone antagonized Beckham by ruffling the back of his hair.

And in that moment, Beckham's life would change forever.

Beckham lost control of his emotions. He instinctively kicked out his leg at Simeone— leading the referee to swiftly brandish a red card and send Beckham off the pitch. England lost the game. And chaos ensued.

Beckham went from the golden boy to the most hated man in Britain in a flash. The media turned on him. He received death threats from fans, bullets in the mail, and a Beckham effigy was even hanged outside a pub in London.

Related: Why Failure Is Your Best Teacher

Everyone turned on him. Except his manager, Sir Alex Ferguson.

Sir Alex put his arms around him. He protected him – and made sure his teammates did, too. He created an “us versus the world” mentality within Beckham and the club. And together, they fought on and pushed forward.

And it worked. Within a year, Beckham and Manchester United would win an iconic treble. Tides would shift. He was back to his place as beloved the world over.

Pivoting back to the world in which we thrive – the world of business—this “us versus the world” mentality can be incredibly powerful when deployed well and with intention. By having instilled the right mindset, our best work has been done when we’ve lost a few things in a row.

Why? Because it forces you to reassess your position in the market, develop new tools and capabilities and refine your sense of direction. Lastly, always remember that feedback is a gift, take as much as you can and learn from it. Embrace it. We call that having a growth mentality.

Related: 7 Lessons on Failure You Can Learn From Top Athletes

Losses and Lessons

Losing hurts. It will always hurt. But there is no shame in losing – so cast that thought aside. There is only regret if you fail to learn.

Sir Alex Ferguson turned a crisis into an opportunity by

leading with a people-first mindset and putting the collective well-being of his team first. He stood by his team, and the world witnessed that.

Businesses work in the same way. Leaders need to create a sense of togetherness. When you lose out on a pitch, people will worry about the security of their jobs. As I am learning again, an “us against the world” mentality can be a transformational asset in these moments.

If you spoke to David Beckham in the aftermath of that game versus Argentina, he would likely give anything to turn back time and change his actions. But that loss, that mistake, was likely worth more than he could realize.

A loss is not always for the worse. Sometimes, it is the best thing that can happen for a person or a business. It's a chance to refocus. To reevaluate your processes and your priorities.

We are all going to face challenging moments in 2024. Everyone will lose at some point. But not everyone will learn. And that, more than their percentage of wins against losses, is what separates successful leaders and businesses from the rest.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/starting-a-business/how-to-find-success-in-failure-and-loss/468964>