



Why People Fail

The 16 obstacles to success and how you can overcome them

Simon Reynolds

Reviewed by David Hanlon.

As a book this is an easy read. Most motivational/self-help books tend to focus on the drivers of success, rather than delving into mending the aches and pains of the body. Reynolds's brings together much of the latter-day thinking about getting the best performance from yourself.

Who is Siimon Reynolds?

Reynolds's became one of Australia's youngest self-made millionaires and an agency director at the tender age of 21. After his acrimonious fallout with former Omon agency partner Mark de Teliga over shares to being "sacked at 21" over the phone and "without reason" from Grey Advertising. He went on to found The Photon Group, a group of marketing companies. He's now chairman and co-founder of OMG, one of Australia's largest online networks, and a business consultant, author and public speaker.

In an interview with Samantha Selinger-Morris of the Sydney Morning Herald, Reynolds's responded to criticism about his flamboyancy and tendency for suggesting some out-of-the-square solutions was: "Well, I guess I'd rather help some people than worry about what the criticisms will be."

He is passionately driven to take the "taboo" out of failure. As Reynolds's suggests it is a "forbidden subject. We're not supposed to fail and if we do, we're supposed to hide it from everybody. It gives people the wrong impression about what it takes to be successful."

The sixteen mistakes

Reynolds's solutions to manage these mistakes range from new-age to the downright practical and sensible. I encourage you to take a look them with an open mind and get behind the essence of what the intent of the practice is. The 16 mistakes are:

1. Unclear purpose
2. Destructive thinking
3. Low productivity
4. Fixed mindset
5. Weak energy
6. Not asking the right questions
7. Poor presentation skills
8. Mistaking IQ for EQ
9. Poor self-image
10. Not enough thinking
11. No daily rituals
12. Stress

13. Few relationships
14. Lack of persistence
15. Money obsession
16. Not focusing on strengths

Messages and tips

1. Unclear purpose

Having a clear purpose in life and work underpins satisfaction, happiness and success. Yet there are still many who are unclear about their life's purpose. Reynolds's pushes the point by claiming "the average person is average because they have no clear purpose." We prefer to suggest that without purpose, you are more at risk of becoming the outcome of somebody else's purpose.

None-the-less, a strong purpose is our fuel and source of inspiration.

2. Destructive thinking

How we think determines how we feel and act. Reynolds's discusses the impact of thought, the impact on how well you perform and how happy you are. Mastering thoughts is something many people only vaguely think possible and fewer still, work on this. However it is not easy, daily focus is one of the essential inputs.

3. Low productivity

How we choose to use the same 168 hours in the week varies enormously. People who fail usually don't take enough action. The heart of intelligent action is to try something, evaluate how it went, adjust your strategy, then try again.

Productivity is simple: 1. Get clear about what you want; 2. Take action; 3. Change your approach if it isn't working, and stick with it if it is. Add the techniques of doing the most important action first and working in uninterrupted blocks of time.

4. Fixed mindset

There are two mindsets you can have: fixed mindset and growth mindset. When you have a fixed mindset you are fearful of venturing into new areas and greatly concerned about what other people think of you. This attitude tends to inhibit your activities, making you play safe and not stretch your boundaries. Because we live in an ever-progressing world, that mindset slowly causes you to be left behind in both your 'career and your personal evolution.

5. Weak energy

We often forget that the human body is a machine. Like any machine it needs to be maintained well and powered by a quality energy source. If you're neglecting your energy levels, then eventually you will fail, or at the very least perform at a mediocre level. Many corporate executives think they don't have time to eat well, sleep well and generally look after themselves. They're too busy "getting things done". Stress and recovery are critical components of high sustained energy.

6. Not asking the right questions

Powerful questions are wonderful things. The questions that Reynolds's poses are good ones for us all to reflect on.

- What are my values?
- What would I do if I knew I couldn't fail?
- What could go wrong?
- How could I make 10 times more money?
- What would X do?
- Should I even be involved with this?
- How would my competition defeat me?
- What's the best use of my time right now?
- When I die, what kind of life would I like to have lived?
- How could I improve that performance?

7. Poor presentation skills

Some simple reminders for those who have to communicate with teams, clients, or other stakeholders. How often do we say to ourselves that Jack or Fred is a great person but a shocking communicator – yet we do nothing about it.

8. Mistaking IQ for EQ

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) has only been recently acknowledged as an important contributor to our ability to more effectively manage relationships and our thinking processes. Although a pretty shallow discussion, Reynolds's makes two good points.

Firstly, understand your score and the key areas where you are strong.

Second, being aware of ones weaker points and working on them will improve your overall EQ.

9. Poor self-image

Part of mental toughness is working on a realistic and positive self-image. Not easy for some, however the will to shift can become part of ones daily routine.

10. Not enough thinking

As we constantly say, busyness is today's epidemic – and we praise it. Multi-tasking, reacting and just plain doing are increasingly bad habits.

11. No daily rituals

Rituals for sports people are common, expected and practiced. Rituals for executives are rare and ignored. Bringing rituals into the corporate world can be attributed to Loehr and Schwartz, "The Power of Full Engagement". And I have no doubt they work – we use them internally and with clients with great success. The trick is to have the right ritual for the particular problem or issue and not to try to solve everything at once.

12. Stress

Reynolds's is wise to pick up on stress as a key form of failure: from diseases, broken relationships, bouts of depression and poor work performance.

13. Few relationships

We can't achieve success at any significant level without the assistance of others. Highly successful people always develop a crack team of advisers to help them reach their goals. The fact is, you are only as good as the team around you.

14. Lack of persistence

Persistence is one of the common elements in the great majority of successful people. Talent and persistence make a powerful relationship, however talent alone is not the answer.

15. Money obsession

Perhaps a strange one for many, however Reynolds's is right when he points out that "materialism is at epidemic levels and still rising fast in many countries. So many of us are obsessed with getting more, more, more, rather than enjoying what we've already got."

He doesn't deny money – "I'm all for wealth." It's just not putting it first.

16. Not focusing on strengths

A nice reminder to spend as much time as we can on those factors, which add value given our particular set of capabilities.

Summary

Whilst at times light on the theory underpinning some of the failures and seemingly a bit trite, this book is great for those who manage teams and wish to give some clear support. Also I think many of pointers have direct relevance for individuals who want some pointers to be more effective.

"*Why People Fail*" is available in good bookstores.

David Hanlon is the founder of the Right Mind International Pty Ltd. He conducts his consulting and training activities globally. His leadership program, *Conversations for Growth*®, was a 2010 finalist in the Australian Institute of Training and Development's Australian Learning Innovation award.