The Edge: View failure as your next positive step

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I keep his quote on my bulletin board above my desk so I can look at it every morning. “Never, never, never quit.” Winston Churchill knew a lot about the value of perseverance in the face of failure. He was estranged from his political party from 1929-39. He never gave up, and then was elected British prime minister in 1940 and was instrumental in the Allies’ victory in WWII.

Churchill isn’t alone. History is written by the winners who viewed failure as a steppingstone on the way to success.

Thomas Edison was told by his teachers that he was “too stupid to learn anything.” One thousand patents later, the inventor of the electric lamp proved them all wrong. Walt Disney was fired by his newspaper editor, who said Disney “lacked imagination and had no good ideas.” Oprah Winfrey was fired from her first television anchor job and then went on to wildly succeed in the entertainment industry. Another person fired, this time from dozens of jobs, was Colonel Harland David Sanders, who then went on to found the Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise. Even Steven Spielberg was rejected — several times — by the University of Southern California’s School of Cinematic Arts. Turns out he didn’t need USC to win three Oscars and create beloved and high-grossing films.

The common element among all these superstars is to treat failure as the cost of doing business. If you dream big, there will be obstacles along the way. There will also be failures. And then
there are the people who will tell you it can’t be done. It’s never been done like that before. And you can’t do it.

Never let other people say you can’t or shouldn’t do something. I decided I wanted to become a lawyer in eighth grade. It sounded fascinating, and I believed I could help make a positive difference in people’s lives. Back in the 1980s, when I entered law school, I was told I shouldn’t be a lawyer, since it wasn’t a job for ladies.

“What are all these lady lawyers going to do?” a man once asked me.

“The same work the gentlemen lawyers are doing,” I answered. And I have been doing that for more than 30 years.

When you start your own business or go to work for someone else, there will be obstacles and failures along the way. Zoning regulations will change. Permits will be denied. Construction will be delayed. Products will not be shipped and received on time. Promises will be broken. Treat each failure as a steppingstone on the path to success. Do not take a failure personally. It is just a problem waiting to be solved. Fix it and snatch victory from the jaws of failure.

International Monetary Fund Chief Christine Lagarde, in an interview with CNN, said about failure: “Oh, get over it. Get over it and move on.”

I just found a new quote for my bulletin board.