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Fail Better: Design Smart Mistakes and Succeed Sooner

Anjali Sastry, Kara Penn
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Anjali Sastry, Kara Penn : Fail Better: Design Smart Mistakes and Succeed Sooner before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fail Better: Design Smart Mistakes and Succeed Sooner:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Succeed More!By Harley DavisThe essence of the scientific method is to develop hypotheses based on observations, and experiment until these hypotheses can be proven or disproven - and then to publish the results. What if we could apply the same technique to business problems to create the same kind of success?ldquo;Fail Betterrdquo; would be better titled ldquo;Succeed More Oftenrdquo;. It is a detailed guide to applying the best lessons of the scientific method to business ndash; despite differences between our abilities to set

up good experiments and gather data, the fundamentals of incremental improvement through testing and good communication can still be applied, and Sastry and Penn show us how. "Fail Better" combines practical, detailed advice with concrete examples from a variety of industries to show how this incremental approach can allow us to succeed on the large scale of a project even if we "fail" on a small scale of iterations within it. In fact, the argument is that many projects fail on the large scale because they don't set up experiments and latitude to fail on a small scale. Coming from the software world, where agile development methodologies that have a similar philosophy have come to dominate, it is clear that this approach can be made to work extremely well if all the parties are willing to look at the big picture and adopt the approach together. Organizations that are not familiar with the approach will require more work; and the biggest challenge is for project managers to get their teams and organizations to buy into the idea that the potential for small failures is the best way to ensure long-term success.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Great resource for anyone undertaking a project of any kind
By Ashok A Ginde
I've read a number of books on how failure can ultimately lead to success. Fail Better is one of the best books I've read on the topic because it's written in a very accessible manner and also contains a wealth of practical information and real world examples. The great thing about the Fail Better method is that it can be applied to a project in almost any context. I highly recommend this book!

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. "You can't escape failure": How to use it to achieve great success that would not otherwise be possible
By Robert Morris
As I began to read this book, I was again reminded of a passage in Paul Schoemaker's latest book, Brilliant Mistakes: "The key question companies need to address is not 'Should we make mistakes?' but rather 'Which mistakes should we make in order to test our deeply held assumptions?'" This is precisely what Anjali Sastry and Kara Penn have in mind when introducing what they characterize as the "Fail Better" approach: designing smart mistakes, learn from them, and thereby achieve greater success and do so sooner. These are among the dozens of passages of special interest and value to me, also listed to suggest the scope of Sastry and Penn's coverage:

- o Failures, Small and Good, Big and Bad (Pages 16-18)
- Note: Peter Sims has much of value to say about this strategy in Little Bets: How Breakthrough Ideas Emerge from Small Discoveries. As he explains, "At the core of this experimental approach, little bets are concrete actions taken to discover, test, and develop ideas that are achievable and affordable. They begin as creative possibilities that get iterated and refined over time, and they are particularly valuable when trying to navigate amid uncertainty, create something new, or attend to open-ended problems."
- o It's Not You, It's the System Complexity (18-24)
- o Projects Are the Crucible (27-30)
- o The Fail Better Method (34-44)
- o Taking Your First Steps to Implement the Method (50-53)
- o Results-Driven: Link Action to Outcomes (63-81)
- o Build Your Team (87-92)
- o At-a-Glance Guidance for Launching Your Project (100-106)
- Note: This is one of several "At-a-Glance Guidance" sections located throughout the narrative. Great for frequent review.
- o The Power of Iteration (112-127)
- o Embed the Learning (152-174)
- Note: Derek Bok, former president of Harvard once observed, "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."
- o Implementation: Developing the Fail Better Mind-Set (199-221)
- o The Only Benefit of Failing Is What You Learn (226-228)
- o Designs for Learning: Calibrated Challenges (228-233)
- o Skills for Extracting Feedback's Lessons (237-243)
- o Concluding Thoughts: What BRAC Reveals About Failing Better (261-263)
- o Build on the Lessons, Use the Method, and Initiate Larger-Scale Change (280-281)

I commend Sastry and Penn on their provision of nine "Real-World Inspiration" mini-case studies that focus on real people in real companies facing real-world challenges who demonstrate the power of the Fail Better Method. They include several companies wholly unfamiliar to me (e.g. WiPower and Pivots Software) and others that are prominent (e.g. Eli Lilly and IDEO). With all due respect to the importance of developing the Fail Better Mind-Set, responding effectively to challenges using the Fail Better Method must be a collaborative effort at all levels and in all areas of the given enterprise. Most change initiatives either fail or fall far short of original expectations and the reasons vary. However, as James O'Toole suggests in Leading Change, most of the resistance tends to be cultural in nature, the result of what he so aptly characterizes as "the ideology of comfort and tyranny of custom." Sastry and Penn are well aware of all this, of course, and conclude their book by offering "some parting suggestions for putting the method into practice." I share their hope that those who read their book will then succeed in helping their organizations to remake work experiences by accelerating the personal growth and professional development of everyone involved. It certainly will not be easy. Indeed, it will be damn difficult. But it can be done because it already has been done by companies such as BRAC, an organization that "over the course of four decades has achieved global change with limited resources." Why not yours?

* * * Anjali Sastry is senior lecturer at MIT Sloan School of Management and lecturer in the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School. Her research investigates global health delivery and management, applying systems thinking and practical, business-based approaches in low-resource settings. She has conducted numerous field studies and collaborative action projects in Africa and Asia and advises and teaches internationally. Kara Penn is cofounder and principal consultant at Mission Spark, where she works on the front lines of practical management to implement new approaches in complex settings. She has led award-winning community collaboratives; designed, managed, and evaluated multiyear social change initiatives; and guided more than sixty NGOs, social enterprises, corporations, and foundations. Several prestigious fellowship programs, including Coro, Watson, and Forteaacute;, have recognized her leadership and community contributions.

If you're aiming to innovate, failure along the way is a given. But can you fail better? Whether you're rolling out a new product from a city-view office or rolling up your sleeves to deliver a social service in the field, learning why and how to embrace failure can help you do better, faster. Smart leaders, entrepreneurs, and change agents design their innovation projects with a key idea in mind: ensure that every failure is maximally useful. In *Fail Better*, Anjali Sastry and Kara Penn show how to create the conditions, culture, and habits to systematically, ruthlessly, and quickly figure out what works, in three steps: 1. Launch every innovation project with the right groundwork 2. Build and refine ideas and products through iterative action 3. Identify and embed the learning. *Fail Better* teaches you how to design your efforts to test the boundaries of your thinking, explore crucial interdependencies, and find the factors that can shift results from just acceptable to groundbreaking or even world-changing. Practical instructions intertwined with compelling real-world examples show you how to: Make predictions and map system relationships ahead of time so you can better assess results Establish how much failure you can afford Prioritize project activities for disconfirmation and iteration Learn from every action step by collecting and examining the right data Support efficient, productive habits to link action and reflection Distill, share, and embed the lessons from every success and failure You may be a Fortune 500 manager, scrappy start-up innovator, social impact visionary, or simply leading your own small project. If you aim to break through without breaking the bank or ruining your reputation this book is for you.

Top 11 Books to Watch for Q4; 250 Words (250words.com) ADVANCE PRAISE for *Fail Better*: Sachin H. Jain, Lecturer, Department of Health Care Policy, Harvard Medical School; former Senior Advisor, Health Care Reform, Obama Administration In corporations, governments, academic organizations, and nonprofits, there is a desperate need for leaders willing to boldly experiment, thoughtfully learn from failures, and refocus their efforts yet few actually do. In this important book, Sastry and Penn show us how. Simon Johnson, coauthor, *13 Bankers* and White House Burning *Fail Better* is a brilliant antidote to most management thinking. You are going to fail. The question is: Can you fail better, learn from your mistakes, and get closer to where you need to be? If you're committed to improving health care, or passionate about the economic development in poorer countries or if you've ever tried anything, really this is a must-read. Una S. Ryan, Chair, Bay Area BioEconomy Initiative There are some clear choices in life: fail to learn or learn to fail. Although it's not hard to make the right choice, it is hard to find a map for turning individual mistakes into the stepping stones of a mission-driven journey. Thankfully, Sastry and Penn offer us clear footprints to follow and even tell us how to customize the path to our own unique needs. New entrepreneurs and old hands alike will marvel at the sense and sensibility of their project-driven approach. May everyone's passion and mission benefit from this tour de force. Anuj Pasrija, Head of Group Social Business, Novartis Failures, whether at the office or in our personal lives, evoke fear of rejection. No wonder we often conceal or ignore them, even though we shouldn't. That's why *Fail Better* is so useful. It's a practical guide that will help you and your company manage failures while turning them into opportunities that could eventually lead to much greater successes. Desh Deshpande, Trustee, Deshpande Foundation; Life Member, MIT Corporation When failure is inevitable in the innovation economy, weeding out useless failures is an efficient way to succeed. Anjali and Kara show a practical way to do it. Natalie Givens, Senior Vice President, Booz Allen Hamilton As a veteran in technology and management consulting for 30 years, I found value in the reminder that it's up to me to create the environment for success through deliberate planning, learning, and feedback. These lessons apply in business and life."