

Finding success by failing to fail

Gary Nunn



Edward Plant turned his life around after several traumatic events.

"We've been programmed to focus on the negative. Fear of failure cripples us," says Greg Alder.

"We're afraid to let go, to reach out for something new. One thing I've learnt is that we're all capable of learning new tricks."

Alder, 62, has certainly learnt some new tricks. Today he's happy and on the road to success - but five years ago things were quite different.

He and his wife Sharon were defrauded by friends-turned-business partners who they'd known for 20 years: "She'd been bridesmaid at our wedding. He was the

photographer."

The 'friends' financially crippled them and the Alders were left ruined.

"We were in a bad place. We received counselling for depression. Sharon's weight went down to 45 kilograms. It felt like quicksand," says Alder.

CoreData research of Australians, released last November by coaching consulting Lifestyle Advantage, found that almost a third of respondents (32.8%) associate 'failure' with 'embarrassment' and another three in 10 (30.6%) with 'financial loss'.

However, Alder's adversity and financial loss eventually propelled he and his wife further forward than they might have originally anticipated.

The couple now runs NewIQ, a global consultancy that helps 30 clients to "build engaging brands and bring innovation into their organisations".

It's not something that happened overnight.

"There wasn't an ah-ha moment," says Alder. "We just focused on the things we could change in the future, rather than the things we couldn't in the past.

"Gradually, we re-learnt how to trust. You have to present a version of yourself that masks the real hurt."

This professional veneer is leading to exciting places for the pair.

“The business opportunities we work on today weren't even in our imaginations a few years ago,” says Alder.

The big question is, do they forgive the de-frauders?

“I think I do,' Alder says, “most of the time. Every now and then I get an urge for revenge. It took a while to get to where we are now, but success has been the best revenge.”

For Edward Plant, of the Gold Coast, failure led to an epiphany and a breakthrough. But not before a rapid downward spiral from what seemingly was “the dream life we got sold as kids.”

Plant, 37, explains: “I followed all my parents' wishes, got good grades, went to uni, received my engineering degree, got a good job, got promoted, got married.”

In his job, Plant was also in command of 120 Australian soldiers - but even from these dizzy heights, he felt something wasn't right.

“I was unhappy in the army. During an overseas deployment, my marriage broke down and we separated," he says.

"I returned to Australia and within two weeks, my dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He passed away four weeks later. I spent the next year working 15-hour days, drinking and eating.”

After ballooning out to 115 kilograms, his first step to re-building was to doggedly find positives in a bleak situation.

“If it wasn't for my marriage breaking up I wouldn't have had time with my dad before he was diagnosed. I'm extremely grateful for this,” says Plant.

From there, a refreshed outlook saw him start to regroup.

“I realised that I'd never done anything for me. That dream life my parents wanted for me hadn't worked. The start point was to actually understand what it was that I wanted," he says.

His journey back to a happier life was as rapid as his descent.

“Once I'd made the decision, I knew I'd make huge changes. I lost over 20 kilograms in three months. I've stayed a healthy 90 kilograms for the last five years.”

As well as starting his own coaching business, Plant has now re-married with a son and is “extremely happy”.

Reflecting on his turnaround, he's concisely philosophical: “Failure, to a certain extent, is good.”

For some, flunking high school is an unequivocal failure, but Brisbane's Johnny Carter, now 37, is convinced it helped him.

“Dropping out of high school was one of the best things I could have done on the road to becoming a self-made multi-millionaire, and rings true for a lot of other wealthy elite," he says.

Carter left school after Year 11 and started his first successful business at 21, the first charter boat operation on the Brisbane River.

Early failure also sharpened Carter's business sense.

“You don't end up a successful entrepreneur unless you find a way to love the risk, the uncertainty, the repeated failures, and working insane hours on something you have no idea will be successful or not,” he says.

"Some people are wired for that sort of pain. And those are the ones who succeed.”