

At several of the conferences and conventions I've attended lately, I've received a frequent question: "How do I deal with disappointment and setbacks with my projects, and especially in my career?" This is a similar theme from our last column. However, it is far more personal in nature and requires a different set of strategies to help you overcome this discouraging situation. No matter how successful we are in our career, we are at some points going to experience loss or setbacks. The missing of a promotion, a lack of acknowledgement of our accomplishments, or a less-than-successful outcome to an important, high-visibility project we've led, can be devastating in the short term.

The good news is that there are only two groups of us in this situation—those who have already gone through it, and those whose turn is rapidly approaching. It may seem catastrophic while you are in the midst of the trial. But with perspective, we can see that instead of disaster, these situations actually offer us a golden opportunity to grow and learn. The best way to accomplish this is to talk with people who will tell you the truth and ask them for honest feedback on what they think happened. Ask them what you could have done differently or what you can do in the future to achieve a different outcome.

If we force ourselves to be objective (very difficult when all you can feel is the disappointment), we can see that there are some specific steps we can take to handle adversity professionally *and* personally.

1. The first thing we have to be *very* aware of is how we handle rejection in front of others. From a professional perspective, it is very important to handle your hurt feelings in private. Don't let your frustration affect how you carry out your job. People are going to know this happened to you, and those who matter most are going to be watching your every movement to see how you carry yourself. Just as the leadership advice is to never let them see you sweat, I strongly encourage you to never let them see you hurt. Show them that no matter what, you are more than up to the task of doing your job and doing it professionally!
2. These moments in our career often can be embarrassing as well as frustrating. Embarrassment is more difficult to handle as it is often the result of our reaction to how *we* perceive *their* reaction to our situation. Remember, no one is perfect, and no one has ever had the perfect career. As long as you have done your best, there is nothing to be embarrassed about. The most important advice for this step is to check your ambition at the door. We are all ambitious in our own way and to our own ends. The problem begins when you allow your disappointment—or worse—your bitterness at seeing your ambition blocked, become apparent in the workplace, especially to your customers. This is nothing but our own personal pride on display. Pride is good, and properly employed can help propel us to the top of our profession. But when we are wounded, our pride is most often not our friend. Put it on hold in public and show people that

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your response to your setback is how you are learning from the experience. Always turn each of your experiences into a “step up” instead of “stepping in it.”

3. The next step is just as important. Now is the time to project self-confidence. In fact, *force* yourself to do things to push yourself out of your comfort zone to boost your own confidence in yourself and to show people you still have a lot more to offer. After all, if people think you no longer believe in yourself, why should they?
  
4. Depending upon the circumstances of your setback, it may be that there are feelings of anger or a sense of injustice. Under *no* circumstances should you give in to the urge to redress any real or perceived grievances. Here is where people are going to be watching very closely to determine your ability to control your emotions and remain professional in the face of real adversity. Turn this around and make it a demonstration of outstanding performance!
  
5. In the face of setbacks or losses, it is common to mourn what you had, or what could have been. Now is the time for you to focus on what you *have*, or what you can obtain in the face of defeat or setback. Take inventory of your blessings and take advantage of your current situation. People will be watching to see how you handle this type of stress just as closely as they watch how you handle success . . . maybe even closer.
  
6. Finally, demonstrate your commitment to your organization, your team, and/or the greater good. Show people that even in the face of adversity or personal setback, your ambitions and dreams are secondary to those of the greater good, the bigger strategic plan, or your teams’ goals. What you feel on the inside may be radically different, but on the outside, people need to know they can depend on you. Done correctly, this can be a very powerful statement.

When you face adversity and overcome it with the right attitude, you gain even greater respect, trust, and admiration from others because you prove you can rise above your personal reactions and retain your ability to perform professionally. It shows real strength of character to control yourself and your emotions in the face of a crushing defeat or a stinging setback. Those who can handle this with grace and dignity demonstrate that they are indeed ready for another chance. In fact, it just *may* cause those who made the decision to realize they might have misjudged you, and that you deserve another look!

Now get out there and show them what you’re made of and prove them wrong!



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If you have a question or a topic you would like to see in this column, e-mail me at [askcoachjr@x-slg.com](mailto:askcoachjr@x-slg.com)