

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

Leadership Briefs and Reflections



Fail First

Creative leaders view failure as necessary for creativity and innovation to flourish.

While it can seem counterintuitive to say that failure is a good thing, embracing it is an essential condition for eventual success. Whether in the classroom or the district or county office of education, failure plays a critical role in the process of arriving at impactful solutions that improve the lives of children and those that serve them.

Successive approximations, tinkering, and prototype testing are examples of ways that educational leaders can embrace failure as a key component of the learning process. Historically, we have solved problems in the educational space by designing and implementing large-scale solutions.

However, we have learned that spending more time understanding problems and the perspective of those that will ultimately be impacted by solutions is best achieved by prototyping some small trials, learning from them, making course corrections, and then repeating the process. The insights gained from early “mis-steps” are essential to deepening our understanding and practice. Gordon Moore, Co-Founder and Chairman Emeritus of Intel, is credited with saying that “If everything you try works, you aren’t trying hard enough.” That is good advice for both students and educational professionals alike who fail first to succeed!

Reflection Questions:

- When leading a team on a project or in problem-solving, how can you employ creative thinking in identifying potential solutions? What questions will help you understand the issue or challenge that you are facing more deeply?
- If a trial or prototype fails, how can you quickly analyze the solution without judgment? What worked? What didn’t? What can be adjusted for the next trial?

Did you know?

- Abraham Lincoln had unsuccessful bids for Congress, the Senate, and Vice-Presidency before being elected President.
- Michael Jordan missed over 9,000 shots in his career and ascribes his success to his failures.
- Steven Spielberg was rejected by USC three times.
- Walt Disney was once fired from a Missouri newspaper for “not being creative enough.”
- Vincent Van Gogh only sold one painting in his life.
- The Beatles were rejected by multiple labels before becoming iconic, including one that said that they have no future in show business.