



CHAPTER 1

**Get Ready for
Adventure:
You Have Never
Heard a Speaker
Like This Before**

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I am an entrepreneur and business owner who has been a keynote speaker at more than 100 business events. The biography that I provide to the event organizers for my introduction always begins like this:

Barry has been starting and running businesses for 15 years with a great deal of success *and failure*.

I wrote my introduction this way specifically to drive home that I am different from most of the other business speakers that my hosts and audiences have hired or heard before. While most if not all of us have failed more than once in our business careers, we prefer not to discuss our failures. I talk about my failures—honestly, openly, and often from the stage.

Many times the person who actually makes the introduction will skip over the “*and failure*” part, thinking it must be an error or possibly a deliberate joke by me or by the event organizers to trip them up or get a laugh. Alternately, they sometimes say “*and failure*” quite awkwardly, especially if they haven’t reviewed the script of my introduction ahead of time.

Most people who speak publicly provide an endless litany of their achievements. Why on earth would a celebrated keynote speaker want to reveal that along with his success, he has also experienced so much failure? Certainly, this speaker—this Barry Moltz, whom we hired to inspire and educate us with his wonderful success stories and anecdotes—does not truly intend for his eager audience to know that he’s failed at anything.

Invariably, if the audience is listening, my success/failure introduction will get a little chuckle or maybe even a nervous laugh. However, within a few minutes after I’ve expanded a bit on my failures—talking about how many of them were hard stops, dead ends, failures that didn’t lead to either success, a comeback story, a happy ending, or even a lesson learned—I can see on many of the faces in the audience that they are thinking, “Wow, this guy and I have something in common. I have had both success *and* failure in my life. I can definitely relate.” With this realization, my audience is more able and ready to listen and to learn from what I have to say.

When I discuss my past failures, my listeners’ brightening eyes and half-smiles signal their very first thought, which is likely not one of empathy, but of relief. I can almost read their minds as they tell themselves, “Thank you, Lord, that it happened to him and not to me.” Some of you reading this book, much like my face-to-face audiences, may have had this feeling more than once.

Eventually someone in the audience poses the question: “Barry, how did you survive all that?” They want to learn the magic trick to ride through their next difficult situation and come out the other end, too.

Talk the Talk

We businesspeople all love to talk about our successes, and why not? They remind us of the times that we stared down a particular business situation and won. These are the times when we arm-wrestled the

bad guys (our competitors) and pinned them to the ground. These are the times our success offered a path to living happily ever after (at a financial profit).

For a long time, whenever I succeeded at something, I felt fulfilled because that was exactly the promised outcome of the archetypal stories of success that my parents drilled into me when I was young—and if you had parents who wanted to direct and motivate you into having what they saw as a good life, you know the stories I’m talking about.

My mother told me that when I grew up, life would be nothing short of a magic carpet ride. If I worked hard, every year I would advance in my career, be recognized for my accomplishments, and earn more money.

In our formative years, we need this encouraging picture of the future, but as we gain experience, we realize that life and business do not always work out this way. Reality has a way of colliding with our parents’ dream scenarios and our own carefully constructed plans.

The Ultimate Reality Show

This collision is not a bad thing; it is just a part of daily business life. Many times we encounter less-than-perfect results that we wish could have worked out differently. Other times, we end up with a result so far from perfect that it can only be described as ugly, painful, and debilitating. Paint it with broad strokes in any color you want, but *failure* is the only word that accurately describes situations like these.

When we do fail, conventional business wisdom comforts us, saying that failure is a good thing because it teaches so much. We are continually reminded by those around us that failure is an important ingredient in the next success, possibly even a prerequisite. Sometimes we listen to this soothing mantra because in our tattered state, it consoles us. We tell ourselves that failure “happened to us” so that we could learn some important lesson that would later propel us to even greater success.

This stream of logic might make us feel good, but if failure is truly a critical component of success, why are so many of us unwilling to talk about our disasters as openly as we talk about our successes? Why can't friends and associates help us figure out all the important things we are supposed to learn from screwing up? We give lip service to the benefits of failure when it's happening to someone else; but when it's our turn in the crosshairs, we clam up.

Here's one thing I know: People love it when I speak about my failures. As I tell my tales of how I went out of business, I see it in their eyes. They love to hear about how my partners kicked me out of our company. They are mesmerized when I tell them that I thought I was going blind before I actually came down with diabetes. They can't wait to hear the next part of my tale when I say that after I was diagnosed with diabetes I fell into a depression that included panic attacks and anorexia—that I was days away from checking into a mental health facility.

The television networks understand this human trait very well. They know their viewers are riveted to the calamities covered in the news as long as it is about someone else. Remember watching the victims of Hurricane Katrina clinging to their rooftops, or eavesdropping on the collective misery inside the Superdome? This fascination is also the reason for the popularity of reality television shows all over the world.

While there are many differences in cultural attitudes toward failure or tragedy, as we see later in this book, most people share this common trait: Seeing other people going through failure helps us see our own situation in a more positive light. It isn't that we aren't empathetic, but we do feel better that it's not us. Seeing someone who is worse off than we are raises our spirits, not necessarily in a malevolent way, but so that we can recognize that things may not be as bad as they seem, and certainly they could be much worse.

In his book *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Harper, 1993), David Myers says, "Happiness is relative not only to our past experience but also to our comparisons with others. We are always comparing ourselves

with others. And whether we feel good or bad depends on who those others are. We are slow-witted or clumsy only when others are smart or agile.”¹

The Comeback: See, Dreams Can Come True

Businesspeople like hearing tales of failure that are followed by a big comeback story as much or even more than they like hearing stories of tragedy. Remember Sylvester Stallone as Rocky Balboa in his famous 1976 movie, *Rocky*. He came to symbolize the underdog who wins. In 2006, Rocky even came out of retirement (he now owns a restaurant!) for one last shot at regaining the boxing title, and people flocked to the theaters to cheer him on.

In fact, in this country, we love the underdog so much that in the late 1960s and early 1970s there was an American cartoon series about a crime-fighting superhero called Underdog. The character, who completely personified the unlikely superhero, was a small beagle with flesh-colored fur, a big, black nose, and oversized, floppy ears. Underdog got his strength from a super vitamin pill that he kept in a compartment on his ring.² There are many times (especially before I begin a speech) that I’ve wished I owned one of those rings!

At some level, we all recognize that we are or have been an underdog; we want the hope that someday we, too, will swirl a satin cape and be the winner.

I have had my own personal comeback. At the second company I started, I learned how important teammates are to the overall success of a company when my business partners kicked me off the team. I had chosen to start a company with partners I had found in the classified section of a local newspaper. This was not my smartest move. When I started my third business, I didn’t make the same mistake. I knew my partner well and valued him and our other team members far more than I valued the business itself. I did learn from a past experience in order to come back and achieve a better outcome.

There are many times that failure teaches lessons that we might not be able to learn another way; but there are also plenty of times when there is nothing (or almost nothing) new to be learned from failure. There are times when dead-end failure just plain stinks, and you can't pretty it up or minimize the pain by ferreting out something of value from the mess.

My third company once lost its largest customer because the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) caught them stealing. Another time, I lost my best employee because her spouse took a new job 1,000 miles away. There wasn't much new for me to learn from either of these situations that I didn't already know. I already knew not to do business with criminals, and I knew that I would keep on hiring good people no matter whether their spouses had the potential to be transferred or not. However, since it's not possible (short of hiring spies or engaging in other invasive practices) to know what goes on inside other companies or to know our employees' personal goals until they choose to share them, there was nothing in either of these situations that I could have done differently.

Incidents like these just happen; they are examples of a kind of inevitability that exists in business cycles. There are times of success, and there will be offsetting times of failure. Many things can create failure—*create*, not *cause*: a person's actions, the actions of others, the external environment, or perhaps the phases of the moon.

There are steps you can take to help you experience and endure those knocked-on-your-rear effects of failure differently. My goal is to help you learn how to turn these painful experiences into "aha!" moments and develop a business confidence that will be the foundation of your own personal brand of business success.

To increase business confidence, we need to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. We need to be at ease with not knowing what is going to come next, and with knowing that we are never going to know all that we don't know. This is hard to accept for businesspeople

who are always trying to predict the future with formulaic precision, when the truth is that it's impossible to know what will come next.

A Messy Process

Gaining true business confidence by bouncing is messy. Bouncing is not an exact process. When a process is created, it is mostly through trial and error. You can't get it right by just riding your success or just learning lessons from failing. How do you structure a process for something that generally isn't repeatable? There are so many ever-changing variables that contribute to any outcome in business that a rote methodology is impossible to structure. Therefore, telling you to take action A in situation B will only help you in situation B. It won't matter a speck in situation B-2, or in C through Z, or all the rest.

To develop a sense of ease, we must come to the personal realization that we can survive almost any outcome, despite how treacherous it may be. Beyond that, we must learn how to look forward to what will come (genuinely rather than with false bravado) because we have the confidence that we will be okay no matter what.

Armed with this knowledge, we will resist judging events as failures or successes. We will see them only as opportunities to make a decision that will eventually move us toward an outcome that we want, if the current result is not, to our way of thinking, optimal.

To accomplish this shift in my own life, I needed tools that I didn't have. These weren't the tools we learned about at business school, or the tools we develop through business training as I did in my early career at IBM. I'm talking about tools of an entirely different sort.

When I was young, I used to make rubber band balls. I started by covering a tissue with rubber bands—from my newspaper route, from the grocery store, and from my father's office drawers. Once my rubber band ball got as big as a baseball, I bounced it—against the side of the house, my mother's car, the street in front of our house, my sister's head.³

Building true business confidence is a lot like making a rubber band ball. Put together bit by bit, the elastic bands give the ball bounce. Like experiences, rubber bands come in many different shapes and colors. They stretch in different directions, and they have many diverse uses. Rubber bands rarely break, but when they do snap, they sting, though only for a short period of time.

Like building true business confidence, building a rubber band ball is a project that is never complete. Some bands fray over time and need to be replaced. As rubber bands are added, the ball with its random orientation will never bounce the same way twice.

In the business journey, there are tools and skills that we can develop. The tools I'm talking about don't come about or fit together in a predictable, linear manner; they don't stack or square up like building blocks. Instead, developing true business confidence and resiliency comes about more in the winding, uncharted way of building a rubber band ball.

The path that I outline to business confidence and resiliency comes about by snapping or layering on ten *building bands*. Think of it as building a rubber band ball that will give you the bounce to develop resiliency for true business confidence.

The process begins by forgetting the tenets of business we thought were true.