

THE SUCCESSFUL MISTAKE

how 163 of the world's greatest entrepreneurs transform failure & adversity into success

BY MATTHEW TURNER

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A FOREWORD BY AJ LEON

I first met Matthew when he hosted a book tour event to promote an essay collection that I had published. The event took place in Sowerby Bridge, a market town in Matthew's beautiful home county of Yorkshire – unfamiliar territory for a Cuban who cut his teeth in New York. I knew we'd be firm friends when he handed me one of his famous homemade toasties at 1am after we'd shared a few pints in his local pub to thank him for hosting such a wonderful event.

With his first publication of this kind, Matthew has taken on one of the hardest but also the most important topics. Learning from failures is a wonderful skill. The trick is to have them be the springboard for future successes. But it's hardwon. My own journey certainly hasn't been easy; very few worth taking are. Failure can spawn the seeds of success, but it can be difficult to pick them out amongst the ashes. Matthew is a natural storyteller with a great talent for narrative and imagery, and *The Successful Mistake* shares its lessons and advice in powerful, beguiling language. At the same time, there is no fluff here: his takeaways are coldpressed advice, gleaned the hard way, and laid out in terms which makes them immediately actionable.

As *The Successful Mistake* explores, everybody fails. The difference is that some people allow this initial failure to entirely define them. They permit this one misstep to become the day that they bend a knee and acquiesce to a fear that will hold to ransom the dreams they once dreamed, which will forever rot in the chambers of their hearts, and the unwritten pages of their Moleskins.

Others, however, convert this failure into something much better, and set about creating a phoenix from the ashes, simply by changing their approach, analysing what went wrong, and learning from their earlier stumbles. Matthew's book is testament to the incredible potential inherent in any mistake. There are

163 top business minds in here that discovered the same thing that I did: namely that a mistake can be the best thing that's ever happened to you. But this discovery is a tricky one; one that's hard to acknowledge, hard to work with and hard to convert back into success.

The book you are holding in your hands holds the clues of how to begin this process of entrepreneurial alchemy. Matthew's interviews are incisive and illuminating. The wisdom they contain will enable you to learn more from your mistakes than you do from even your successes. With *The Successful Mistake*, Matthew aimed to 'entertain, educate, and inspire' – he has done all this and more. Perhaps the highest praise I can give is that I sincerely wish I'd had the book in my hands when in 2008 I tossed out a life that wasn't working for me, and began the long slow work of converting my life's failure into a success. Overcoming adversity isn't easy, but it's easier with guidebooks like this one. You are in for a great read.

AN INTRODUCTION

For a few seconds I was fine. Then panic kicked into gear and consumed me, sending shivers over my skin and a nauseous thud throughout my stomach. 'What have I done?' I whispered. 'I've made a mistake. I can't do this.'

I was *terrified*.

Some people grow up with the dream of owning their own company and taking charge of an empire. Not me. For the longest of times, I aspired to climb the corporate ladder and become a vital cog in a grander machine. When you work for other people, there's less stress and more security. Working for myself... Nope, that wasn't for me.

So why did I lie paralysed in bed, pinned under the covers, realising I'd become a self-employed man? Why had I welcomed unemployment with open arms in the belief I'd find greater happiness by taking charge of my own destiny?

I remember this shitty morning like it was yesterday, my alarm barking to life at an unruly hour because I wanted to get up and start my new existence with a bang. Like I say, for a few brief seconds all was fine, but the peace didn't last.

'What have I done?' I whispered again, clinging to my cover like a little boy, afraid of the dark.

As you read these words, I'm positive you'll relate to such worry, fear, and self-doubt. Maybe you've already had a morning like this, or maybe your entrepreneurial journey has yet to begin. Either way, you nod your head and agree; I write this with confidence, because I've interviewed 163 successful entrepreneurs for this book.

These are people with money, fame, and freedom, yet they still have stories of worry, fear and self-doubt to share. It doesn't

matter how esteemed or wealthy an individual is, they still suffer the same worries that I did that morning, and they continue to make mistakes and fail to this day.

The only difference is that they approach such scenarios differently from the way that I did (although it took me the process of writing this book before I was able to figure out how they do).

It's now your turn to unearth such life-changing lessons, but before you do, I'd like to focus a little more on this horrendous first day because that's where this book began. You see, as I lay in bed unable to move, I considered the previous few months of employment and security.

I wouldn't say I loved my job, but I didn't hate it, either. The money was good. The potential, exciting. Life, overall... Pretty darn spiffy.

But it was around this time that I began to blog and delve into the online world. I wrote more, discovered new people, and befriended folk who lived a life on their own terms. All of a sudden, the corporate ladder climb didn't seem so sweet, nor did my daily nine-to-five grind. I yearned for more, and what had started as a mere rumble exploded into life when my boss, Tony, called me into his office.

'I want to change your role in the company, ' he said. 'You're doing well, but going forward I'd like you to focus on...'

It was no use. His words evaporated into nothing as I drifted off into my own thoughts. I was different from the rest of the team, always keen to experiment and implement *new* processes, which in the beginning was great, but I soon sensed this rubbed certain folk the wrong way. As I look back on my twenties, I now see that I was a terrible employee at each and every job, and it was during this short meeting with Tony that I realised just how bad I was.

I also realised I faced three choices:

- ✓ Take the new role and grow frustrated.
- ✓ Get a new job and more than likely grow frustrated.
- ✓ Work for myself and build a life on my own terms, like those I admired online.

I'm sure you can guess the choice I made, which led to this morning of paralysis a few weeks later. I hopped into bed the night before, a free man in waiting, complete with a long to-do list and mind hefty with dreams. I drifted off into sleep with a plan, knowing how I'd spend my first day of entrepreneurship. A few hours later, I woke up and clung to my sheets like a child. Holding back the tears, I stared at my to-do list, terrified to tackle a single task, because I didn't know which one deserved the most attention.

I feared failure, so chose to do nothing at all.

Each passing second drained me of confidence and belief, and I even considered calling Tony and pleading for my job back. I felt worthless and useless, and, as I slipped deeper into my self-pity, I did the one thing I could bring myself to do: email those who had been through this before, who owned their own businesses, who lived the life I apparently wished to live. After all, I'd just spent months befriending a bunch of entrepreneurs and online go-getters. These people were now my peers and had advice to offer, and although I only completed one task that day, luckily for me it turned out to be the most important one of all.

WE LEARN MORE FROM OUR STRUGGLES THAN OUR SUCCESSES

Over the next few days I Skyped, coffeed, and conversed with numerous entrepreneurs and business owners. As they shared stories and advice, a particular theme wove its way through each

conversation, because for some reason these people chose to focus on their mistakes and failures.

I couldn't believe it. I'd figured they'd offer success stories and build up my confidence, not torture me with their hardships.

'Do you know something,' I said to my buddy, Arnold, tapping my chin. 'You're the fifth person I've spoken to these last few days, and each one of you has focused on your mistakes. Why are you telling me all this?' I whined. 'I already feel close to giving up.'

Gazing above his webcam, Arnold smiled. 'I guess we learn more from our mistakes than our successes.'

Lifting me from my self-induced fog, clarity reigned supreme as these numerous conversations intermingled into a single cohesive epiphany.

You see, people like you and me start new businesses each day.

We're scared and cautious and overthink everything, and although you have your dreams and goals, and believe in what you're doing, it's easy to slip into a glass-half-empty mentality. You fear making mistakes. You fear failure. You compare yourself to those you admire, which makes it impossible for you to succeed. You're so worried about committing to one idea, you choose to play it safe and do nothing at all. Or worse, you become bogged down with lots of little ideas and become a master of none. It's understandable, because we're brought up to fear and avoid failure and mistakes.

It's red ink on your homework; it's failed exams and tests; it's rejection; it's a job you don't like but have to take; it's pressure from your parents and teachers; it's the media and stardom and bright lights of Hollywood; it's the fact that if you don't have a particular degree, or drive a certain type of car, you're deemed not quite good enough.

Is it any wonder you fear mistakes and failure? Is it any wonder

you begin a new venture with such hope, but soon drown under self-doubt and insecurity? The truth is we're born to make mistakes and fail again and again.

I recall my beautiful son learning to walk, and the tears and frustration and bumps and bruises. It didn't come easily, but each tumble took him closer to those all-important first steps. He garbled a lot before he learned to speak. Sometimes you have to burn yourself in order to appreciate it isn't a good idea to touch fire.

During this conversation with Arnold, I saw these worries and fears in a new light. I realised that those I spoke with weren't warning me, or kicking me further down, rather they were helping me to see that this entrepreneurial journey isn't perfect, and isn't without hardship, and although it may be hard to believe, we don't become successful despite our failures, but because of them.

A NEW MINDSET FOR A NEW AGE

A few weeks later, I walked through London whilst visiting Arnold.

'After talking to you, I knew what I had to do,' I said to him. 'I like to think that I value mistakes and the lessons that come from them, but I've not been doing this of late. I've allowed them to hold me back, and the truth is it's because I'm scared. I don't know what lies ahead of me, and it's terrifying, man. But I guess most people feel like this when they begin a business. Hell, maybe you always do in part. So, I've got this idea for a book, and...'

I continued to tell Arnold all about this idea, which, many moons later, rests in your hands as you read these words. I didn't plan to write this book when I first left my job, but it was that dreaded first day that inspired me to do so.

You live in a world of opportunity but absolute chaos. The Internet has not only brought us closer together, it's pushed us further apart. There's so much *stuff* and white noise, and so long as there is, your self-doubt and insecurity will continue to creep into your life.

And just like it stifled me, it may stifle you, too. It stops you from fulfilling your version of success because you continue to worry about not reaching the lofty heights of your idols.

And know this, my friend; you cannot stop yourself from making mistakes. You can, however, learn to deal with them and transform these situations into life-changing ones. This is what the world's most successful people do, and after interviewing 163 of them, I'm excited to share what sets them apart.

If you're the type of person who believes you have it figured out, and live a life of perfection already, this book isn't for you. If you're happy to plod along and remain safe and content, this book is not for you. But if you desire success and to build a life on your own terms, this is a book you need.

These pages aren't jammed with one case study after another, simply throwing more useless content at your face. The journey you're about to begin guides you through a seven stage process of intention and purpose. It's designed to show you how the world's most successful people deal with adversity, and how you can too. It's written to not only inspire you, but to give you the necessary tools to build your own version of a successful mistake. I interviewed 163 successful go-getters, spent 100+ hours on Skype, sent over 1,000 emails, and dedicated over three years of my life to this book so that you can learn how the world's greatest minds approach their failures and transform them into success.

If this doesn't sound like something you wish to be part of, close the book and go and read another one. If it does, I invite you to turn the page and unravel what this unique seven-stage-process has in store for you, because it may just change how you approach your business and your life from here on in.

THE SEVEN STAGES OF YOUR #GREATMISTAKE

If you glance over the contents page, you may notice there are seven stages within this book that resemble the seven stages of grief. Well, there's a reason for this; I've structured the book around the process so often linked to losing a loved one.

The thing is, this process doesn't only cover what you go through during grief, but rather change in general.

We're creatures of habit, you see, and when thrust out of your comfort zone it sends you into a maze of emotion. So, when you make a mistake or fail (or simply begin a new venture or idea), you invite change into your life. You're no longer comfortable in your habit, so you find yourself going through a particular type of process:

- 1) Shock
- 2) Pain
- 3) Bargaining
- 4) Depression
- 5) Tipping Point
- 6) Reconstruction
- 7) Acceptance

Sometimes it's a subtle journey; on other occasions it redefines your entire world. Each mistake, failure, and scenario differs, but no matter what your situation is, you go through this process each time. It may not always be as clear-cut or as simple as moving from one step to the other, but undoubtedly these are

the stages you go through.

This isn't a psychology book though, so when it comes to knowledge of the brain and how and why you do what you do, you should not, under any circumstance, listen to me.

I'm a rather simple man, with a simple brain, but I've gone through these stages myself (as I'm sure you have).

As a writer, I have a tendency to make up words and mingle theories together, so although these seven stages should act as an inspiration, don't for a second expect a theoretical textbook. That's not how I do things, and I do not apologise for this.

What you can expect are several chapters within each stage, all of which represent a different topic and set of takeaways. Within these you'll meet successful entrepreneurs and their mistake-riddled stories, designed to bring the words you read to life in an entertaining manner.

There are tips and tricks and tasks throughout, as well as exclusive content you can devour online, because I don't want you to read this book once and then forget about it. This is a book you'll want to highlight, and place strips of paper between the pages, so you can come back to when you need it.

And trust me, as you delve deeper into your own entrepreneurial journey, you will need it.

Finally, I've approached each chapter and sub-chapter as an individual blog post, and although I encourage you to work through this book step-by-step, you can, if you wish, mix things up and pick and choose which chapter to read.

But, before I let you venture forward and weave your way through these pages, there's something you must know, and someone you must meet. He goes by the name of Mark, and he has something rather important to tell you.

THE UNFASHIONABLE FASHION OF MISTAKES

Before you delve into Stage One: Shock, I'd like to introduce you to Mark Schaefer; a wonderful and successful entrepreneur who turned our interview upside down with a rather different viewpoint on mistakes.

'You know, it's really fashionable right now to talk about big mistakes. Somehow it's become cool for entrepreneurs to make them, like it's a badge of courage or something. But here's the secret to business success: Don't make big mistakes,' he said.

Although I've encountered every imaginable viewpoint along this journey, Mark's words stuck with me. I value mistakes and believe they can form the catalyst for your greatest idea yet, but I don't wish to glorify them. You shouldn't either, nor should you set out to make them.

This book's purpose isn't to glorify your mistakes, or failures; rather to help you appreciate the value they offer, so long as you approach them with the right mindset. It's written to help you look past the pain and find the potential growth beyond it. It's designed to introduce you to those who have been there and done it before, appreciate how they overcome their mistakes and learn from them, and better yourself by living through their eyes.

My role as the writer of this book is to help you:

- ✓ Discover what success means to you, and dedicate your life towards this.
- ✓ Overcome your fear of failure, so it doesn't stop you from achieving greatness.
- ✓ Learn how to spot your mistakes before they happen, and transform them into success when they do.
- ✓ Work through the seven stages of your great mistake with a successful and confident mindset.

- ✓ Stand shoulder to shoulder with those you admire, instead of spending your life looking up to them.

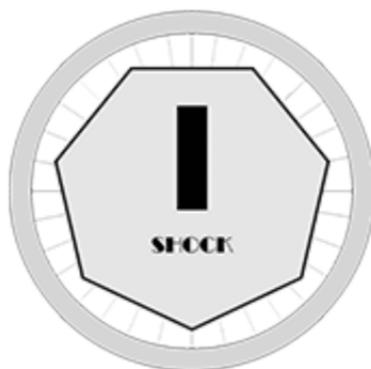
Mark's right. We shouldn't make mistakes and failure desirable, because the whole point of business (and indeed, living a happy and free life) is to avoid such hardship. I don't wake up each day hoping I fail. I don't invite mistakes into my life. But I do appreciate that they happen and don't let them define me when they do.

As Mark says himself, 'It's okay to make little ones. In fact, you can't help but make little ones. Just avoid the big ones because these are what kill your business. Nobody sets out to be a failure. Why glorify it?'

So, let's listen to Mark and not glorify our mistakes, failure, or pain. Instead, let's understand them, learn how to spot them, appreciate what it takes to overcome them, and better ourselves like the world's most successful people do.

This begins with Stage One: Shock; a stage that not only focuses on the key attributes of a mistake and how they form in the first place, but also the preceding warning signs, that are so often present in our everyday lives.

Spotting these signs is another matter altogether, but in the coming pages, you'll start to appreciate how to, and indeed learn to control yourself when that moment of shock arrives.



STAGE 1: THAT AWKWARD MOMENT WHEN THE SHIT HITS THE FAN

After blogging for six months, and seeing little in return, Jaime Masters came close to giving up. As she prepared her farewell email to her subscribers, something stopped her; a nagging something. Such procrastinating often ends badly, but on this occasion it turned out for the best.

CNN called wanting to interview her about how she cleared \$70,000 of debt and began a life of blogging. You may assume that this is a good thing, although it marked the beginning of Jaime's greatest mistake.

'I prepared my site for an up-spike in traffic for my CNN feature, but not for my face to appear on Yahoo's homepage,' she said, recalling a time before she interviewed hundreds of millionaires for her podcast, *The Eventual Millionaire*. 'My site crashed, and remained down for days. When it came back online, I realised how much potential traffic and how many opportunities I'd lost.'

I'm sure you'd love to go viral yourself, but are you prepared for this? Because amid Jaime's ecstasy and excitement of going viral, the shock and realisation soon hit. But this isn't the part of

Jamie's story that's the most important, because a few months later the unthinkable happened.

'I assumed it was a fluke, that I wouldn't get that sort of exposure again.' Shaking her head, she laughed. 'Not long after, I appeared on Yahoo's homepage again, and again, my site crashed.'

The shock of the unexpected is one thing, but the shock of reliving the same pain twice... now that's a different kind of agony.

'Oh, it hurt,' she said. 'Stupid too, because I could have changed my hosting rather easily. I managed to gather some metrics this time, and in the two hours my site stayed up, I received over 8,000 visitors.' She shook her head again. 'I remained on Yahoo's homepage for a further forty-eight hours, and all the while my site stayed down. I kept thinking about those lost visitors, but couldn't handle it. Like I said, it hurt.'

It's amazing how a great opportunity can turn sour rather quickly, but that's the thing about shock; it shocks you.

In Stage One: Shock, we focus on those dreaded moments that slow you to a standstill. They begin in your stomach, rumble up your chest, and then continue through your brain and out of your mouth as an 'Oh no! What have I done?'

Jaime experienced this moment of shock at a time when she should have been celebrating and jumping for joy; exposure on Yahoo's homepage is the zenith for all aspiring bloggers, after all.

I've watched successful entrepreneurs relive such awful moments many times throughout this journey, and however big or small their mistake may be, those initial moments of stress, pain, and shock are enough to unnerve even the hardest-nosed entrepreneur.

This is what we'll focus on over the coming pages: unearthing

the attributes of a mistake and the various forms they take. You'll explore the warning signs, and see that even when this shock comes as a surprise, the telltale clues are there all along. We'll then finish with some actionable tasks and takeaways because although you cannot always escape your mistakes, you can prepare for them.

You may deem it unfortunate to begin this book by focusing on such tough periods, but in fact this is where your journey begins. Before you can overcome your mistakes and failures, you must first understand what they look like, what they're made of, and how they came to be. From here, you can spot them before they happen, and overcome them when they do. As you read Stage One: Shock — and indeed, the rest of this book — remember that you'll soon know how to tackle it in the same way as those you admire.

With this in mind, let's delve into some stories that are sure to make you cringe, grit your teeth, and sigh in disbelief...

Thanks For Reading This Excerpt

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