



Strive for Minimal Achievement By Barry J. Moltz

In American business, we are constantly bombarded with this message:

Money = Success = Happiness.

We are taught that:

Do what you love and the money will follow...and

Good things come to those who wait...and

Failure is not an option...

Many of us grew up learning these things. My mother always repeated the famous proverb that *“With money in your pocket, you are wise and you are handsome, and you sing well too.”*

This is exactly what happened for awhile—although I never really could sing. In my first job out of college at IBM, I worked hard. I was promoted often and made more money every year. It became so predictable, I could calculate my future earnings in a neat linear line going straight up.

In America, we are taught there are three ways we can get to success.

I call them **The Three Success Archetypes**.

- 1. You can create something from nothing.** You have few financial resources, but you do have an idea and you are willing to work very hard. After many years and bit of luck, you finally reach a well deserved million dollar payday. America being the land of opportunity means that no matter where you start from, there is the infinite possibility that you can get there! This is the American Dream. (Well the real American dream is just to win it in the lottery, but that is another manifesto!).
- 2. The Great Comeback.** You fail miserably—you may even go bankrupt—but you are able to learn something important from this failure that propels you to even greater financial success this time around.
- 3. The Rich Get Richer.** Finally, once you get there after you made that first million, success leads to even greater success since we all know, it takes money to make money. Rich people charge interest, they don't pay it. I love the business maxim that says..."How do you make \$100M ? Start with \$10M!"

And there are places where this has been true.

Michael Dell did create something from his college dorm room and runs the billion dollar Dell, Inc. and became a very wealthy man. **Simon Cowell** did have a miserably failure. He went bankrupt, lost a million dollars and had to move back in with his parents. With the success of the show, American Idol, he now makes over \$8M a year, and in 2003 he sold half of his S Records to BMG for \$43M. Pretty good comeback. And finally, **Donald Trump** was able to take over his father's real estate business and become even richer. I laugh because in a recent issue of a pop-culture magazine, *Stuff*, one of the headlines read "*How to Get Rich, by Ivanka Trump.*" That article, I bet, only had one sentence to it!

These stories are great to read about and sometimes they even inspire us. But are they always true? Many of us think that if we could only get our hands on the right 10 steps, we can be successful too. We believe that there is this linear process where we can read a book, and if followed, it will lead to riches. This is why there are so many books out there with numbers in their titles like:

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey

The 7 Spiritual Laws of Success by Deepak Chopra

One that just came out is called, *The Business Laws: The 7 Irrefutable Laws That Determine All Business Success* by David Eichenbaum. How can he be so sure?

There are not 7 steps to success. It is different for everyone. We can all get at financial success if that is our goal, but there isn't one single path that will work for all of us.

So without the 7 steps or these 3 patented ways to achieve success, where do we begin our journey? Well, the first thing we need to do is stop letting our egos brag about our successes and Honor Our Failures instead.

When I was at IBM, my mentor at the time was a gentleman named Tom Liebttag. When I was leaving IBM to go work for a client of mine, Tom said "You are a pretty good business person, but you will be a better business person when *you have failed*. You have had way too much success here at IBM. Every year you got promoted, every year you made more money." I thought Tom was just jealous— here I was leaving IBM to go with one of my clients, I was going to make twice what I had been making, I was going to have a huge office, with teak furniture, a green high back leather chair, I was going to have my own assistant (her name was Denise).

He was foretelling my future, as I was fired from that job a year later, then went out of business in my first company and was kicked out of business in my second company by my two partners.

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This was the **first place** where I learned an important lesson... I could fail! I could actually fail in a huge way. My father said at the time that maybe IBM would take me back. This is the first place I diverged from the success archetype that I had come so deeply to believe in "of something from nothing." Now, unfortunately in our culture, business wisdom tells us that when we fail there is always something to learn. We don't let go of failure so easy until we understand what it is there to teach us. Let me tell you the truth... sometimes when we fail, there is absolutely nothing to learn. Sometimes it just sucks.

When I lost my largest client because they were indicted by the government, what did I learn? That I wasn't supposed to do business with criminals? I already knew this. When my best employee left my company because her husband got a job in another state, what was I to learn? Not to hire people who are married?

If failure was such a prerequisite for success, then when we fail we would be sending emails to all the people in our business network that read something like this:

To: Everyone I Know
From: Barry Moltz
Subject: Yippee! Another Failure

“I can’t help but brag that I have failed yet again. I am writing because I knew you would want to share this wonderful moment with me. I am so proud of myself because as a result of my latest failure and all the unbelievable things I was able to learn, I am now so much closer to that big financial success I deserve. I am certain that my time is coming soon since I have failed at an increasing rate lately, and I have learned so much. Please stay in touch so I can share with you when I have an even greater failure and get that much closer to the success you all want for me.”

—Your Close Business Friend, Barry

Failure is valuable only when we realize it is a normal part of the business process, even when there isn’t always something to learn. So it does not hold us back.

The real fear and pressure in this whole process is not brought on by our competitors or other outside people. It mostly originates within us. The biggest fear we have is that someone in our position would have done better than us, made better decisions, and would have built it faster and more profitably than we did. We believe that we should be in a different place than where we are right now, and that we would be if only we had made better decisions.

Nonsense.

In order to move forward in our business life—past the fear, past the failure, and yes, past the success—we actually need to just let go. Letting go is the key to gaining true business confidence—not by holding onto what people have taught you are the keys to success, not by looking for the 7 steps. You need to let go of the idea that there is always something to learn from failure or that you can always build and duplicate your success.

Get ready for your next great success by letting go and bouncing. A rubber band ball can represent our last business result.

When we have success, we look at it, we hold onto it, we cherish it. When we fail, we try to hide the shame. *You need to let go* of whatever the last result was—celebrate your success or grieve your failure. But then get ready by taking **action** on the next decision that you have to make. It ultimately gives you the resiliency that determines which one of us succeeds in the long run.

This bouncing is a very important concept to understand since we can never get to our goal on a straight line—unlike what our parents told us. Business life is **not linear**. Like a rubber band ball, we need to have **flexibility** and **resiliency**.

We need to view piloting our business lives like navigating a sailboat across a windy lake. Sailors cross lakes not by going straight to their destination point. Wind blowing directly from their destination makes the direct approach impossible. Instead, sailors use a method call tacking: they position the boat relative to the wind so they actually sail in this **zigzag manner**, as close as possible on one side of the wind, then the other side

Making progress in business is very much like tacking in sailing. It requires you to make a decision based on current facts (the direction of the wind) as you see and feel them. When we get that result (one tack point) you make another set of decisions based on current facts (reading the wind again).

Although perhaps not the straightest or quickest way to the goal, testing each outcome point in this way will be the best way to make progress toward our next great success

In this system, we need to value action. Stop planning, stop analyzing, stop asking questions, and to see what comes next. Go out and get it done. Only experience builds true confidence. So in our business strategy, we need to outlaw premeditated business. Stop waiting for the perfect moment,

enough capital, the right team, the right market conditions, reliable customers, or desperate competitors. Forget about the “only if” game. It is delusional.

Most decisions are based on *incomplete information*. This is just the nature of business. We must make decisions on what to do next based on the information we have and the information we do not have. If we wait for all the information we need (or want) to make a particular decision, we will be waiting a very long time. Inaction will sink our boat.

Besides, there is evidence that even though we often believe that more information provides a clearer picture of the future and improves our decision-making, in reality, additional information often only confuses us.

Researchers illustrated this point with a study of horse-race handicappers. They first asked the handicappers to make race predictions with five pieces of information. The researchers then asked the handicappers to make the same predictions with 10 or 20 pieces of information for each horse in the race. Although they felt they had more confidence to make their decision, the added information did not increase their accuracy.

Making a go of it with whatever you have at a particular point in time is the nature of business and life; scarcity can be your competitive advantage and barrier to entry for someone else.

Perfection only happens in Hollywood. The perfect moment in real business doesn't exist. I started my second business right after I got married—a bad idea. I started my third business two weeks after my first son was born—a worse idea. We don't get to choose the right time to make our next decision. Waiting passively is a waste of time. We need to choose to do something or choose to do nothing by making our decisions proactively. Our bias needs to be some form of pro-active decision.

This is best illustrated in a contest held in the 1970s which awarded the Kremer prize for the first group that could build an airplane that would take off under solely human power and fly a mile

before landing. Brainy groups like MIT and Caltech entered, but the winner was a group of amateurs who designed a plane that allowed fast repair. Their airplane, the *Gossamer Albatross*, would fly it until it crashed... over 500 times. Their process was that when a part failed on the airplane, they would then make that change and *not spend a lot of time figuring out what went wrong*. They took action and got the plane up in the air for another run. Similarly, our goal in business is to test as many things as possible, with as little money as possible, over as short of period of time as possible, to achieve a desired result.

So what business life are we actually building? Our dream? Our parents dream? What we see on TV's dream? We are constantly told to conquer that next mountain—to grow our businesses and our careers as big as possible. To get richer, bigger, better, faster. Achievement has become our addiction.

This is strange when we think about the fact the many of the 6 billion other people of this planet's only goal for today is to find enough food to keep them and their family alive. Can we just pause and be thankful for what we have today? If so, why can't we just lower the bar a bit for today? For a moment, forget the grand vision. Besides, there is always someone that is going to be richer, smarter or better looking than you.

This is why you need to commit to me that you will downsize our dreams. In this way, we can begin too define our own brand of success—not someone else's.

First, we need to set **patient, interim goals**. I remember when I asked my Zen master, when I first began mediating, how long I should mediate for—15 minutes, half hour, or an hour each day? He said that I should try it for a minute for each day for the next few months. If I was successful, I should go to two... minutes (i.e. not hours). This is where I learned that when striving for new goals, what is important in the climb is not even to get a foothold, but to get a toehold. If you can make some progress toward your goal, you have a better chance of achieving it in the long run.

After downsizing our dreams and getting that toehold, we next figure out what will make us **happily successful**. Most of us will immediately say that it is to make a lot of money. Money *is* an important measure of success. It is how we keep score. But if we never get to that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, will our life trip be for nothing?

Interestingly, researchers studied both lottery winners and individuals that sustained a physical injury to determine if winning the lottery made them happier, and if sustaining an injury made them less happy. What they found was that immediately after either event, levels of happiness were higher (lottery winners), or lower (physically injured), but that after eight weeks or less, people returned to the level of happiness they had before the event. This research suggests that we adapt to these situations very quickly, and often return to the degree of happiness we had before such an event.”

You need to realize that too much Money Will Actually Make You Stupid (I know, you hope that G-d makes you a blithering idiot).

The rich don't always get richer. Your past success will not guarantee your future success. “Necessity truly is the mother of invention” applies to every one of our lives. Having limited resources will ultimately make us more creative in solving our challenges. We need to stop “growing ourselves broke”. In our businesses, when we have a little success, we then invest too heavily in growing our business. In an effort to grow sales, we invest in more people, more space and more overhead. Unfortunately, expenses often grow ahead of the revenue curve and it increases the chance we will go out of business.

In order to be successful, we actually need to **Strive for Minimal Achievement**. What does this mean? There were these two monks sitting by the river, talking about the power of their Zen masters. The first one says “My Zen master is so powerful, he can walk across the river without using a bridge.” The second monk says “My Zen master is so powerful, when he chops wood, he chops wood. When he cooks rice, he cooks rice.”

We can gain so much power in our lives and businesses by striving for minimal achievement and focusing on one thing at a time. This is becoming increasingly difficult as we are raising a generation of Attention Deficit Disorder individuals. When was the last time you focused on one thing at a time? It does not mean that if our customers or the business environment need us to morph that we should not do so. Plenty of businesses started doing one thing and now do another. eBay sold auction software. Nokia made rubber tires and boots. A survey of venture capitalists says that 70% of the businesses they invest in morph their business into a different area for ultimate success within 5 years.

Finally, let's say you have that great success. You hit the mother load. You are Leonardo De Caprio. You are king of the world! You achieved the American Dream. Are you as only good as your last success?

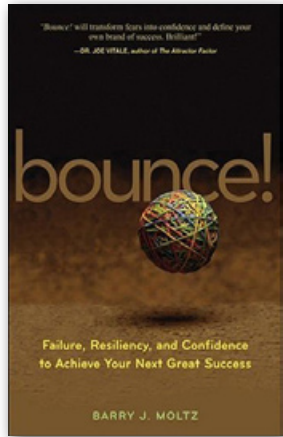
Remember, it doesn't matter how many times you fail. It doesn't matter how many times you almost get it right. No one is going to care about your failures or successes more than you. All that matters in business is that you get it right at least once.

Wayne Gretzky said that "You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take." We can't get caught up in the failures. It only matters that we met our success requirements that one time. When things go bad, we can think back to perhaps that one time where the planets aligned, and we got across the goal line.

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The perfect moment in real business doesn't exist.

The order of successes and failures does not diminish the high point. Hitting this success can help root a sense of business confidence that will carry you through a lifelong path of both success and failure.

Any success can give us that **resiliency** that allows us to bust those success myths, It will give you the **boost** to be able to **downsize your dreams** and strive for minimal achievement by focusing on what will make us happily successful. It will allow us to let go of what is **holding us back and bounce to the next action** we must take to get ready for our next great success. 📌



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Barry J. Moltz's [Bounce!](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barry is a nationally recognized expert on entrepreneurship who has given over 100 speeches to audiences ranging from 20 to 20,000. He was appointed by the Illinois Governor in 2005 to serve on the board of the Institute for Entrepreneurship Education (IIEE). As a member of the Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame, he also has taught entrepreneurship as an adjunct professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology. He founded an angel investor group, an angel fund, and is a former advisory member of the board of the Angel Capital Education Foundation. He is the author of *You Need to Be A Little Crazy: The Truth about Starting and Growing Your Business* and *Bounce! Failure, Resiliency and the Confidence to Achieve Your Next Great Success*.

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