

The Importance of Perseverance and Resilience

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“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

The specific occasion upon which these words were expressed by Calvin Coolidge, 30th President of the United States, are not recorded. However, they were repeated at Coolidge’s memorial service. From that occasion, the Oxford Book of Quotations immortalized his famous observation.

Perseverance and resilience are leadership attributes. Perseverance is pursuing objectives with energy, drive, and a need to finish. Even in the face of setbacks and resistance, a person with resilience seldom gives up without accomplishing the desired outcome.

Read these words. Tenacity. Grit. Doggedness. Fortitude. Persistence. Determination. Diligence. Perseverance. Resilience.

“If at first you don’t succeed,” do these words make you want to “try, try again?” Or do these words just cause you to feel discouraged? For most of us, the words are either an inspiration or a turnoff.

Like all other leadership attributes, some people find that they are “a natural” at these characteristics. Others--well, let’s just say their natural strengths lie elsewhere. However, no leader will prevail without overcoming setbacks and obstacles.

I’m sure with some research, one could find examples of individuals who “gave up” on some aspiration, chose to do something else, and were hugely successful. However, abundant examples exist for individuals who tenaciously stuck with their objective.

Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States, failed in business, declared bankruptcy, suffered bouts of melancholy, was defeated twice for the state legislature, defeated three times for a seat in the House of Representatives, defeated for the Senate, and defeated for Vice-President.

In March of 1876, Alexander Graham Bell was issued a patent for “transmitting vocal and other sounds telegraphically.” Later that year, a Western Union internal memo read: “This ‘telephone’ has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us.” The President of Western Union turned down the purchase of the patent for \$100,000, considering it to be “nothing but a toy.” Two years later, Bell refused to sell the patent for \$25 million.

George Washington Carver was born into poverty to slave parents and almost died of whooping cough. Despite being denied attendance at school in his hometown, Carver became an agricultural chemist and teacher, creating 300 products from peanuts and 175 products from sweet potatoes.

Thomas Edison, with a record 1093 patents, is often identified as a person who failed himself to success. He once reported: “Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.”

Theodore Geisel, known as Dr. Seuss, was rejected by 27 publishers before Vanguard Press accepted his first book, *And to Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, in 1937. Geisel wrote 44 children’s books.

A young Paul McCartney failed his audition to join the Liverpool Cathedral Choir. His January, 1962 “Beatles” audition with Decca Records resulted in this evaluation: “We don’t like their sound. Groups of guitars are on their way out.”

Michael Jordan, perhaps the greatest basketball player of all time, was cut from his Wilmington, North Carolina high school team in his sophomore year.

These seven examples are but a few who showed perseverance and resilience. William Arthur Ward, 20th century American educator, author, and motivational speaker, wrote: “Adversity causes some men to break, others to break records.” Which will it be for you and your organization?

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