# WELCOME TO bbcon 2025

#bbcon

# Failing 101:

How to Fail Well and Thrive in the Workplace

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# Failing 101: How to Fail Well and Thrive in the Workplace

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### Sara Niemiec, bCRE-Pro



Based at: Excelsior University in Albany, NY

My Role: Advancement Operations Specialist

Background: 7+ years in nonprofit and education

Products: Raiser's Edge NXT

Interesting Fact: loves anime

Hobbies: writing her debut novel and Settlers of Catan

Favorite type of reading: Fantasy

Failure experience: parenting, human interaction, queries, mailing lists, report generation, writing, opening doors

# Lauren Henderson bCRE-Pro, bCFE-Pro



Based at Dexter Southfield, Brookline, MA

My Role: Director of Data Systems and Management

Background: 20+ years nonprofit and education experience

Hobbies: Gardening and Laundry

Favorite type of reading: Detective Novels and Science writing

Failure Experience: Hand-Eye Coordination, Friendships, Organic Chemistry, Parenting, Power Automate, Drinking out of open cups, Cutting in a straight line

#### **Elizabeth Johnson bCRE-Pro**



Based at The Putney School, Putney, Vermont

My Role: Development Data Systems Director

Background: Involved in nonprofit and education for 30+ years

Interesting Facts: Love spending time with my family and outdoors

Hobbies: Fiber arts and gaming

Favorite type of reading: Manuals

Failure Experience: Parenting, Friending, Speaking, Time Management, ResearchPoint, Boundaries, Handwriting, Task Switching, Letting go.

#### **Session Goals**

- Clearly define failure and mistakes
- Share guidance and real-life examples for handling them at personal and organizational levels
- Show how to turn setbacks into learning opportunities
- Offer tips for building workplaces that support growth through failure

Fine Print: We are far from experts and look forward to engaging in a conversation to learn from you as well as share our experiences.

#### Mistakes and Failures: What's the Difference?

#### Here's one definition:

- Mistake = a tiny, often reversible action. Many can build up into a larger unit of failure if you don't learn from them.
- Failure = an irreversible and unintended result of multiple actions

"Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."

# **Handling Failure**

- Communicate early to relevant parties
- Do not place blame
- Ask for forgiveness and grace
- Resolve the issue
- Look for weaknesses in current process and establish new procedure.
  - Document it!

#### You failed? Good.

"Failure is not the opposite of success, it's part of success"

~Arianna Huffington

# The Long Road to Failure (and Finally, Success)

- An add-on for our Head of School
- Why just him?
- Why different issues than others?
- Was the pressure real?
- The power of tenacity!

"Doubt kills more dreams than failure ever will."

~Suzy Kassem

#### **Slow Down!**

- In-house Annual Fund mailing
- Printed envelopes, then merged letters
- Letters in different order than envelopes
- Lessons learned:
  - Print full address block on letters
  - Make mismatch more obvious on review
  - Easier to sort if it happened again

"Try and fail, but don't fail to try. ~John Quincy Adams

# Turn Failure Into Positive Learning Experiences

### Every failure is an opportunity

- Debrief
  - Identify what did work
  - Identify what didn't
  - Collaborate to move forward
  - Document processes
- Get creative!
  - Brainstorm ideas
  - Thought exercises for perspective

"Failure is instructive" ~John Dewey

#### **How Do We Make Failure Not Feel Like A Bad Word?**

- New tasks will be more challenging
- You will fail and/or make mistakes
- Put things into perspective
- Know the guardrails of a project
- Talk openly about failure

"There is no failure except in no longer trying."

~Marianne Williamson

# **Building Better Workplaces**

- Congenial Conduct
- Layered Listening
- All employees trained in feedback
- Celebrate mistakes when they're caught early
  - That's learning, not failing
- Brainwriting
  - Nod to Adam Grant

"I have not failed.
I've just found
10,000 ways that
won't work."
~Thomas Edison

# **Building Better Workplaces**

- Model experimentation and openness
- Own your mistakes
- Fail forward
- Ask for guidance/help
- Keep the team together through iterations
- Let go of perfectionism
  - Accept not everything goes as planned
  - Embrace the uncertainty

"You beating yourself up is like Woody Allen playing the clarinet. I don't want to hear it."

#### **Pause**

- Mistakes/Failures are normal and inevitable
- Embrace, learn from, and celebrate them
- Slow down!
- Communication is key
- Evaluate and update processes
- Shift from perfection to collaborative growth
- Model the behavior you want to see
- Put things into perspective
- Focus on the future

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response."

~Viktor Frankl



We are all active in Blackbaud Champions and Blackbaud Community

Sara Niemiec

Lauren Henderson

Elizabeth Johnson



#### Reminder

Just because you failed at accomplishing something, doesn't mean you're a failure as a person.

# **Audience Questions and Insights**



# On the Mainstage

Hidden Potential, Think Again, Give and Take, Originals, Option B, and Power Moves.

- Imposter syndrome: "I don't know what I'm doing. It's only a matter of time until everyone finds out."
- Growth mindset: "I don't know what I'm doing yet. It's only a matter of time until I figure it out."

#### Adam Grant

Bestselling author, organizational psychologist



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# THANK YOU

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