

Stand tall: The fear of failure vs bravery



By [Andrew MacKenzie](#)

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I recently came across a photograph taken on the morning of the D-day landings. It shows an army Regimental Sergeant Major standing bravely on a beach while all those around him, from the Hampshire Regiment, are hunkered down trying to find cover from the bullets raining down on them.

He was no doubt full of fear, but his body language tells a different story, he is beckoning his troops to follow him, up the beach and into battle, not knowing whether they will survive, and with the odds stacked against them, perhaps into failure. But something about this man showed that failure was not an option, he had an air of confidence. A leader, leading from the front with bravery. He had to make a decision to move forward, uncertain of the outcome, but knowing that every step forward could lead to victory.



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Business today needs more brave leaders. The fear of failure builds indecision, anxiety, and stagnation, it affects the very culture of a business, and often leads to business failure. In the current business environment, where leaders are faced with the challenges of economic upturns and downturns, political upheaval, and massive social challenges, it is far harder to lead with bravery in these trying conditions. It would be far easier for business leaders to hunker down, much like those troops on the beaches, in the hope that the challenges they are faced with abate. Well, I'm sorry to say, they won't. There will always be challenges. The businesses that succeed will be those that take the brave steps, that confront the challenges head on, one step at a time.

As leaders, we will be faced with the fear of failure on numerous levels, one of these is confrontation. The hard, performance-based conversations with staff are always challenging, but they are vital. I've had to learn that the principle of being soft on people but hard on performance is vital as a leader.

Another challenge for us as leaders is our ability to allow our staff the space to fail. Through failure we learn, that's experience in its best form and as Ellen DeGeneres apply puts it, "When you take risks you will learn that there will be times when you succeed and there will be times when you fail, and both are equally important."

Have a plan A, a plan B and a plan C. Have a brave plan, something ambitious, risk a little, but risk wisely, we all know that only fools rush in. The reassurance that there is a back up to plan A often gives one the confidence to overcome the fear of failure, because let's face it, only in an ideal world does everything always go as planned. Constant and repetitive reinforcement of the plan to all staff is important. It builds cohesion and a single-minded approach to achieving the goal. Try and build milestones of achievement into the plan, celebrate these small victories and, very importantly, give recognition where it's due. People want to know that they are appreciated and doing a good job.

As a leader, we cannot lead with the fear of failure lingering in the back of our minds, we need to stand tall, confident, just like that Sergeant Major, install confidence in your team, and take that first, brave step up the beach and on to success.

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