



5 Tips to Succeed by Failing Fast

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Comedian Chris Rock probably doesn't enjoy bombing on stage.

Yet that's what he does over and over again, at comedy club after comedy club, trying out ideas on crowds of people who probably go home disappointed.

"He may do this 100 times to come up with the work that finally becomes that perfect national routine," said Ryan Babineaux, PhD, career counselor and co-author of *Fail Fast, Fail Often: How Losing Can Help you Win*. "He knows it's the fastest way to take ideas, work through them and get to the point where he's doing his best work."

Babineaux keynoted "The Fail Fast Approach to Success" Tuesday during the Leadership Institute 2016 session at PromaxBDA: The Conference 2016.

Babineaux describes his approach as "a means by which you deliberately use your imperfect efforts and mistakes as a way to rapidly develop your work," and gave five tips for doing just that.

1. Try Things Like a Beginner, Not an Expert

Children learn the most when they act just outside of what they can do on their

own, according to Russian psychologist Lev Semyonovich, and it's no surprise that adults are the same.

Babineaux recommends deliberately putting yourself in situations where you deliberately do things beyond your ability while focusing on learning - not how well you can perform.

"That's where the good stuff happens," he said.

When you're an expert, situations can often be more competitive as you're trying to impress, but as a beginner you can expect to make mistakes, treat other people as teachers, ask for help, and have fun.

"On a regular basis [once a week] if you don't feel like the newbie in the room, you're probably not challenging yourself enough, and because of that you're not going to do your best work," Babineaux said.

2. Go see for Yourself

The Japanese concept *genchi gembutsu* translates to "go see for yourself" and is based on the notion of getting involved to find out more before committing to something.

It's a good strategy for the startup world - and for life, Babineaux said.

"You don't want your life to be limited by something you can disprove just by going out in the world, and quickly getting some firsthand information," he said.

As a career counselor, he recalled a woman who wanted his help starting a second career as a criminologist. She was loved to read true crime novels, collected murder clippings, watched CSI and was fascinated by that world, but he suggested she enroll in a community college course to get some exposure before deciding to professionally pursue the field. The woman was especially excited for a field trip to the morgue.

"When I asked 'How was it?' she said, 'I hated it. I hated every minute of it,'" Babineaux said. "In this very quick experience of seeing things first hand, she might have saved herself many years of going down the wrong path."

The same concept can work the other way: people may discover tasks they they think they hate or are bad at are actually things they enjoy, and may be surprised by the whole new dimension and fulfillment it adds to their work.

He recommends people volunteer, get involved in a project, take a tour, shadow someone, talk to people, and essentially try to be a 'fly on the wall' to get some real-life exposure to whatever it is you think you want to do.

3. Get Going with the Smallest Investment

Virgin Airlines started with one flight. Zappos began by with the founder creating a bare-bones website with pictures of shoes, where he took orders, traveled to the retail store, and shipped them out. It wasn't sustainable, but "it was enough to test the idea," Babineaux said.

Many startups strive to create a "minimal viable project"-the simplest version with enough features that allow the company to collect valuable feedback. When you have an idea, he recommends experimenting with a minimal amount of time and resources - three days tops - to collect the most amount of information with the less amount of upfront work.

"If there's some new direction you're thinking of going ... instead of building it up into some huge project, try to find the cheapest, least expensive way to do it where you can test it out as quickly as you can," Babineaux said.

4. Be Ready to Change Course

A mom and pop antique shop began selling sandwiches at lunch. They became popular, with lines at the door, and the company is now the national chain Potbelly.

YouTube started off as a dating website where you could post dance videos.

Changing course based on new information and opportunities is called 'the pivot' and in the startup world, it's considered the norm.

"You can't really know where you're going to be until you put something out there and see what happens," Babineaux said.

The more successful you get the harder it can be to embrace change because you're often used to knowing what you're doing. he said. But you have to do bad work before you can do good work.

In the words of author Anne Lamott: "Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life, and it is the main obstacle between you and a shitty first draft."

Babineaux recommends putting yourself in situations where new things are happening to explore different possibilities that help you learn and grow, and celebrate the opportunities to change direction.

"If you find you're always getting things right, you're probably not challenging yourself enough," he said.

5. Do Things Badly as Fast as You Can

Babineaux has been working as career coach for 10 years, developing his own

methodologies for working with clients, and at some point decided he wanted to write all down. He worked with a mentor to get feedback on his writing and ideas and a year later had a manuscript.

Everyone told him the publishing industry was a process full of rejection and anguish.

"Instead of worrying about rejection, I decided I'm going to see how many rejections I can get," he said.

It's an idea his daughter became infatuated with, and they had a good time racking up all the no's from agents-38 to be exact. He received two "yes's" and penned *Fail Fast, Fail Often: How Losing Can Help you Win*.

Babineaux also teaches a class at Stanford University on the subject. There is no homework, but each week students must find something fun to fail at. Projects have ranged from salsa dancing to sea kayaking; starting a handbag company to a children's theater group for finger puppets.

"It's fascinating to see how many fun things you can do out in the world," he said.

Babineaux recommended everyone in the audience think of some fun new thing they have wanted try, whether it has to do with work, a technique, and industry to explore, something to do with their personal life.

And I would like you to fail at it as quickly as you can," he said. "Find a way to do it badly next week, when you get home."