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## A Qualitative Study of Redemptive Intelligence and the Leader's Opportunity to Grow Performance Through Failure

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A Qualitative Study of Redemptive Intelligence and the Leader's Opportunity to Grow  
Performance Through Failure

by

Jonathan Eastman

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

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I want to sincerely thank my committee chair Dr. Jason Lively and committee members Dr. Robyne Elder and Dr. Lynda Leavitt for their optimistic and joyful correction and support. Your efforts provided me with a very enjoyable experience and allowed me to pursue a study that I felt was of great interest personally and of great importance to leaders everywhere. Your examples and influence on me throughout the process proved why you are successful professionally and personally, and why so many call upon you for help. I also want to acknowledge the authors of failure literature everywhere whose work is truly profound and meaningful for all who listen to learn. I want to especially thank the participants of this study. Your sacrifices, personal examples, and wisdom gained have made a lasting impression on me that will not be forgotten. Your experiences eloquently and aptly described successful recovery after failure and laid out a clear path to redemption for all who are willing to abide the way.

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## **Abstract**

This is a qualitative study about the redemptive intelligence of successful leaders and their opportunity to grow their personal and team performance through failure. Leaders who have a strong ability to leverage failures for improved performance for self and team, exhibit high levels of redemptive intelligence. Leaders who have a weak ability to leverage failures for improved performance for self and team, exhibit low levels of redemptive intelligence. After failure happens there are one of three paths that everyone will follow. They are first, a path to improved performance than what was experienced before the failure. Second, a return to normal levels of performance. Third, a path to lower levels of performance than what was experienced before the failure. From current literature and this study's research of successful leaders from various industries, it was found that there are six common themes or phases of redemptive intelligence that impact the successfulness of the failure recovery process. These phases can happen in succession or in variable order. They are first, bravely acknowledge and process painful emotions with hope. Second, pause and reflect for lessons learned. Third, fix-it with humility and honesty. Fourth, grit through with purpose and perseverance. Fifth, forsake with faith and resolved confidence. Sixth, support with joyful optimism in self and others.

The study included 10 participants who were surveyed and interviewed. Success was defined by these participants along the lines of progression and joy. Failure was defined along the lines of pain and quitting. These definitions evolved over time and became less of a zero-sum game where they were focused on things and became more about learning and progression. Participants came from successful stints in various industry and ideology including government, politics, military, business, holistic health,

law, homemaker, medicine, education, engineering, music, ecclesiastics, and athletics. Positions held by participants included Dean, Professor, CEO, Partner, Government Commissioner, Military Commander, Composer, Producer, Doctor, Surgeon, Lieutenant Colonel, Owner, Coach, Bishop/Pastor, Instructor, Lawyer, Teacher, Mother, Father, Missionary, Engineer, Founder, Board Chairman, Trainer, and President. Some of their accomplishments have included Researcher of the Year, expert surgeon, elite ranking in global business, National Champion, Founder of businesses and associations, Partner in company, Commander of elite leaders in military, Federal Commissioner, Parent, Grammy award winner, Vocal Group of the Year, Fellowship, and Doctoral degrees, etc. Participants were chosen for their common ability as proven and successful leaders.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Introduction

For every success there are a multitude of failures, but society tends to focus on and praise the successful while even at times disparaging those that have failed; even though the ones who are succeeding today are no stranger to failure in the past. Failure is in the very strands that weave the tapestry of each person's life. Failure has great power to inflict tremendous pain that often cripples the one who failed, while at the same time possesses the capacity to strengthen resolve within the individual so resoundingly that future success is no longer a matter of if, but becomes a question of when. What is the difference between these two outcomes of failure? Why is it that some fade into darkness never to be seen again, while others return triumphantly and magnificently more equipped and prepared to tackle the same or similar tasks that brought them to their knees once before? Some important figures throughout history have made comments in relation to this process of failure recovery. President Theodore Roosevelt, in his Citizenship in a Republic Speech said,

It is not the critic who counts; not the man you who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is not effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while

daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat. (as cited in Hughey, 2004, para. 53)

President Roosevelt, who began his career in politics with great success, did not take long to realize that his puritanical approach to overcoming evil with the higher moral ground was not warmly received by all that were needed to move his causes forward (Goodwin, 2019). After Roosevelt failed to mobilize enough support for some of his projects he said, “My isolated peak had become a valley; every bit of influence I had was gone. The things I wanted to do I was powerless to accomplish” (Goodwin, 2019, p. 37). Despite Roosevelt’s feelings after failure, he was able to triumphantly rise to become the President of the United States. Like other successful leaders, Roosevelt understood the importance of never letting a good crisis or failure go to waste (Gruere, 2019).

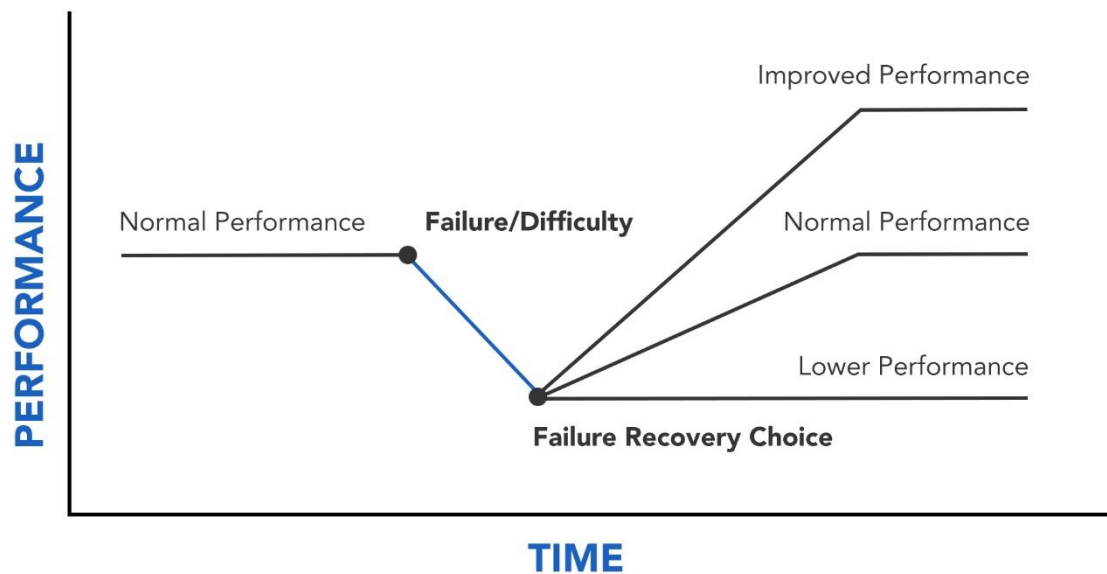
Abraham Lincoln, while acting as an Illinois state representative, experienced very similar heart ache and hardship after legislature halted all work on half-finished railroads, canals, bridges, and roads (Goodwin, 2019). Lincoln was the driving force behind tackling such a tremendous effort in the first place. He greatly desired and even promised to support any bill that would bring roads and commerce to the most thinly populated and poorest communities of the state, thus allowing them to thrive. Despite his hopes and aspirations, the third year of recession in the year 1840 caused a halt to Lincoln’s expansive and ambitious plans for access ways and commerce. The economic hardship did not lend support to Lincoln’s dream and played a factor in crippling the state with crushing debt. This debt destroyed credit ratings for years and deterred new settlers from entering Illinois. Thousands lost their homes and banks and brokerages closed down. It was a dismal time in the state of Illinois and Lincoln took the lion’s share

of the blame. More detail about this specific moment in Lincoln's life will be examined later in chapter two, but like a young Theodore Roosevelt, a young Abraham Lincoln overcame. It took some time, but he eventually responded to this failure in his life by saying, "I must die or be better" (Goodwin, 2019, p. 97). As history proved, Lincoln did become better and rose above his failure. How did these men and many others like them rise above when so many others were unable to overcome their failures? It is because they developed capacities or intelligence that allowed them to overcome their failures in a positive and uplifting way (Cannon & Edmondson, 2005). For as Henry Ford said, "failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently" (Coad, 2014).

"Scholars who have studied the development of leaders have situated resilience, the ability to sustain ambition in the face of frustration, at the heart of potential leadership growth" (Goodwin, 2019, p. 97). Duckworth et al. (2007) describes this same idea of resilience using the word grit. She specifically defines grit as that character utilizing perseverance and passion in pursuit of long-term goals. She points to grit as the real predictor of both objective and subjective measures of successful goal attainment. Goodwin explained that scholars have identified leaders and people to follow one of three paths in their time after failure. Some people lose their bearings and their future lives are forever stunted by the failed experience. Their negative experience with failure has left such a fracture of the mind that they are never quite able to return back to who they were before the failed experience happened. Second, others are able to resume normal life after their experience with failure. There is no sustainment of lesser performance or a better performance, just a return to their normal life and normal levels of their life's operations. Third is a group that, "through reflection and adaptive capacity, are able to transcend

their ordeal, armed with a greater resolve and purpose” (Goodwin, 2019, p. 97) than they had before the failed experience. They are able to enjoy improved performance going forward. Why?

This study sought to answer the why by identifying those specific processes and/or practices that led to each of these three levels of future performance after an experience with failure. It also analyzed how the leaders’ beliefs on failure recovery processes impacted the performance of their teams. This study focused especially on those practices/processes of successful leaders that were redemptive in nature. Redemptive meaning that they were able to leverage those experiences with failure in a way that improved their life and their performance for themselves and their teams. The study identified how leaders responded with actual processes that helped them to react to their failures in ways that showed the type of grit and resilience described by Duckworth (2016) and Goodwin (2019). Redemptive processes that ultimately led to that third level of overcoming failure. Overcoming it in a way that improved their future performance, as opposed to helping them only maintain status quo performance or suffer from a sustained lower level of performance moving forward. The hope of this study is that more people will be able to see their failures as something that they believe they can learn from and overcome in a way that is redemptive for them in their lives, as well as for the teams they work with. Specifically equipping them and their teams with defined tools and processes that will lead them to redemptive feelings, improved belief in self, and improved future performance regardless of the failures that face them. See figure 1 depicting the three potential paths after failure has occurred.

**Figure 1***3 Paths After Failure*

Note. Normal performance is the level of performance to which someone has learned to perform. Failure causes a decrease in that normal performance temporarily. A failure recovery choice is made and a process followed leading to one of three different paths. Those paths are that of a sustained lower performance level, a return to previously normal levels of performance, and an improved performance level.

**Rationale of the Study**

Handling personal failure/challenges has proven to be very difficult for a growing number of leaders today (Farson & Keyes, 2014). One proof of this is manifested through the mental strain that failed and negative experiences have over the human mind.

Recently, the covid-19 pandemic has shown the good and bad of how leaders, teams, and societies mentally react to failure (American Psychological Association, 2020). While there was a lot of good leadership and success during the covid-19 pandemic, more than half of Americans suffered from mental health issues. Learning to cope with failures and

challenging circumstances is hard regardless of what they are. Leaders everywhere know this to be true. Addressing mental health and other issues that come from trying to handle failure of any kind have been a growing concern for some time and is part of the reason 14 CEOs from top mental health institutions around the world formed a coalition to combat rising mental health issues that are evident in all communities of the human race. While failure does not exclusively produce long term mental health problems for individuals, it does cause some kind of strain that is felt mentally, emotionally, physically, or metaphysically for all people.

Mayo Clinic defines mental illness as “a wide range of mental health conditions - disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors” (Mental Illness, 2019, para. 1). Mental illness can make an individual miserable and can cause problems in daily life. It can affect the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of leaders and those they lead. While there is a heightened awareness of mental illness and other issues stemming from failure and challenging circumstances today, the research giving specific solutions for specific problems is sometimes lacking. While this research did not provide the solutions for mental illness that only trained medical professionals should provide, it did provide information that may impact the mental wellbeing of leaders and their teams. It provided tools used by successful leaders that can help other leaders and their teams cope with and overcome failure. Specifically, it provided examples of actions that the leaders and their teams have used to improve performance after failures. There were also examples of habits/practices not to follow, that led leaders and teams to sustained lower performance after failure, as well as actions

that returned an individual to normal performance levels. Again, while contacting health professionals is best for coping with mental illness, this study provided tools used by successful leaders and their teams that allow for greater emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and improved mental wellness after failure. It provided tools and specific processes or practices that leaders can use to help them and their teams leverage failure for growth and greater success in the future.

While there is not a plethora of information in current literature describing the complete step by step process for recovering from failure and its impact on leaders and their teams, there is plenty of information about various aspects of failure recovery and ways people process the difficulties of stress that come with failure/challenges. An article focusing on organizational systems in British sport points out how some leaders are even required to take a mental health first aid training course so that they can better lead their teams through the suffering that comes through the good and the bad of sport (Poucher et al., 2021, p. 273). Additionally, in *Grit*, Duckworth (2016) devoted chapter nine to this concept of failure, hope, mental health, and wellness. She refers to a study done by Seligman and Maier involving dogs that proved the idea that thought leads to behavior. She uses this to elaborate that elite salesman, swimmers, and students, etc. did remarkably better when they believed they were doing good. When they did not believe they were, they did remarkably worse. Their leniency towards being an optimist or a pessimist had an impact on their mental state, or thoughts, which ultimately drove their behavior and performance after failure. She points out that performers with higher levels of grit enjoyed greater success over time. She defines grit as a combination of utilizing passion and perseverance in pursuit of a goal (Duckworth, 2016); both of which can be



challenged in a performer's thought and behavior process after a failure occurs.

Duckworth's research is one of the foundational elements to the research in this study.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze the failure recovery processes of successful leaders across varying industries to identify common practices that can be employed by leaders to improve personal and organizational performance after a failure has occurred. This study aims to aid leaders in becoming more emotionally intelligent about their reaction to failure. It also aims to improve their social intelligence and help them understand their ability to impact others in their organization after failure has occurred. The study sought to focus on significant moments of failure as opposed to minor failures of the participants. Specifically, the researcher looked to identify habits or practices employed by the leader after failure had occurred. This was done through interviews where the participants were asked to reflect on lessons learned from past failure experiences. Both failures that occurred during performance and those failures that were not realized until after a performance was over, were analyzed. The research included both past and recent failures of the leaders, and remained focused on how those experiences with failure impacted the participants as leaders today. The study especially analyzed how the leader's failure recovery process impacted themselves and their teams moving forward in future pursuit of goals. This approach allowed a more holistic understanding of each participant's experience with failure and their failure recovery practices in their life as a leader. Both positive and negative habits/practices were identified and analyzed. The researcher sought to understand and connect the positive and negative failure recovery practices to how they develop the leader and/or their

team/organization. Specifically, which habits and practices led to lower performance, normal performance, and improved performance. The social, mental, emotional, and physical state of successful leaders from backgrounds including medicine, business, athletics, and arts, etc. were analyzed. All of these leaders were analyzed within the context of their teams, for as described in the book *Extreme Ownership*, without teams there is no leadership (Willink & Babin, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

**Research Question 1:** After failure has occurred, what are the common failure recovery processes that lead to declining levels of performance, a return to normal performance, and improved performance for individuals and teams?

**Research Question 2:** How does a leader's beliefs on failure recovery processes impact the success of their team?

The author believes that successful leaders do not necessarily fail less often, but they fail with higher levels of redemptive intelligence after failure. Additionally, there are common failure recovery processes that leaders and their teams from varying ideologies and industries share, and these common processes lead to redemption after failure for those willing to abide by these common processes. Both research questions will aid in determining the relationship between failure recovery and redemptive intelligence; as well as in determining the strength or weakness of the commonality of failure recovery processes amongst varying industries.

### **Study Limitations**

This study interviewed participants that are successful in their field/industry. Their successfulness is a potential limitation in the study. What is successful today can

fade with the changing perspective of time. Success may also be different from one perspective to another. Some commonly respected perspectives were used to evaluate success and identify successful leaders. Some of these factors included longevity in their field or position, growth sustained over a period of time by their organization, social influence amongst their peers within their industry, and financial wellness personally or organizationally that was earned over time, as well as other factors utilized to help identify successful leaders to participate in this study. While none of those factors by themselves are a perfect indication of success, they factored into the identification of the participants. However, the most prevailing factor utilized for identifying success in participants was the idea that the participant is generally respected by their peers within their industry or area of experience. Respect of peers is generally an identifier of success that presumably most would agree upon, but this is an area of limitation in the study.

Additional limitations included issues of time constraints, tactical application due to varying team sizes, methods/techniques used to collect the data, and lack of female participants. Time was an issue for one participant and thus he was unable to answer survey questions and was unable to answer all interview questions. This was not necessarily an error in the way the study was set up, but rather a particularly busy time for the participant. There were, however, enough participants to still achieve saturation, but anytime someone cannot fully participate there is a chance that something was lost. The issue of tactical application became apparent throughout the study that it could be a potential issue. While there were common principles that could be applied to everyone, some individuals were only used to working in teams of less than 10, while others were used to working with 200 or more. So, tactical approaches could vary in how the leaders

applied similar failure recovery concepts and principles to their teams and organizations. Issues with methods and techniques are not necessarily included because the researcher did not feel confident in the way the study was set up, but rather is a recognition that asking the right questions to illicit the best response is more of an art than it is a science. Meaning, the researcher may or may not have asked the right questions to illicit the best responses despite doing his best. Lastly, it has been interesting that most of the prominent researching voices on this topic today and included in this study have been overwhelmingly female voices. There is an underlying feeling that because the majority of participants were male, there might be some perspective or insights that were not gained.

Other limitations include only interviewing successful leaders as opposed to average or below average leaders. If these other groups were interviewed and they conveyed a belief in the same themes for success then it would imply that maybe the different types of leaders are doing the same things and are only successful or unsuccessful because of the opportunities afforded them or other relevant reasons. Additionally, leaders from the unsuccessful or average groups might be able to more readily recognize in leadership those things that are different than what they do. Maybe there is some insight or a theme that can only be properly expressed by these other groups. Participants were all also all Americans, born and raised. Understanding beliefs of leaders in varying country cultures is an obvious limitation to this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Challenge.** Defined as a stimulating task or problem that can aid in learning (Research Schools Network, 2019). The specifics of this definition will vary in detail

from one participant to the next, but will involve any event or moment in time that presents a particularly difficult issue or problem for the leader to navigate through. It is a word used in this study to help participants identify and further elaborate on their failures or tough times that they have navigated.

**Emotional Intelligence.** Defined as the ability of an individual to understand and control their emotions (Panait, 2017). There are five levels of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Each helps the individual understand themselves in a way that allows the individual to be in tune with self and others emotionally.

**Failure.** For the purposes of this study failure is failing to perform a duty, action, or responsibility. The specifics of this definition will vary in detail from one participant to the next, but will involve not attaining a goal personally or organizationally. Failure may also represent a particularly difficult time, situation, or challenge that sets someone back, a crucible of sorts that needs to be endured (Bennis & Thomas, 2018). Failures may be setbacks along the path toward achieving a goal or they may be not achieving the end goal itself (Sobel, 2014).

**Failure Recovery Process.** For the purposes of this study, this is a phrase coined by the researcher to describe what individuals do “after” failure. It seeks to describe elements related to the thoughts, emotions, and actions of an individual after failure has occurred. Stated in a different way, it describes the intelligence of the individual as it relates to failure recovery processes.

**Grit.** As defined by Duckworth (2016) to mean utilizing perseverance and passion in pursuit of long-term goals. This element of grit is a great predictor of success

that is not only subjective, but objective as well (Mitchell, 2022). Subjective because grit can be used to predict happiness, it proves that the individual utilizing grit in the pursuance of a goal is demonstrating their willingness and overall happiness to continue investing effort toward that goal. Grit is also objective, because it can also be used to predict objective measures of success as well.

**Performance Level.** Performance levels in this study refer to the different levels of performance that an individual may be operating at during a certain period of time. Performance as it relates to a specific activity that they are engaged in. There are three levels of performance mentioned in relation to this study. Lower performance refers to someone that is performing at a lower level of performance than what they have previously exhibited as their capacity in prior performances. Normal performance levels refer to someone that is performing at what is a normal level of performance for what their capacity is based on prior performances. Improved performance levels refer to someone that is performing at what is an improved performance level for what their capacity was understood to be based on prior performances.

**Redemptive.** Clark explains that the word redemption comes from the two Hebrew words *padah* and *ga'al* (Clark, 2003,). Clark explains that both words describe divine activity, but their origin was first used to describe human activity and to understand the word redemption one must first understand the words in that context. *Padah* was used only in relation to the redemption of persons or living things. *Ga'al* was used to indicate a price paid by a person acting as a next of kin to redeem family land. The two words together have been combined into the singular word redemption, and have come to mean a payment for something or someone that is to be released or secured

(ransomed). Kipper is another word used in relation to redemption that means to cover. Redemptive processes, for the purposes of this study, describe the efforts (Ga'al) that are required to provide redemption, ransoming, or the desired reward that a person (Padah) has failed to achieve previously; thus covering (kipper) the failed actions and providing atonement for the individual in relation to their goals.

**Social intelligence.** A form of intelligence that relates to one's ability to understand and relate with the emotional needs of others. Daniel Goleman mentioned that the true sign of social intelligence is one's ability to connect with others (as cited in Harvard Business, 2008). A leader with high levels of social intelligence will exhibit social intelligence by taking time to interact with followers in an authentic and genuine way. Individuals with a high level of social intelligence will take time to listen and emotionally process what a follower is thinking and feeling.

**Success.** For the purposes of this study, success in this research will be described as achieving a favorable or desired outcome that is widely valued (Duckworth et al., 2007). The specifics of this definition will vary in detail from one participant to the next, but will involve attaining a goal personally or organizationally that would also be valued by a larger group of individuals, in particular a larger group of peers. Furthermore, in Duckworth's studies, success is always defined as objectively possible through countable or measurable criteria (as cited in Mitchell, 2022). However, the real nature of success is more subjective and must also involve conviction and passion. She points to grit as the key element and predictor of objective and subjective measures predicting success. Success at its basest level is improvement and rising to higher levels of performance than what were achieved previously.

**Successful leaders.** For the purposes of this study successful leaders are those that have attained higher levels comparatively to that of their peers as it relates to things like longevity, growth, social influence, awards, finances, and other factors indicating success within their industry or ideology. Successful leaders are generally respected by their peers in their industry.

**Team.** For the purposes of this study a team is any group of individuals that is working together toward a common goal. Teams can be very small with only a few individuals, very large with thousands of individuals, or anywhere in between. They can be a team of doctors, athletes, educators, business workers, or a family, etc. An individual working alone, regardless of talent, is not able to accomplish as much as a team of individuals who are effectively working together (Bolman & Deal, 1992). Teams have an ability to multiply and transcend individual effort. Successful leaders are able to tap into and leverage this ability in pursuit of a goal.

### **Summary**

This was a qualitative study that sought to identify common failure recovery processes that leaders from varying industry or ideologies use to help themselves and their teams overcome failure. After a failure has occurred scholars have identified three levels that a leader's failure recovery process may lead to (Goodwin, 2019). First, is a sustained level of lower performance that is worse than the level experienced prior to the failure occurring. Second, is a return to a normal or same levels of performance experienced prior to the failure occurring. Third, is an improved level of performance than that which was experienced prior to the failure occurring. Leaders who respond with high levels of redemptive intelligence are those that are most successful after failure.



These leaders and the redemptive processes leading to the highest level of performance after failure took a majority of the focus in this study. These failure recovery processes exhibited by successful leaders are those that led to overcoming the failure by leveraging the failure experience to improve upon prior levels of performance.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

This is a study about failure recovery processes of successful leaders and their teams and their impact on teams after failure has occurred. The literature review analyzed studies on failure, experiences of successful leaders and teams with failure, and a synthesis of information as it relates to the research questions. Also included are the personal experiences of the author as it relates to failure that were significant in forming ideas and beliefs about failure recovery processes that ultimately set the stage for this study and research questions. Research questions 1 and 2 were both analyzed generally throughout the literature review and not in successive order. The research questions are stated as follows. Research question 1: After failure has occurred, what are the common failure recovery processes that lead to declining levels of performance, a return to normal performance, and improved performance for individuals and teams? Research question 2: How does a leader's beliefs on failure recovery processes impact the success of the team? This is a qualitative study utilizing interviews and the literature review followed a similar methodology. Certain sources used were viewed like an interview and synthesized throughout utilizing multiple examples of failure and experiences of successful leaders with their failures. Additionally, the literature review used a phenomenological approach (Williams, 2021). It identified the phenomenon, failure recovery processes of successful leaders and teams, and explained the position and experience with the phenomenon from the perspective of the sources. Both from the perspective of the successful leaders as well as from the perspective of various researchers who study failure recovery processes today. While there is a lot of information discussing leadership and the success of teams,

this study researched information related to the phenomenon of failure recovery processes of leaders and their teams and the actions that lead to one of three potential paths after failure (Goodwin, 2019). Path one is that of sustained lower performance after failure. Path two is that of a return to normal levels of performance after failure. Path three is that of improved levels of performance after failure. Amongst other research, the most prominent voices that were discussed and utilized for this research were that of Duckworth (2016), in her studies about *Grit*, debriefing for learning after mistakes from the United States Air Force's Weapons School which is their elite leadership training school (Murphy & Duke, 2011), *Extreme Ownership* from Willink and Babin (2018), *Leadership in Turbulent Times* from Goodwin (2019), and various works from Edmondson who is a Harvard professor and prominent researcher on failure recovery (Edmondson & Cannon, 2005). Other sources of research that analyze both the individual leaders and their impact on the teams around them, as it relates to failure and failure recovery, were included in this study. Leadership sources that are not related to the topic of recovery after failure for leaders and teams were not included.

The literature review begins by focusing on the Critical Connection Between Success and Failure and how experiences with failure possess power that can be leveraged by an individual for higher levels of future performance, if they possess the intelligence allowing them to leverage the failure appropriately. Three Paths After Failure is the next section and points to supportive research affirming that there are typically three paths after failure that individuals will follow depending on their abilities to recover after a failure has occurred. The next section is a focus on historical examples of failure, as well as some applied theory in the Historical Examples of Failure Recovery and

Improved Performance section. After this is the main section that focuses on the current literature and the gap in literature that leads to the authors' suggested solution for said gap, the new term redemptive intelligence. This section is titled Current Literature and Redemptive Intelligence. Next is further expansion on four common stages of failure recovery from the current literature. These four common stages of failure recovery identified from the prominent voices of this research form the framework for the author's suggested term, redemptive intelligence. This section is titled the Four Stages of Failure Recovery: Redemptive Intelligence. Lastly, in the Conclusion section for this literature review chapter is a summation of the information throughout the literature review with some final takeaways from the research included in this chapter. Connections between sources and the synthesis of the material are a large extent of this literature review and happen throughout the review.

Failure recovery as a topic is important because it is integral in refining theories, making discoveries, and developing innovations (Young, 2019). Engaging in intelligent failure recovery provides opportunity and insights for improvement. Engaging with failure publicly role models the complexities of failure recovery and allows communities to more readily humanize and normalize failure as a part of the process for growing productive leaders, teams, and communities. As the literature review progressed it became apparent that the gap in literature as it relates to failure recovery processes is not that failure is not adequately researched or understood. On the contrary in fact, there seemed to be plenty of helpful information about failure and overcoming failure. However, there exists no common language easily understood by the masses and accessible to people from various socioeconomic, technological, national, healthcare, and

scholastic backgrounds, etc. Failure is a common phenomenon experienced by all people from every background, but the information educating the masses on failure recovery is varied and incoherent and thus inhibits the willingness of leaders and teams to engage with failure in public and humanizing ways that will lead to performance improvement. Imagine a room of people speaking different languages trying to accomplish a unified goal. This would prove to be very difficult. Speaking the same language or at the least establishing some commonly understood terms, understood by all, would make success much more readily available. The common themes and language that gives helpful words of expression to leaders and teams as it relates to failure recovery can only be deduced after fairly substantive research. Even then, themes and common language are hard to connect because the phrases describing various aspects of failure recovery are varied enough that important aspects of the complete failure recovery process are left out by researchers who spend their efforts focusing on only one aspect, as opposed to the complete process of failure recovery. It becomes difficult to see all of the stages required of leaders and teams after failure to leverage their failure for greater performance in the future. This lack of clear and simple messaging limits the prospects for future success of leaders and teams who do not have access or the time to research and understand each stage of the complete failure recovery process. Ultimately, the research in this chapter points to the truth that successful leaders and teams are not more successful because they fail less, rather they perceive and respond to failure differently and with higher levels of intelligence than those who are unsuccessful (Maxwell, 2007). Stated more simply, successful leaders and teams do not fail less, they recover from failure more intelligently by incorporating all stages of a complete failure recovery process.

**Critical Connection of Success & Failure**

As the ninth child in a family of 11, the author learned a lot about sharing and love and harmony, but also learned a lot about competition and winning and losing. The author learned what it felt like to get things one might want, as well as had experience with what it felt like to not get something one might want. There was time spent competing with loved ones in wrestling matches, tackle football games, basketball in the driveway, cross country, musical interests, scholastic pursuits, tree fort building, and who could hold their breath the longest under water or in a tunnel, etc. The focus was trying to be the best at whatever one was spending their time on and everything usually ended up being a competition. Even basic life things like who could brush their teeth the fastest, or who could do it best, who was the tallest, food at the dinner table, time with Mom or Dad, a place to sit on movie night, time in the bathroom or in the shower. Mom and Dad taught manners and saying please and thank you, but there was nothing wrong with competition or trying to be the best at the things that were pursued. There was one major rule after competition of any sort. Everyone loved one another and would kiss and make up if they needed to. Mom and Dad would literally make two quarrelling teenagers hug each other until they could laugh and move on as friends. Growing up the author enjoyed both success and failure in comparison to others in the family as well as classmates at school. Many poignant lessons were learned from striving to be best, competition, success, and failure. One of the many lessons learned was how to smile and have grace in defeat as well as success. Even though grace and a fake smile were learned as a part of failure, success was much more thoroughly enjoyed and failure felt downright awful, even if trained to make it appear not so bad on the outside. There were multiple times after a

failure that the author's parents would teach the author how to not take things so seriously and maintain balance and perspective. While these lessons were helpful, they could not completely eliminate the pain of failure.

As the years wore on and successes and failures were experienced, something about the pain of failure started to become more clear. Failure seemed to present opportunities that may not have been fully understood by the author in his younger years, but it seemed to proffer lessons and opportunities for growth that success did not quite have the same ability to teach. All the author could understand at the time is that failure was awful and one should do all they could to run away from it or to prepare enough so that the pain that seemed to always accompany failure, would not have to be experienced. Failure as a young person was simply not fun and did not feel good and seemed to always cause empty feelings of nervousness, sadness, or a stomach turning to knots. Usually, it could be overcome fairly quickly as a young person. As an older person these pains of what seemed to be more significant failures became a little deeper and more profound causing anxiety, stress, sleepless nights, feelings of worthlessness, purpose in life being lost, great reflection, and spiritually seeking for greater understanding about purpose. These deeper and more profound feelings seemed to require a little more effort or a different approach in order to get past the overpowering negative feelings and even self-hatred that accompanied failure. In order to learn the lessons and capitalize on growth opportunities after failure, the author needed a better approach and attitude. How to do that was not exactly understood, but recognizing that there were different paths that could be taken after failure that led to different outcomes were becoming more readily apparent.

Faust (2004), a successful clergyman for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints quoted Dr. Arthur Wentworth Hewitt, a successful clergyman, educational leader, and poet about something he said relating to failure. Dr. Wentworth used humor to answer an important question and to teach an important lesson about why bad things happen to people. He said,

First, I don't know. Second, you may not be as innocent as you think. Third: . . . I believe it is because He loves us so much more than He loves our happiness. How so? Well, if on a basis of strict personal return here and now, all the good were always happy and all the bad suffered disaster (instead of often quite the reverse), this would be the most subtle damnation of character imaginable (as cited in Faust, 2004, para. 11).

Dr. Hewitt and Faust seemed to already know what the author was just beginning to understand about life, success and failure. Success and failure are connected and a full life cannot be lived by trying to only experience success while running fearfully away from failure. For to do so “would be the most subtle damnation of character imaginable” (Faust, 2004, para. 11). One has to lean into their failures in such a way that they truly understand the lessons their failure has to proffer, willing to look around every corner or under every rock to unlock their path to greater success and higher levels of performance. A human being that has the intangible makeup to succeed over the course of a life despite prospective opportunities, timing, support, and situational circumstance must embrace learning from failure as a critical and necessary companion to success (Collins & Porras, 2011; Lawler & Worley, 2006). If they do not then their success may only be a product of their good opportunity, right timing, strengthening support, and positive situational



circumstance and each of those things run out eventually, according to Lawler and Worley (2006) and Collins and Porras (2011). Lawler and Worley (2006) in their book, *Built to Change*, identify key characteristics of companies that are able to succeed in spite of changing circumstances. Lawler and Worley (2006) point out that only 29 of the original Fortune 100 companies from the 1917 list made it to the 1987 list and that only 74 remained on the S&P 500 index from 1957 to 1997. Both Lawler and Worley (2006) in *Built to Change* and Collins and Porras (2011) in *Built to Last*, point to the essential connection of an organization's willingness to learn from failure types of experiences and then change in order to improve performance and enjoy success over time, as opposed to enjoying only temporary success. Stated another way, both books point to the essential connection between lessons from failure and the potential for change that garners success. Leaders who do not lean into failure typically run fearfully away from failure environments and situations, because they have not learned to harvest the opportunities for greater performance that lie within the failures. They have diminished capacities and have not learned the ability to create change after failure that grows into better performance. Their best chance for success is typically to jump from one successful opportunity to the next and hope to stay away from any situation that would ask them to show their abilities as a leader in a moment of failure. This is something that many seemingly successful people do in their lives. Some of these seemingly successful leaders recognize that they are solely jumping from one success to the next and are ok with it. Other seemingly successful leaders are not aware that their success has been largely a product of their circumstance. Regardless, neither of these seemingly successful leaders have yet learned in their life how to capitalize on the opportunity failure provides and

how to be a change agent for improved performance after failure. This dissertation is not focused on learning from those perceived to be or seemingly successful people, but rather learning lessons from leaders that actually know how to leverage failures for constant improvement and higher levels of success and performance.

Truly successful leaders for the sake of this study are those that know how to improve performance and through that attain higher levels of performance despite the opportunity, timing, support, and situational circumstance. These are individuals that know how to lean into and embrace failure. They are a unique group of successful leaders that have the ability to both keep a functioning environment successful as well as take a failing situation and leverage its lessons from failure into higher levels of performance and greater success. These successful leaders seem to make wherever they go better if they are just given the time and the trust to do it. These successful leaders understand that success is nothing without first learning how to leverage failure as its opposite and failure is nothing without its eventual connection to success. It is the critically important relationship between the two unlikely partners, success and failure, working in tandem that has the ability to unlock higher levels of performance within people, leaders, and teams. Those higher levels of successful performance always come after failure, as long as there are no obstacles placed in the way that would inhibit the effects of their natural relationship to one another. While this dissertation focuses on the less understood and less embraced failure side of this two-way relationship, it is important to spend a little more time leaning into the critical relationship between the two, success and failure, by utilizing Sir Isaac Newton's third law of motion and the idea of scientific modeling (NASA, 2022).

Baglow (2020) from Notre Dame University explains how scientific models like Sir Isaac Newton's third law can be used to explain things less defined like emotions and the metaphysical utilizing scientific modeling. He describes scientific modeling as a method used by scientific thinkers to explain something they do not understand, utilizing a model that they do understand. He cites the mechanical clock used by Newton and others throughout history as a good model for better understanding things that were less visible or less understood. Baglow quotes Lawrence Principe saying,

In living organisms, the levers and pulleys were to be revealed by anatomy and the new microscope. Individual organs became mechanical devices; the heart, a pump, the kidneys, filters, and indeed the whole body, a mass of plumbing and rigging (Baglow, 2020, para. 4).

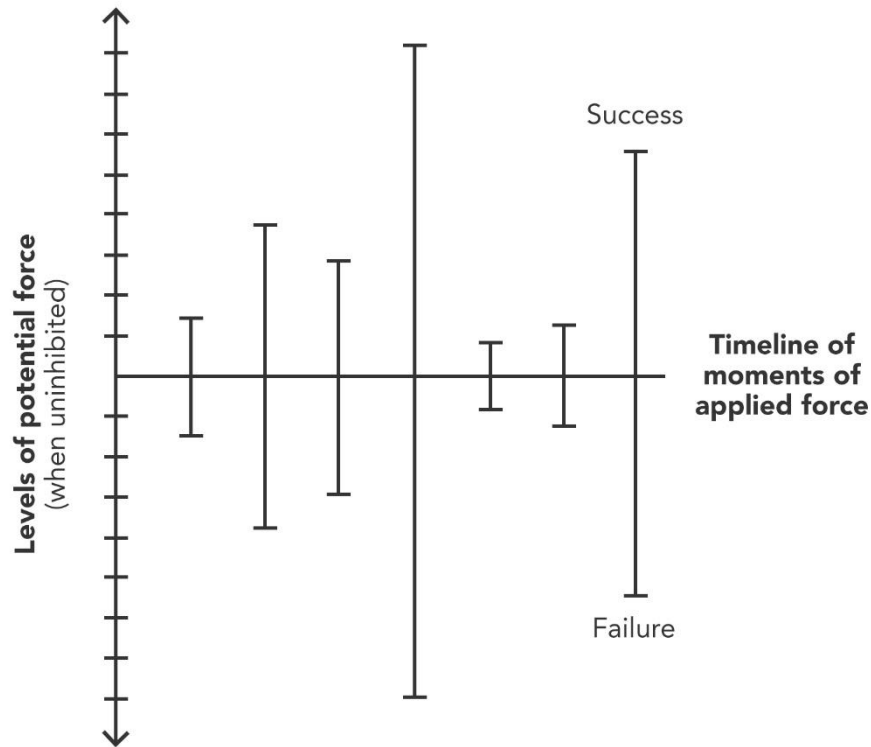
In the absence of clocks and microscopes to explain the connection between success and failure inside a human being, Sir Isaac Newton's third law becomes a very helpful scientific modeling tool to explain the connection between success and failure. The third law of motion states that "Whenever one object exerts a force on another object, the second object exerts an equal and opposite on the first" (NASA, 2022, para. 1). Stated another way, there is an equal and opposite reaction for two opposing forces. Success and failure are two opposing forces with the ability to impact one another through the internal mental, emotional, metaphysical, and even physical makeup of human beings.

The example of kicking a soccer ball can be utilized to explain Newton's third law and its connection to the relationship that exists amongst failure and success within individuals. When kicking a soccer ball, object one is the body or leg of the person. Whatever level of force is applied to the ball, the ball will react to it with an equal level

of force in the opposite direction. The force of the kick will send the ball traveling toward a potential distance. That full potential distance will be achieved as long as there is not a third object inhibiting the path and causing a new reaction. So, it is with failure. Each time the force of failure is applied mentally, emotionally, and metaphysically to an individual there exists a potential for an equal and opposite reaction toward success as long as there is not a third object inhibiting this potential force from reaching its full distance. Just as kicking a ball against a wall will keep the ball from successfully traveling to its full potential distance, placing figurative walls in front of the internal force provided by failure will keep individuals from reaching their full success potential. Figurative walls can be anything done to limit the pain of failure from having full sway in the minds, emotions, and hearts of human beings. Every failure then is a great opportunity for growth, greater success, and higher levels of performance.

There is a relationship between failure and success, and the potential within each failure has an equal and opposite opportunity for success. Loscalzo (2014) says that the commonly held view of failure is that it should be avoided and only in the avoiding can success be found, but he also disagrees with this narrative. He makes the case that failure has at least as important of a role as success in the experience, education, and professional development of an individual. Loscalzo (2014) points to the scientific method as proof of the connectivity between success and failure. Specifically, pointing out that the scientific community has only achieved their level of understanding by being aware of both the positive and negative results, both a rejection and non-rejection of the null hypothesis. It is the connection between the two that attains knowledge and it is that knowledge that leads to higher levels of performance. Each failure in science, like in any

other industry, has the power and potential to instruct and inform in a way that is both equal and opposite to the level of failure endured. One of the most significant examples of this in American history is that of the attack on Pearl Harbor. This significant moment in history has not lived on in infamy as prophesied by President Roosevelt because of the many small failures that led to the attack on that day (Tierney, 2023). Rather it has lived on in infamy because of the reaction of the military men and women at Pearl Harbor, as well as the reaction of the American nation to that event. From the redemption and rebuilding of ships sunk that day to the ultimate victory in the war and everything else in between, the intelligent reaction to failure by a few key individuals and the nation as a whole, led to higher levels of performance that have cemented the United States for over half a century now as a world superpower. Tierney (2023) “notes that the attack on Pearl Harbor led to a period of national unity, an end of American isolationism, the entry of the U.S. into WWII, and the beginning of the superpower status of the United States” (para. 1). See figure 2 for an illustrative depiction of the connection that exists between success and failure, as well as the equal and opposite potential for higher levels of performance after failure has occurred.

**Figure 2***Relationship Between Success and Failure*

Note. Force is felt during both moments of failure and success. The amount of force applied in one direction has an equal and opposite ability for force in the other direction.

It is also important to note that each failure and its related potential for success should be viewed independently of other failures. Meaning, just because an individual has reacted to a particular failure in a way that will allow higher levels of success and performance, does not mean that they will always choose to react in ways that result in higher levels of performance and success with other independent failures. Each failure requires a separate decision to react in a way that will lead to higher levels of performance. Any individual at any given moment may decide to put up figurative walls that limit the potential force generated from failure that could lead to an equal and

opposite level of success. Yes, the better someone becomes at reacting to failure in success generating ways, the easier it becomes to replicate, but it requires a separate decision each time failure occurs. This is where one might see a previously successful leader who has learned how to leverage failure appropriately, begin to experience greater and more prolonged failures. This is not because they have not developed the ability to leverage failure for improved performance, but rather they are choosing to not be true to that previously learned ability. Some decide that certain failures are too hard for their mental, emotional, or metaphysical psyche to handle. They give in and give up too early (Duckworth, 2016). Thomas Edison said that people give up because they do not know how close to success they are (as cited in Allen, 2022). It is important to note that the relationship works in both directions. The greater the force of failure the greater the potential force for success, as well as the greater the force of success the greater potential force for failure. While the group of successful leaders with an equal and opposite potential for failure would be an interesting study on its own, that is not the focus of this study. Suffice it to say that reactions to failure leading to higher levels of performance once learned are not automatically sustained to ensure future success and each failure requires a unique and separate decision to respond in ways that lead to higher levels of performance.

### **Three Paths After Failure**

After failure has occurred, “some people are able to extract wisdom from experience, and others are not” (Goodwin, 2019, p. 97). This section will not seek to convey what factors lead to extracting wisdom, but rather to point out that some people do extract wisdom that aids them in future performance while others do not. Furthermore,

to identify that there are three paths that human beings follow after a failure has occurred (Allen, 2022; Collins, 2001; Collins & Porras, 2011; Cullman, 1998; Goodwin, 2019). There are those who are elite learners from failure, very poor learners after failure, and mediocre learners after failure. Some are so damaged by their failed experience that they do not fully recover from what happened to them and therefore go on living a lesser life than they did before their failure. Others recover from their negative experience and eventually soldier on in a way that they return back to normal levels of action and performance that are reminiscent of their life prior to the significant moment of failure. Yet, there are still others who transcend their ordeal through reflection and adaptive capacities that ultimately arm them with a greater resolve and purpose than they previously had prior to the experience with failure. In other words, they are literally better and stronger and able to perform at a higher level than they would have been able to prior to the crucible of failure they endured. People generally follow three paths after failure; one of lower performance, a return to normal levels of performance, and an improvement to higher levels of performance. The failure recovery processes or intelligence of the leader and team are what determine which path is followed. The following three subsections include supporting examples and research that further illustrate these three potential paths after failure as well as examples from the author's life.

### **Path One: Lower Performance**

As a young elementary student, the author had a poignant experience that taught him about the first or lowest performance path of failure recovery, the sustained lower performance level. As a young student, the author loved to run and attended Shelton View Elementary school in Bothell, Washington, where a very influential and successful



teacher, Mr. Wang, taught physical education and saw to it that the students participated in cross country and track and field competitions against other schools. Running was fun and the author was good at it, so for multiple years the author never lost. However, the nerves and fear of failure were mounting with every win. It was not realized at the time, but the author was failing to manage the anxiety that was a part of every race. One race day the author decided to give into the previous failures in managing the anxiety before races and decided that he would relax and run with his friends who liked to laugh and joke while participating in the race. The thought was that this would solve all problems related to the failure in managing the anxiety in appropriate ways. This seemed like the right decision and at the start of the race the anxiety was not as prevalent as it normally was. However, throughout the race and despite what was hoped for, the anxiety that led to this decision to perform at a lower level began to increase and would not leave.

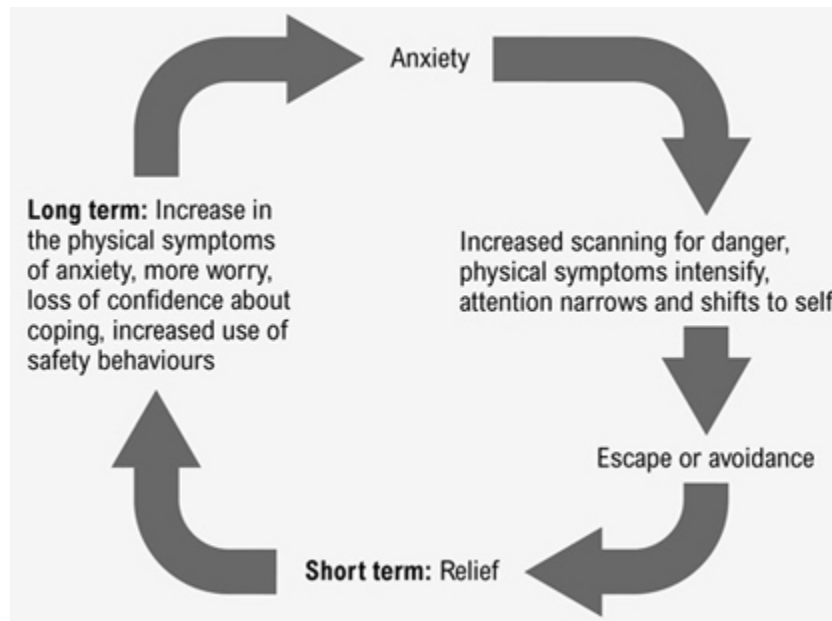
Fortunately, something clicked and this choice became very clearly the wrong one as the author watched the first and second place runners finish the race. They both finished having totally expended all energy and giving their best effort. The author knew in that moment that despite the anxiety, he would have felt a lot better had he done his best, just as the other two runners had done. This path of lower performance levels and trying to sustain that level by not trying was not going to solve the internal wrestle with managing anxiety. That anxiety had to be dealt with in another way. Choosing to quit, run away, not try, and play victim to both the circumstance and personal feelings was not the path to success.

Avoiding anxiety from failure may immediately decrease anxiety levels, but over time it increases anxiety and compounds the issues derived from unresolved failures

(Centre for Clinical Interventions, 2023). Figures 3 and 4 depict the anxiety avoidance cycle, mentioned in the previous example, and how to fix-it. Figure 3 shows how avoiding anxiety provides short term relief, but in the long-term increases anxiety and lowers self-confidence to cope with the anxiety inducing situation.

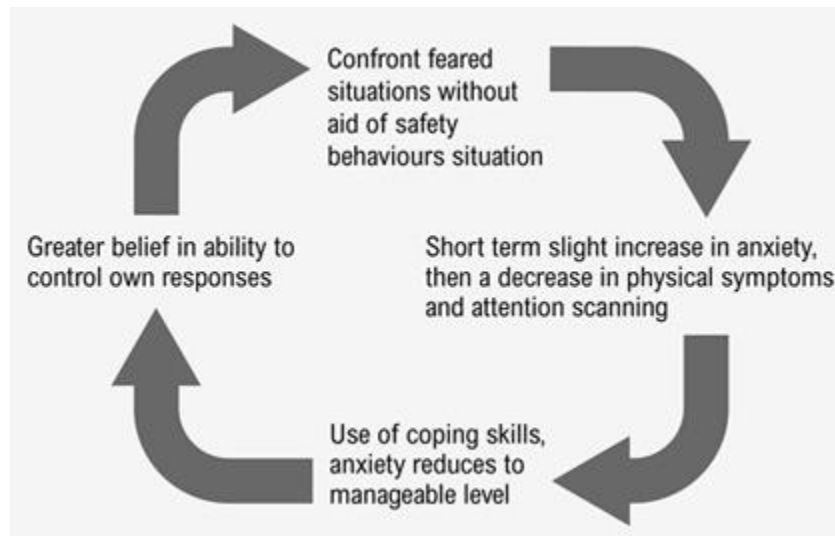
### Figure 3

#### *The Vicious Cycle of Anxiety*



Note. Figure 3 is taken from the Centre for Clinical Interventions (2023).

Figure 4 shows that the solution to moments of anxiety is not running from it or placing blame on others, but rather to confront it, which initially increases anxiety, but in the long term reduces anxiety and improves self-confidence to cope with anxiety inducing situations.

**Figure 4***Reversing the Vicious Cycle of Anxiety*

Note. Figure 4 is taken from the Centre for Clinical Interventions (2023).

Responding to anxiety or failure is like a muscle. The more it is worked out the stronger it will become, the less it is worked out the weaker it will become. An underdeveloped or weaker ability to cope with anxiety incurs future compounding problems that will not go away. The only solution is to break the anxiety avoidance cycle by addressing anxiety and working through it. Many who sustain a lower level of performance after a failure struggle to face the anxiety of their situation because of various reasons, including not taking the time to learn and apply lessons learned in future attempts, giving up, lacking grit, not understanding their purpose or the purpose of the failure, and not persevering or persisting in the face of anxious situations (Allen, 2022; Duckworth, 2016). Ultimately, they do not turn and face their failure, but run from it in some form or fashion, hoping that the anxiety of the failure will be diminished or eventually extinguished. These and other reasons for sustained failure will be explored further later in this chapter.

**Path Two: Return to Normal Levels of Performance**

Next is the middle path of failure recovery, or a return to normal levels of performance. The author played college football for four different universities. The University of Sioux Falls, Colorado State University, Snow College, and Weber State University. Each school had good coaches, good players, and good teams. During that time the teams played for three different National Championship games. In each of those games each team came up as losers, not achieving the goal that had been worked for all year. The first game was lost 42 to 28, the second was lost in double overtime at 38 to 31, and the last was lost 10 to 7 on a last second field goal. Each of the first two losses were painful and gave the author the opportunity to learn. Each of these failures were responded to in the best way known to the author, coaches, and supporting family and friends. In general, there was a willingness to turn and face the failure and respond by striving to maintain balance and perspective, learn lessons that could be applied going forward, identify areas to improve, but mainly move on from it quickly and get back to work. The hope with this type of response was that the hard work would get the team back to the national championship and produce a different outcome, one that ended in a win. While moving on quickly and working hard led to a lot of success that was enjoyed, it did not result in a different outcome from a win or loss perspective in the national championship game the following year. The teams were largely able to get back to normal levels of performance through quickly moving on, maintaining confidence, having purpose and persevering with grit and determination (Duckworth, 2016). They successfully got past the lowest level of failure recovery and avoided falling into a sustained lack of performance hole by not giving up, running away, or playing the victim.

These teams turned toward the failure and used it to stoke the fire that fueled the hard work. However, these teams were not able to achieve the highest level of failure recovery, which actually improves performance after failure. Granted, it could be argued that had they played a lesser opponent or had they played better on that particular day, they could have achieved a different result. However, for the sake of this research, performance was not improved enough to achieve a different result in the national championship game and therefore those teams returned to normal levels of performance.

Learning to lean into failures and face them head on, even if knowing what to do from there is not understood yet, is a big step in the right direction. It is also the difference between the first level of failure response and the higher levels. The first level sustains lower performance levels largely due to not facing the failure and running from it, while returning to normal levels of performance are largely accomplished by simply turning and facing the failure. Looking at the intelligence and different reaction of buffalo and cows in a moment of crisis can help to illustrate this point further (Cohen, 2022). Colorado is one of the only places in the world where buffalo and cows coexist. Most storms in Colorado roll from the west toward the east. As storms in Colorado form, cows can sense the storm coming and will begin running east, away from the storm. The only problem is that cows are not particularly fast animals, and the storm eventually catches up to them. Since the cow does not know any better, it continues trying to outrun the storm, effectively maximizing the time, pain, and frustration they experience from the storm. Cows, like those avoiding an anxious situation, only maximize the time, pain, and frustration they will experience from that anxiety inducing situation (Centre for Clinical Interventions, 2023). Buffalo on the other hand do something rather unique in the animal

kingdom. Buffalo will wait for the storm to crest over the mountaintop and then as the storm rolls over the ridge they will turn and charge directly into the storm. They run at the storm, and by doing so, they run through the storm in minimal time thus minimizing the pain, time, and frustration they experience from that particular storm. Turning and facing the storm, being willing to work on weaknesses and grit through the pain of failure even if not done so with the intelligence required to improve performance will at the very least return the performer to normal levels of performance. It also limits the pain and anxiety associated with failure because it gets them through the storm of failure more quickly than running from it.

### **Path Three: Improved Performance**

The third and final national championship loss experienced by the author was different than the previous two failures in that it did not provide an opportunity to move on quickly and get back to working hard for another national championship run. The career was over and there would not be another opportunity as a player again. This most recent failure was different and felt as if the pain from all of the other failures accumulated into one heavy and excruciating failure that weighed the author down in a way that was not easily shaken. The pain of this type of failure is only understood within the quiet confines of a mind who has known losing an opportunity not just temporarily, but forever. This kind of pain weighed on the mind in a way that previously had not been as recognizably felt. Although painful, this failure seemed to proffer a different kind of encouragement to find a path after failure not pursued in the past. The path leading to lower levels of performance and leading to a return to normal levels of performance were understood. The path that leveraged failure for improved performance was not fully

understood, or at least the words needed to articulate the path to higher levels of performance after failure were not yet a fluent language. Nonetheless the three paths of failure recovery were more recognizable now than ever before. The path that would pull ahead of previous performance levels (improved performance), the one that would lag behind personal potential but stay alive (normal performance), and the one that would lead to progression death were evident (lower performance) (Collins & Porras, 2011). The desire to face the failure with a greater willingness to look around every corner and turn over every rock was more prevalent now than ever before due to an attitude of die or become better (Goodwin, 2019). Since death was not an option, improving performance was the only path left to quench the pain that was burning inside. Running from the failure and simply working harder were no longer good enough reactions because their end result would not produce improved performance. This higher path required a different reaction. One that would seek this time to learn once and for all what needed to be learned to alleviate the pain. Although another national championship game could not be played, the mistakes of these failures did not need to be repeated in other endeavors ever again. It was better to let it hurt and learn in a more meaningful way once and for all than to set up emotional walls that stymied the pain and its potential force for future success. So, the failure was leaned into in a way that had not been done before. Leaning into this failure in a more deliberate and thorough fashion helped to remove anxiety and fostered an environment for true learning and improved intelligence as it related to failure recovery. One that was void of fear and possessed a deeper humility, honesty, and willingness to learn. The principles learned and further clarified by current literature will be explored later, but much of the failure intelligence developed at this time came from a

deep and unshakeable feeling that the failures happened for specific and purposeful reasons. Reasons that would influence self and others in deeply meaningful ways, significantly helping them in times ahead.

Shortly after this last national championship loss, the author began coaching primarily Quarterbacks in college for about 10 years, where many of the freshly learned lessons and failure recovery principles could be applied and taught to the next generation. During this time there was much success garnered from these failure recovery principles including multiple successful Conference Championship teams, All-Conference Quarterbacks, All-American Quarterbacks, National Player of the Year nominees, NFL prospects, and NFL players that were recruited out of high school or coached in college by the author. Some of the specific lessons passed on to current performers that helped them leverage failures for higher levels of performance throughout their career were predicated on the willingness of the leader to engage with failure in a way that he could personally know and understand himself. It is difficult to encourage in others what the leader has no experience with. That does not mean the leader has to possess the skills to perform a task, but they need to know the details of what caused the failure and have the right attitude and reaction that unlocks the potential for success that is contained within every failure for themselves and their teams. Some lessons that helped these teams and performers play at improving levels were things, like deciding beforehand to win. Be honest, humble and do not make excuses. Embrace failure, push the envelope, and make mistakes. Face failure head on so it can be used as a tool for learning as opposed to an obstruction impeding progress. Face fears by talking about them so they do not control you. Players should know that if they are not enough without the win, then they will



never be enough with it. If accolades and awards are needed to feel whole, then individuals approach situations with fear rather than confidence. Even if they achieve the award, it would not be enough to make them whole. They have to accept themselves and know they were enough beforehand. Embrace the good, the bad, the ugly that forged who they are, it all has purpose. Each person has every tool needed of them to fulfill their life's mission and purpose. Wanting to win is not a problem, but wanting to win because it is fun and not because it is needed to prove something to self. Finally, a lot more can be known about someone after an interception than before one. While each of these were helpful to players and led to higher levels of intelligence, discovering them were only products of a process that the leader and team were going through after moments of difficulty or failure. It was not so much about those lessons as it was about the process that produced those helpful lessons. Having a good and well-defined process then is more critical than the lessons themselves.

Brown, a successful military leader and prominent clergyman demonstrates some of his beliefs and processes for leveraging failure for improved performance using a couple of stories from his personal life (Brown, 2022). Brown earlier in life had purchased a dilapidated farm. On his land was a currant bush that had grown to over six feet high and had no sign of a blossom or fruit. Having some experience pruning trees, he went to work and clipped and cut until there was nothing left but a little clump of stumps. Noticing the sap from the freshly cut branches Brown said out loud, "what's the matter, currant bush? What are you crying about?" (Brown, 2022, para. 46). He knew this was ridiculous to talk to a plant, but after asking he envisioned the currant bush speaking back to him saying,

How could you do this to me? I was making such wonderful growth. I was almost as large as the fruit tree and the shade tree, and now you have cut me down. And all in the garden will look upon me with contempt and pity. How could you do it? I thought you were the gardener here? (Brown, 2022, para. 47)

Brown answered back,

Look, little currant bush, I am the gardener here, and I know what I want you to be. If I let you go the way you want to go, you will never amount to anything. But someday, when you are laden with fruit, you are going to think back and say, 'Thank you, Mr. Gardener, for cutting me down, for loving me enough to hurt me' (Brown, 2022, para. 49).

Ten years later in life Brown was cut down like the currant bush when he was denied a promotion in the military that he had worked for his entire career. After being notified in person he took a long train back to base and fell to his knees and cried out in frustration and anger toward God. As he did so, a voice entered his mind, it was his own voice from years before saying, "Look, little currant bush, I am the gardener here, and I know what I want you to be" (Brown, 2022, para. 58). He explains that his anger and bitterness went out of his soul. He ended up responding to his very difficult failure with a stronger willingness to learn, honesty and humility, greater faith in future success, stronger perseverance, and a greater understanding of his purpose in life and the purpose of this failure. All of which are elements that lead to positive performance in the future (Duckworth, 2016; Murphy & Duke, 2011). He went on to explain that his chosen reaction to this failure charted a course in his life to much higher levels of performance and living than he thought possible at the time. He effectively leveraged his failure for

higher levels of performance in the future and greater success throughout his life; success that was much more than he thought he could achieve.

### **Historical Examples of Failure Recovery and Improved Performance**

This idea of embracing failure to overcome and improve performance has existed throughout all of history, but the basic lessons are many times forgotten as each new generation or conquering civilization believes that they will successfully endure forever. However, there are fragments of these lessons learned and passed on throughout history through codes, beliefs, symbols, and technology that represent leveraging failure for improved performance. The oldest civilizations known to man Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, ancient India, ancient China, ancient Peru, and ancient Mesoamerica all stand with examples of learning lessons from failure, and improving performance (Kennedy, 2022). Sun Tzu is famous for lessons learned from the successes and failures of war throughout Ancient Chinese history (Giles, 2023; Kennedy, 2022). Egypt's pyramids still stand today as a symbol of success that was gained from leveraging failures that taught them how to construct such magnificent structures. Mesopotamian civilization learned much from the ups and downs of constructing the first urban cities. Ancient India learned enough lessons probably through much failure to develop some of the earliest and very sophisticated city grid structures complete with drainage, sewage, and water supply systems. There were enough negative experiences with roads that Peru developed paved roads on rugged terrain connecting towns. While ancient Mesoamerica benefited from fertile farmlands, they carried the burden of learning and developing agricultural advancements that could leverage corn, beans, vanilla, avocado, peppers, squashes, and cotton into becoming the important crops that they were. The idea of improvement from failure or redemption after

failure was even part of ancient mythology. Ancient Greece and ancient Egypt believed in a mythical bird, known as the Phoenix (Sundstrom, 2023). This mythical bird was a magnificent creature that symbolized renewal and rebirth. According to legend each Phoenix would live for 500 years and at the close of their life would burn up into ash. From that ash the Phoenix would rise anew, being born from the very ashes of their terminated or failed life. This concept of rebirth after failure symbolized by the mighty Phoenix has such a stronghold in the hearts and minds of people that it has persisted in books, movies, and lives of people today. Part of its popularity is due to the obviously understandable language of symbolism that transcends differences in dialects. Also, because the message is relatable to every human being throughout the ages who has felt the pain of failure and the desire for redemption.

Modern day examples are more familiar, one of which is Elon Musk and his rocket ships which came after devastating failures that almost never got off the ground and threatened to ruin him financially (Chang, 2023). Before Musk's Space X company launched, he had enough money for three rocket launches to prove out their efficacy and secure grants that would ensure their continued existence. All three rockets failed. Rather than giving up, Musk was able to scrape together enough investment for a fourth launch which did succeed and secured a future for his company and employees. In April of this year, they suffered another failed launch as they attempted to launch the largest rocket in history into space. Though the team was disappointed, their attitudes were that of gratitude for the lessons they were able to learn from that failed launch. They have learned how valuable failure can be and remained focused on the success of the future that they believe will come because of what was learned from this and other failures of

the past. Their company mantra is essentially, “fail fast, but learn faster” (Chang, 2023, para. 27). They do not just fail fast without taking the time to pause, reflect, and learn. They understand the importance of each failure and look at it head on, looking for every possible lesson they could learn. Musk and the approach of his team as it pertains to failure is different than most typical aerospace companies, who try to anticipate and prevent as many failures as possible ahead of time. While this seems like a good approach, it takes more time, leads to overdesign of vehicles, and ultimately leads to less getting done. Musk’s teams, by embracing failure as a companion to success have leveraged the power of failure for higher levels of performance than could have existed before the failure occurred. Stated another way, they do not just shy away from failure, but they have learned the balance of pressing enough limits and taking enough risk to tap into the power for success that lies in failure. Figure 5 depicts the evolution of rocket progression throughout history and stands as a witness of critical lessons that were learned through effective failure recovery processes (Wallach, 2021). Processes that resulted in continually improved size, capacity, and performance.

Figure 5



Note. This shows the progression of rockets throughout history and is a visual example of the lessons learned through failure that improve performance in the future. This figure is taken from Wallach (2021).

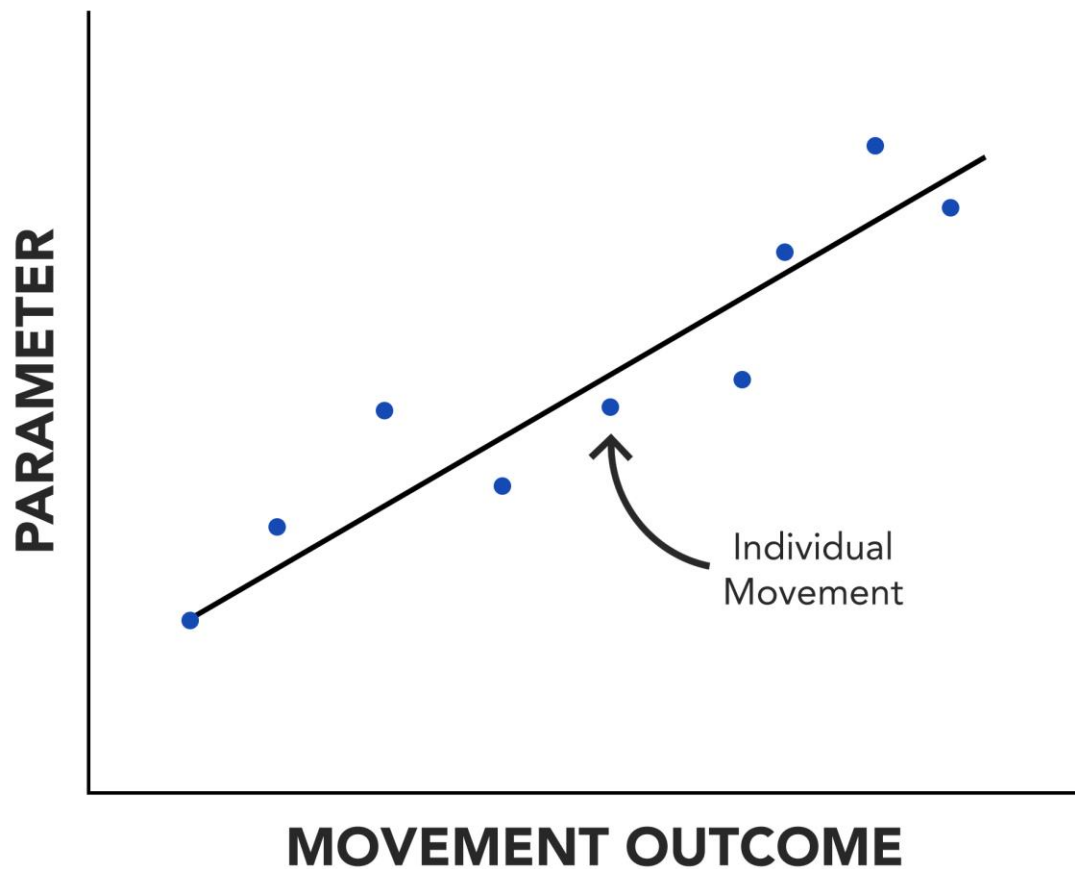
This idea of removing the fear of failure and harvesting the lessons that can only be gained from pressing and stretching the limits are similarly depicted in other fields, including the field of bio-mechanics.

Perhaps one of the earliest examples in history of failure recovery, and most relatable to all human beings is that of bio-mechanics. Most human beings can relate with watching a baby learn how to correctly use their new body, or trying to master certain bio-mechanic movements themselves. Schema theory, as applied by Schmidt in bio-mechanics for motor skill learning, supports the need for failure to leverage success and improved levels of performance in movement (Arbib, 1992). Schema theory indicates how complex functional movements of limb and body, like throwing a ball, are learned best through variable practice (allowing for movement error) versus controlled practice (replicating only the correct movement) (Schmidt, 1988). In Schema Theory, when an athlete is trying to learn the proper way to throw a football, or swing a golf club, or pace themselves in mile, it can be beneficial to feel what it is like to do it wrong. This has been seen to be especially true in children. As a child begins establishing functionality in their legs and in their arms they go through a process of establishing what is referred to in Adam's theory as perceptual trace. Perceptual trace being the right trace/movement of the arm or leg to produce the desired outcome. Schema theory holds that the more variable movements made and the more allowed an individual is to make mistakes, the more readily they will be able to establish the linear line that is in between each

trace/movement of the limb that ultimately establishes the proper perceptual trace. See figure 6, redrawn by the researcher, depicting this process.

**Figure 6**

*Movement Outcomes*

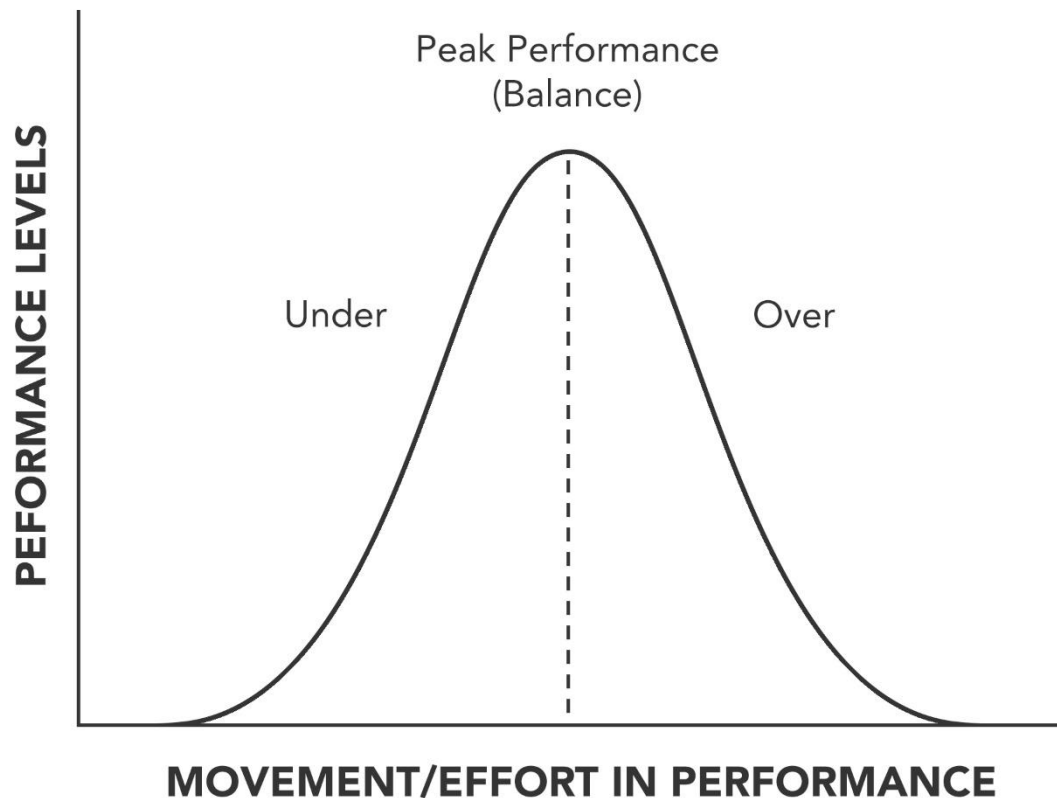


Note. As adapted from Schmidt (1988, p. 484).

As can be seen in figure 6, the more variable the points the more quickly the learner can establish perceptual trace or the correct path needed to produce a certain linear movement. As is evident, the correctly learned trace and improved performance over time comes through variable failures, according to Schema Theory.

Figure 7 also helps to understand this connection between failed or variable movements and their ability to produce successful or peak performance.



**Figure 7***Finding Peak Performance*

Note. Peak performance is at the top of the bell curve and perfectly in between movement/effort that is not enough (under) or too much (over).

The highest levels of success exist somewhere in the area of balance between exerting movement that is under, as well as over doing it. Some athletes, or learners of any kind, are afraid of the failure that comes on the other side of that perfect line of balance that achieves peak performance, so they play it safe and try to always stay at the side they are most comfortable with. One big problem with that is one cannot know what balance is without knowing what failure on both sides feels like. Piaget (1971) says that any piece of knowledge is connected to an action and knowing different actions allows the learner to assimilate the various schema/actions into consequences that make the

learner knowledgeable about how to produce a certain desired outcome. It is the assimilation or construction of the various schema in the mind of the learner that allows them to produce their desired outcome. Imagine a gymnast who cannot swim, practicing on a balance beam right next to a pool of water. Falling to one side means falling onto a mat. On the other side means drowning. The gymnast has such a fear of falling into water that she is constantly leaning to the mat side. This imbalance ends up pushing her away from balance and peak performance. It keeps her from gaining the schema from failure on the pool side that is necessary for her to assimilate various schemas in a way that establishes balance and peak performance. If the water is removed and there are mats on both sides, or if she could somehow overcome her fear of falling into the water, then the gymnast would not be afraid to fall on either side of the balance beam and will more quickly learn balance and establish peak performance. Typically, the pools of life cannot be removed and performers must face their fears to learn balance and establish peak performance. So many learners over or under exert themselves because of the fear of failure that exists on the other unfamiliar side of their own balance beams.

This can also be seen with a golfer who on the over-exertion side swings the club too hard and because of that slices the ball off the fairway. It is still playable and what they are most comfortable with so they keep repeating that same movement. They do not risk exerting less effort which could correct the slice and keep it on the fairway, because they fear not hitting it as far. On the under-exertion side another golfer may want to stay in the fairway so much that they do not swing hard because of the risk of slicing the ball off the fairway. What both golfers do not realize is that if they were willing to fail in the area that they are uncomfortable with, they would more readily recognize what both sides

feel like and more quickly establish a proper balance that would put the ball in the fairway at a further distance. Piaget says this type of learning through schema applies to all sorts of things, whether that be reflexive schemas through eye-hand coordination of a child as discussed earlier, or schemas for language and abstract thought (as cited in Arbib, 1992). Finding balance through variable failures and learning through experiences with schema can be applied to various actions and industries. It is what a singer experiences when trying to hit a note on key but with forte; a Doctor who utilizes a new procedure while staying true to the safe practices of the past; and a teacher, who utilizes a minute-to-minute agenda for each class versus coming with a few bullet points and allowing discussion to lead the learning. Connecting this to all human beings is the process of establishing healthy levels of contentment by allowing self to feel both happiness and sadness. The proper balance for contentment and performance cannot be established without knowing both sides of the balance. Accepting this helps to remove fears and embrace failure as a necessary companion to establishing the balance that leads to optimum levels of happiness, performance, and success. This acceptance and leveraging of failure for improved performance has aided the lives of various individuals, industries, and societies throughout all of history.

### **Current Literature and Redemptive Intelligence**

When Edison was asked about his failures that led to the invention of the light bulb he replied, “I’ve not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work” (Edison Innovation Foundation, 2023, para. 1). Edison, who stands in history as a prominent figure of success, understood the importance and value of failure. Each perceived failure in his attempts in creating the light bulb was not really a failure to Edison. Each failure

taught him a valuable lesson that ultimately led to success for himself personally and for all of humanity. Why though did he persist when so many others would have given up? What was the importance of failure to his eventual success? What characteristics did he possess that helped him take actions after failure that helped him reach higher levels of performance as opposed to remaining where he was or becoming worse from his failures? These are some of the questions that were explored and answered as a part of this study. Successful individuals like Edison understand the benefits of failure, but society tends to spend more time talking about and focusing on success in spite of this truth. Addressing things like what failure is, how to handle failure in a healthy way, and what actions could be taken after a failure that will foster development and growth are typically avoided by many organizations. For some, failure is too hard to confront head on or it is just not as fun to talk about. Some even struggle to recognize failure when it happens. Maybe certain individuals do not focus on it because they feel that the image of failure is so grotesque and the effects so infectious that if focused on too much, it would seep in and slowly deteriorate every other area of a person's life? The reasons and questions around failure are varied but the importance of this study and its applicability can be summed up by considering one question in particular. Do people experience failure or success more often? Regardless of how each individual answers that question, it does not take long to recognize that failure is a companion to all and has as big or an even bigger impact on the mind, heart, emotions, and even body of human beings than success does (Loscalzo, 2014; Young 2019). There is not a human soul that will escape this life without experiencing some sort of failure. So why is it that with an overwhelming majority of

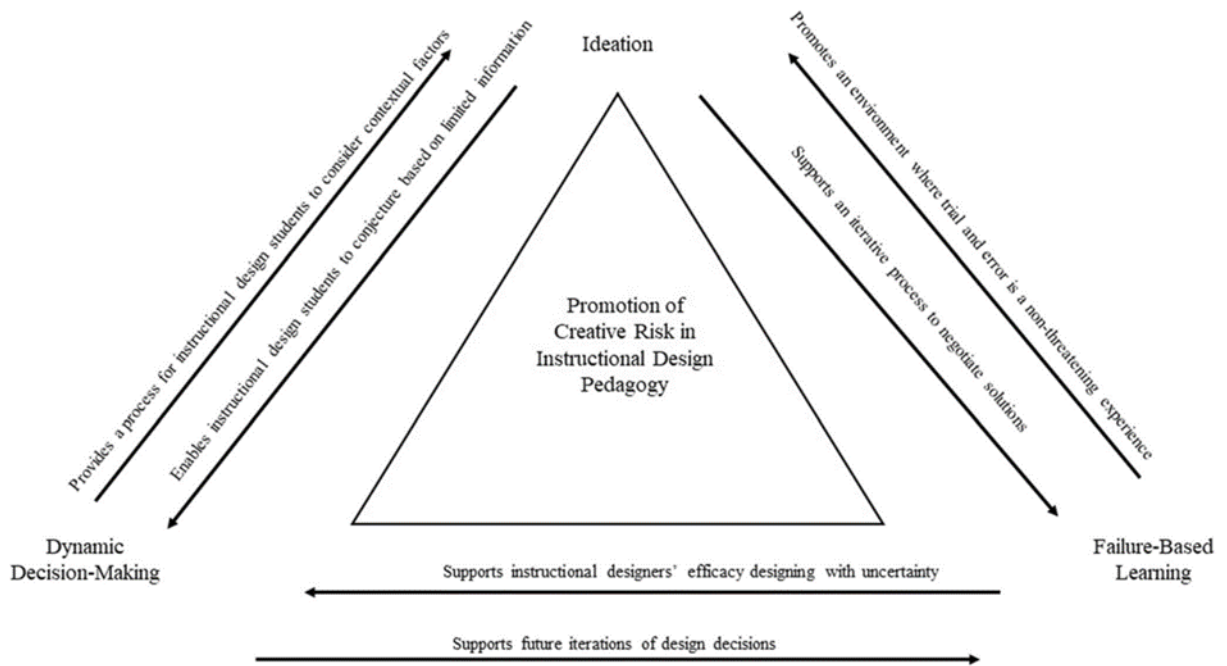
people experiencing failure, there seems to be an inundation of information, focus, and celebration of success and a tactful avoidance of failure?

Edmondson explains it is “because examining our failures in depth is emotionally unpleasant and can chip away at our self-esteem. Left to our own devices, most of us will speed through or avoid failure analysis altogether” (Edmondson, 2011, para. 29). She goes on to explain, “another reason is that analyzing organizational failures requires inquiry and openness, patience, and a tolerance for causal ambiguity. Yet managers typically admire and are rewarded for decisiveness, efficiency, and action—not thoughtful reflection” (Edmondson, 2011, para. 29). Edmondson’s research has shown that failure analysis is often limited and ineffective in organizations, even in complex organizations like hospitals where lives are at stake. She cites that the New England Journal of Medicine has found that despite dozens of years of heightened awareness that medical errors cause thousands of deaths each year, things have not gotten better. Edmondson suggests that it is because of their inability to identify, analyze, and learn from failure in a way that corrects processes and ensures improvement. She also points out that,

The challenge is more than emotional; it’s cognitive, too. Even without meaning to, we all favor evidence that supports our existing beliefs rather than alternative explanations. We also tend to downplay our responsibility and place undue blame on external or situational factors when we fail, only to do the reverse when assessing the failures of others—a psychological trap known as fundamental attribution error. (Edmondson, 2011, para. 30)

Gavett and Stefaniak also connect the importance of proper failure recovery processes as the doorway to improved performance levels and greater success, both individually and organizationally (Gavett, 2014; Stefaniak, 2021).

Gavett (2014), like Edmondson (2011), connects failure to success in what she refers to as ambiguity of responsibility. Ambiguity of responsibility being similar to fundamental attribution error in that failure is hard to leverage because people struggle to take full responsibility or extreme ownership of the failure and thus miss out on the lessons for development and the opportunity for greater performance (Willink & Babin, 2018; Gavett, 2014). Gavett in her studies cites multiple controlled experiments where groups made different levels of improvement after failure because of how they reacted to the failure. Stefaniak (2021) in her studies of instructional designers identifies that because they deal with a great deal of ambiguity in their daily efforts, they need to be willing to take creative risks. Specifically, they need failure-based learning as one of their three critical pillars, alongside ideation and dynamic decision-making, to generate successful instructional designs. See figure 8 for how the three connect and ultimately lead to greater success (Stefaniak, 2021). If any of the three are missing then creative risk will not be taken and successful design will be more difficult to achieve.

**Figure 8***Failure-Based Learning Pedagogy*

Note. A framework to promote creative risk through failure-based learning in instructional design pedagogy (Stefaniak, 2021).

In particular, Stefaniak points out how critical it is to create an environment where failure is embraced by providing an iterative process of negotiating solutions, as well as promoting an environment where trial and error is a non-threatening experience for the individual. She notes how important it is to revisit decisions, prototype different solutions, engage in reflective practices and learn from mistakes to ultimately achieve success. (Gartmeier et al., 2010; Kapur, 2008; Lorch Jr. et al., 2010; Stefaniak, 2021). She also refers to Tawfik et al. (2015) who presents four design guidelines for success and each of them involve an approach to failure as a key ingredient for high levels of performance and success. Tawfik's first rule for successful instructional designers is to allow learners to identify failure. Second, design learning environments to intentionally

encounter failure. Third, Support inquiry into failure for analogical transfer. Lastly, support solution generation to resolve failures. So, not only have they identified failure as an element they need to be able to handle, they have specifically designed their learning environments to encounter failure. They have done this because they know that it leads to high levels of learning and performance if the instructional designer possesses the intelligence or willingness to learn from failure. Each of these researchers serve as further witness that healthy views on failure, as well as effective failure recovery processes, are an important topic to engage with in order to improve performance levels and achieve greater success both individually and as teams.

Zhou et al. (2020) also support the importance of creating environments to learn from failure in a way that can be leveraged for improved performance. Like Stefaniak (2021), Zhou et al. connects this notion of openness to embracing and learning from failures by describing the importance of benevolent leadership in organizations for individual and organizational success. Benevolent leadership being the idea that a leader fosters an environment where employees are not afraid to take risks that might result in failure as long as they try to learn from it and improve upon it. It is the type of environment where an employee would feel confident to take a risk and be willing to go talk with a supervisor about their efforts, whether they failed or succeeded. Like Duckworth (2016) in her book *Grit*, Zhou et al. (2020) recognizes that this is not the only important factor, individual intrinsic motivation is also important in learning from failures. Duckworth points out how important someone's passion for what they are pursuing is to their ability to face and overcome failures. Zhou et al. agree that intrinsic motivation is critical and points to that and benevolent leadership as the key ingredients



for recovering from failure in healthy ways. The combination of which will allow an individual and team to leverage failure for greater performance and success individually and organizationally. Ultimately, it is true that failure can be difficult to talk about, but it becomes a lot less difficult and a more encouraging natural phenomenon that all human beings experience, the more it is addressed head on by leaders who are intrinsically motivated to learn from it without fear. Additionally, more can be learned from failure when leaders can talk about it using language that is understood by themselves and their teams. If individuals, teams, and societies can take these conversations about failure and turn them into a more formal process for learning using common and understandable language then the more equipped leaders, teams, and societies will be to leverage the failures that come their way and improve performance. This is where the gap in literature lies.

The gap in literature addressing failure recovery is not because people are unwilling to talk about it, but rather it comes from not having common language around a simple enough solution to remedy what is a common phenomenon that all human beings from various backgrounds experience. Therefore, the conversations needing to happen that address failure are not happening even though failure is being experienced by everyone to some degree. Failure hits individuals in a variety of ways and the improper response to those variety of failures may manifest themselves differently. One of the ways improper failure recovery practices manifest themselves, that is proof of this gap in literature, was mentioned earlier. Various articles identify mental health as a growing concern in society and link mental health issues to various types of failures including student failures on university campuses, failures due to natural calamities, economic and

physical failure from global pandemics, socioeconomic disparity and failure to achieve proper care for healthy recovery due to rising mental health costs, awarding more trophies to avoid the concept of failure, and failure due to technology abuse are just a few (Asugeni et al., 2015; Holmes et al., 2020; Kay, 2010; Linder et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2017; Young, 2019). The specific connection between mental health and failure is not the exact point of this study, but the increasing proof that there exists a gap in society for handling failure in healthy ways is the point (American Psychological Association, 2020; Mental Illness, 2019; Sapient Labs, 2023). The problem with the current literature is that it is so varied that it becomes difficult to teach one common and consistent theme that can be easily understood by the masses in a way that transcends nationality, socioeconomic background, technology equality, healthcare access, and scholastic equality, etc. Due to this inability to communicate using terms that are easily understood, there exists a gap that is causing real problems for teams and leaders everywhere and adding to unnecessary mental strain for people everywhere. Leaders and teams would be much better off with some kind of formal process or common terms of language to help them learn how to leverage failure appropriately, as opposed to the current happenstance approach that most hospitals, universities, teams, music halls, and laboratories currently follow.

As stated earlier, Edmondson (2011) mentioned how a team of doctors working at a hospital continually failed to improve their performance and a high number of lives continues to be lost because of the team's and leadership's inability to leverage failure for improved performance. If these doctors would have spent a semester of their formal education learning about failure recovery processes and leveraging failure for future success, then ultimately some of the lives that were lost in her example would most likely

be alive today. It is not necessarily the fault of the hospital leadership or the individual doctors. There is no formal system or process in education for everyone to learn proper and basic failure recovery practices. While specific courses on healthy failure recovery processes may be available at some universities like Harvard, they are not commonly available in primary, middle, secondary, or postsecondary educational institutions (Babineaux & Krumboltz, 2013). In fact, Loscalzo (2014) argues that contemporary American education has evolved to minimize that students can fail – a course, a grade, a test, or a program. He explains that educational institutions have maintained the mantra of preserving a student's self-esteem at all costs. He admits there has been some advantage, as there are some students who are severely defeated by even the most modest of failures. However, ultimately he cautions the incessant desire of parents, instructors, and administrators to remove failure and critical feedback, as doing so will continue creating the self-affirming culture of narcissism among many students today. So, in educational institutions and in society there is work yet to be done in helping more leaders and teams recover from failure in healthy ways. Currently, there do not exist common failure recovery terms and thus common language for talking about failure recovery processes does not exist. Without common language there cannot be good communication, at least not communication that anyone can remember or continue talking about in easily understood and relatable ways to people from various backgrounds. So much of education is focused on teaching people how to be successful in their field of interest, and there is not necessarily anything wrong with that. However, failure and recovering from failure stands to commonly impact individuals from all

ideologies and industries. The topic of failure has a greater impact on a human life than many of the topics discussed in required general education classes ever will.

Currently learning how to leverage failure is left up to the individual. Maybe their teachers or mentors will help them learn how to leverage the inevitable failures that will come, maybe they will not. Doctors, educators, athletes, musicians, scientists, and many others are largely left to themselves to figure out how they can individually, and as teams, learn to leverage failure for improved performance. Again, that does not mean that there are not people talking about it, there just are not enough people speaking the same language when they do talk about it. Words like grit (Duckworth, 2016), fundamental attribution error (Edmondson, 2011), ambiguity of responsibility (Gavett, 2014), extreme ownership (Willink & Babin, 2018), failure-based learning (Stefaniak, 2021), debrief imperative (Murphy & Duke, 2011), fail fast (Babineaux & Krumboltz, 2013), failing forward (Maxwell, 2007), right kind of wrong (Edmondson, 2023) and many others are all excellent and teach similarly helpful principles for recovering from failure. However, people do not remember them or connect them to one another because there is no common term, nor formal process for learning, and no immediately personable connection to an audience of varied backgrounds. So, many will read those phrases and think to themselves, that is a message for losers as opposed to a message for all. Additionally, the frameworks for each of these methods for failure recovery are described differently, sometimes using complex language that is not easily understood. In these frameworks, failures are sometimes described as basic, others complex, and others intelligent. Some of these failures are described as good failure while others are described as bad failure. It can feel difficult to keep track of which is which. While each of these

and other terms and resources will help the honest seeker of knowledge concerning failure in tremendous ways if sought out; for most of the rest of the population that is not going out of their way to learn how to leverage failure for higher levels of performance individually or as a team, their potential impact for good misses the mark. It is missed not because the message is not good or helpful, it is missed in large part because of a lack of ability to communicate with the masses from varied backgrounds in a simply understood and consistent manner, utilizing common language.

Fortunately, the solution for this problem has already been modeled in the recent past by Salovey and Mayer who first came up with the phrase and framework for Emotional Intelligence in 1990 (as cited in McCleskey, 2014). While the idea of emotional intelligence existed long before 1990, Salovey and Mayer's work was important in that it helped introduce common language that people could refer to and understand at first glance. They essentially created language, language that allowed people to engage in conversation around the topic of emotional intelligence. These conversations helped societies to become more conscientious about their levels of emotional intelligence. That conscientiousness allowed for reflection and then improvements to be made. There has been much popularization and thus the misuse of the term Emotional Intelligence, but the benefits have far outweighed the negatives. Salovey and Mayer's efforts to establish common language around a topic has catapulted leaders and teams forward in their ability to understand, connect to, and utilize a concept that always offered power but remained largely untapped because of language barriers. Emotional intelligence is the capacity to perceive and assimilate emotion-related feelings, then understand the information of those emotions and feelings, and ultimately manage

them (Mayer, 2006). Since 1998 there have been too many peer-reviewed articles on the topic to enumerate and thus some occasional drift has occurred, but most importantly establishing the term allowed four major things to occur. First it established that there is a right and a wrong way to handle emotions, or at the very least there is a more intelligent and less intelligent way to handle them. Second it provided the word emotion, which is a relatively easy word to understand, or is at least a simple enough word for someone close to the learner to understand and explain. It also causes the learner to take some ownership by investing minimal time to understand how the word emotion is used in the context of emotional intelligence, but that investment of time is quickly rewarded with an easily gained understanding as well as a personal connection to the word emotion. All human beings experience emotion, it is a relatable concept to everyone. Third, because of its connection to intelligence it provides incentive for people to pause and reflect on their own emotional intelligence level. Most individuals are naturally curious about their own intelligence or abilities and have taken time to pause and consider their own abilities/intelligence, sometimes in relation to others around them. This conceptual connection to intelligence infers that there are different levels of emotional intelligence and that each person falls somewhere on that figurative intelligence scale as it pertains to emotion. That concept provides incentive and some encouragement for people to consider their level of emotional intelligence and how they can improve upon it. Fourth, it provided a framework for what the phrase meant. This last point is less important in its impact on developing a more informed society with emotionally intelligent leaders and teams. Most that are currently benefitting from the concept of emotional intelligence do not understand the exact emotional intelligence framework and could not explain it if

asked, but the easily understandable phrase provides an opportunity for conversation and reflection which leads to learning and development. The phrase emotional intelligence established common language which allowed for learning through personal and team reflection to take place.

The encouragement that the simple term emotional intelligence provides to teams and leaders to take time for reflection is one of the core reasons emotional intelligence was so impactful. Reflection leads to learning and development according to reflective learning theory and is also an important aspect of experiential learning theory (Moon, 2013; Sugerman et al., 2000) Also, “Reflection leads to growth of the individual – morally, personally, psychologically, and emotionally, as well as cognitively” (Edith Cowan University, 2021, para. 3). It is very difficult to learn about emotions, failure, or anything for that matter without reflection. Reflection is critical to learning and is critical to development. “Reflection is indicative of deep learning, and where teaching and learning activities such as reflection are missing . . . only surface learning can result” (Edith Cowan University, 2021, para. 2). Therefore, anything that causes reflection has the potential for learning that spurs the learner to make changes to their thought processes, actions, and habits. Similar to emotional intelligence, one solution to the gap in the current literature for failure recovery is to equip leaders and teams with a simple term that guides the process for handling failure recovery in healthy ways that lead to improved performance levels. This can be done by establishing a common term that provides opportunity for individuals and teams to reflect and have conversations about the topic of failure recovery. If the term for failure recovery has a framework, even better, but it is not absolutely necessary for equipping leaders and teams to be successful in

leveraging failure for improved performance levels, just as it was not critical for those benefiting from the concept of emotional intelligence. To be effective this common language term should be specific and relatable in a way that finds access and connection to people from various socioeconomic, cultural, and scholastic backgrounds. In order to achieve a similarly positive effect on leaders and teams that emotional intelligence did, the author recommends the term “redemptive intelligence” be utilized to help in leveraging failure for improved performance levels.

Redemptive intelligence provides the same four components that emotional intelligence does. First redemptive intelligence infers that there is a right and a wrong way to handle failure, or at the very least there is a more intelligent and less intelligent way to handle failure. Second the word redemptive is a relatively easy word to understand or is at least a simple enough word for someone close to the learner to understand and explain. It also causes the learner to take some ownership by investing minimal time to understand how the word redemption is used in the context of redemptive intelligence. That investment of time should be quickly rewarded with an easily gained understanding as well as a personal connection to the word redemption. All human beings experience this concept of redemption. It is a relatable concept to everyone who has ever wished for a different outcome than the one that actually happened. Additionally, redemption is a common word and concept in the world religions that many personally connect with on a deeper level, one related to the purpose of life (Mathew, 2016). Third, because of its connection to intelligence it provides incentive for people to pause and reflect on their own redemptive intelligence level. As stated previously, most individuals are naturally curious about their own intelligence or abilities and have taken



time to pause and consider their own abilities/intelligence, sometimes in relation to others around them. This conceptual connection to intelligence infers that there are different levels of redemptive intelligence and that each person falls somewhere on that figurative intelligence scale as it pertains to their own personal redemptive intelligence. This term provides some natural incentive for individuals to consider on which level of redemptive intelligence they sit and how that level is impacting their daily life. Fourthly, redemptive intelligence can provide a framework of common themes from that of the current literature that exists today. While the research is varied and many different terms are used, most of the current literature seems to agree with four key stages of failure recovery. First it is important to reflect to possibly learn the core lesson. Second, an individual should maintain control of what happens after failure by being humble and honest with themselves. Third, they should grit through the pain of disappointment and lost opportunities with perseverance and finding purpose. Lastly, they should move forward with resolved confidence, also known as faith, that they will forsake and not repeat the exact same mistake twice. Said more briefly the four stages of redemptive intelligence are reflection, control, grit, and faith.

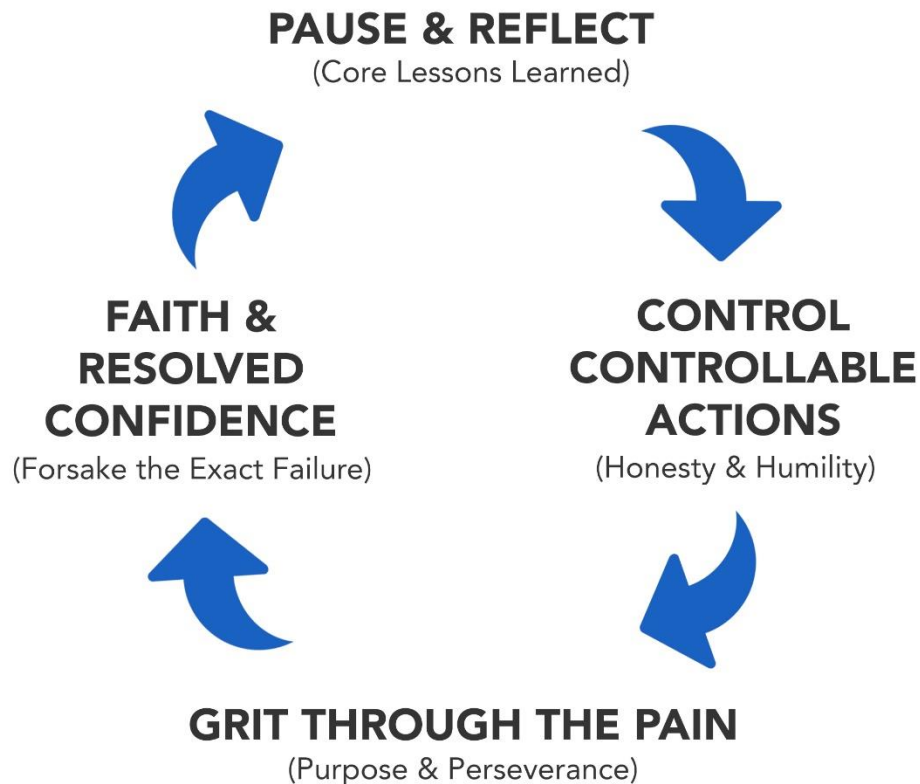
#### **Four Stages of Failure Recovery: Redemptive Intelligence Framework**

There are four common stages of an effectual failure recovery process that include pausing to reflect, taking control through humility and honesty, gritting through with perseverance and purpose, and finally forsaking with faith and resolved confidence. While failure recovery is an important process that all human beings will be challenged with, it is not a perfect, this step then the next step, process and does not need to be viewed in that way. However, skipping any one stage or only half-way executing upon a

stage will impact someone's ability to fully benefit from, and leverage their failure for higher levels of performance. Each stage is interwoven with the others and the better an individual is at fully utilizing one stage, the better they will benefit from the other stages and advance beyond the entire process. See figure 9 for how each stage is connected to one another.

**Figure 9**

*Redemptive Intelligence Cycle: Partially Complete*



If the reflection does not occur or occur well enough to allow for the core lesson to be learned then the opportunity for the individual to be humble and honest with themselves will be limited, as will their opportunity to control their actions that govern which of the three performance paths after failure they will follow. If those stages do not take place appropriately, then the opportunity for grit to persevere while also finding purpose in self

and/or in the failure will be limited. Ultimately, the final stage of moving forward with faith and resolved confidence to forsake and not repeat the exact same failure again will be impacted, because the lesson that needed to be learned to prevent the failure was not adequately learned and internally ingrained within the individual. True confidence that leads to not repeating the mistake will eventually vanish as the same failure is destined to repeat itself. Fortunately, the failure recovery process allows for the individual to try again a second or third or fourth time, always beginning again with reflection. As an individual successfully moves on from repeating the exact same failure, they prove that they have adequately leveraged each stage in the cycle to ultimately improve their performance level. Each time that they do this they move on to the higher levels of failure that can only be known by those who have surpassed failure recovery loops in the past. However, the cycle for each progressive failure and at each higher level of potential performance is governed by the same redemptive intelligence or failure recovery framework. The only way to move on is to master each of the four stages of the cycle as it pertains to that particular failure. If the stages are not adequately mastered resulting in repeating the failure then the individual must remain in that cycle for that specific failure until it is mastered. They are effectually caught in the failure recovery loop seeing little to no improvement with each successive try because learning is not taking place (Allen, 2022).

### **Stage 1: Pause and Reflect**

The old adage encouraging others to try, try again if they do not succeed is not necessarily a surefire predictor of success (Allen, 2022). There needs to be reflection resulting in learning for any improvement to be made. Researchers from Northwestern

University found that those who succeed reflect and identify lessons learned from failures. They then take those lessons and apply them on their next attempt resulting in improvement. Yet there are others on the opposite end of the spectrum who show a very limited or at times no ability to learn from their failures and thus improvement and future success is very limited or even impossible. All good failure recovery begins with pausing to reflect and hopefully learn the root cause or core lesson provided by the failure. The United States Air Force leadership training programs recognize that reflection is critical to learning and learning is critical to improved performance (Murphy & Duke, 2011). They utilize this concept for learning from failures in what they refer to as their flawless execution cycle. All military branches are hyper focused on learning lessons and improving performance, because for them failure can mean the loss of life. Through regular debriefs, which involve reflection for lessons learned, the Air Force has been able to see core lessons learned and improved performance levels. Murphy and Duke, as well as Edmondson (2008) agree that knowledge is key to success and the process for acquiring knowledge demands that reflection start the journey. Truly, the only real failure is the one in which nothing is learned and no new knowledge is gained (Loscalzo, 2014). In addition to other researchers, Loscalzo argues that potential for success can only be tapped into if the individual will first reflect and learn after failure, otherwise the power to improve will not be realized.

It is important while reflection is taking place that the individual does not sum up all actions taken in pursuit of their goal as a success or failure (Allen, 2022). Some of the actions while pursuing a goal may have been successful while others may have been a failure. Failures launching a rocket into space, or throwing an interception, or losing

money on a construction project, or any other number of things big and small typically offer lessons of success as well as failure. Losing the Civil War does not mean that the Battle of Fort Sumter was lost as well. Just because the play was poor overall does not mean that certain scenes or actors were not successful. The same applies to doctors, teachers, athletes, and businesses, etc. There are many actions that should be analyzed distinctly from one another to more readily recognize the core lessons learned from failure that can be leveraged for higher levels of performance. Reflecting effectively enough to identify core lessons requires that the learner dig deeper past the obvious or surface level lessons. In weapons school debriefs in the United States Air Force, amongst other things, students are encouraged to analyze their failures by asking the question why five separate times (Murphy & Duke, 2011). Doing so allows the learner to drill deeper into the core lessons that when applied will change performance levels into success. Edmondson (2022) also reflects on the importance of not moving on too quickly from failures. She cites the importance of taking the time to get past the first reasons and the second and the third even, to ultimately get to the core underlying reason(s) for the failure. Researchers at Northwestern University found in their controlled studies of entrepreneurs, scientists, and terrorists that the ability to reflect and learn of an individual after failure had a much bigger impact on future success than anything else (Allen, 2022). Specifically, they found that those with a below average learning threshold made just as many attempts as those with an above average learning threshold and worked just as hard, but the hard work was fruitless because it failed to incorporate lessons learned from past tries. The below average threshold learners demonstrated less of an ability to reflect adequately enough to arrive at the deeper seeded core lesson that needed to be learned for

improvement to be made. In contrast, the above average threshold learners are more intelligent in the reflection stage, increasing their ability to recognize the core lesson. Doing so starts their journey off on the right foot and allows for increased potential to not get caught in that particular failure recovery loop for longer than is needed to improve performance. They are able to work smarter in that stage, thus allowing them to not have to work harder in the long run, as it relates to improving performance after that particular failure. Those unwilling and maybe unable to effectively reflect after failure are doomed to do as Albert Einstein was once quoted to say, “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results” (Abbasi, 2021, para. 1). The only way out of the loop and upward to improved performance is to start with good reflection. While reflection is critical in setting the stage and starting the journey, it is insufficient without adequately taking control of the situation through honesty and humility.

### **Stage 2: Take Control through Honesty and Humility**

After failure has struck, and the door to learning is opened through reflection, it becomes increasingly important to take control of the situation by identifying controllable actions that going forward can be taken (Murphy & Duke, 2011). The positives of good reflection are that it helps to identify lessons learned and possible courses of action that can be taken to improve performance the next time. However, it does nothing for what has already taken place. Understanding that the past is not controllable, but the future is, is a very important step for everyone in their failure recovery. Murphy and Duke explain that a good debrief allows for three things. First it allows for, “putting the past behind us, learning and growing from it, and moving on” (Murphy & Duke, 2011, p. 26). Second, a

good debrief allows the person to connect cause and effect. They are able to understand why things happened and who and what was responsible. Once they understand this, they can start transitioning into how the who or what can change next time. While the actions of the past are over, the actions of the future are undetermined yet. The third thing a good debrief does is serve as a catalyst for change. Putting the past behind an individual, connecting cause and effect, and changing are only possible through implementing actions that actually make a change. Controlling actions appropriately that make a change are only possible through humility and honesty (Willink & Babin, 2018; Gavett, 2014; Maxwell, 2007).

Willink and Babin (2018) share many stories about the connection between humble ownership, or extreme ownership as they term it, and controlling future actions that lead to improved performance. One of these stories is of a mid-level manager who was upset with his very experienced floor superintendent for not gaining approval to swap out a critical piece of equipment. His actions caused production to shut down for a few days losing thousands of dollars. The mid-level manager's ego was bruised because this particular superintendent did not seem to listen or think much of the manager. Willink and Babin (2018) were able to help the manager understand that he was the one at fault and not the superintendent. Proof being that he obviously did not explain clearly enough why certain critical pieces of equipment had to be approved by him before swapping them out. Had he done so, this situation would have never surfaced. In this challenging moment, the manager had a choice to make, and that choice depended entirely on his willingness to be humble and honest with himself. He could choose to give up control of his future actions by remaining in the emotion of past failures he can no

longer control. He could also decide going forward into the future to continue blaming the superintendent or any other number of things should the failure happen again. With either response the manager would be essentially relinquishing any control over the situation going forward. He would be left as an object to be acted upon as opposed to acting upon objects or the situation. The choice to not take control of future actions by blaming others over self is the quickest and easiest, and it temporarily relieves the pain of the failure. However, it explicitly ensures that control over future levels of performance and their opportunity for improvement rest solely in the hands of the other people or circumstances that are receiving the blame. The anxiety avoidance cycle discussed earlier in this chapter could be something coming to play here when leaders and teams are faced with taking responsibility (Centre for Clinical Interventions, 2023). Addressing anything hard within self or within a team causes anxiety and a natural response for many is to avoid anxiety, but avoiding it will only compound the anxiety.

At times it may be appropriate and the honest thing to place responsibility on others for improved performance, effectively helping them to develop their redemptive intelligence and their ability to face and eliminate anxiety. Not all anxiety needs to be removed by the leader at the top. Allowing for all to be humble and honest eliminates unproductive responses from the team such as excuse making or even manipulation. However, the leader should keep in mind that even if it is right to place responsibility on others, individuals who do not place responsibility on themselves are essentially relinquishing their ability to influence the situation and effectively placing themselves in a helpless and actionless position from having any impact on future actions and therefore future performance. A better move by the leader would be to share responsibility as



opposed to completely removing it from self by placing it on someone else. Accepting responsibility for one's problems and failures regardless of external circumstances or the involvement of others is at the core of overcoming and improving upon failure (Maxwell, 2007). Responsibility for failures that can be reasonably passed to others are what keep most people from leveraging failure for improved performance according to Maxwell (2007) in his book *Failing Forward*. The only antidote for these critical moments of decision is the humility and honesty of the individual. These characteristics allow them to take control of the situation and take control of actions that will allow for improved performance in the future.

### **Stage 3: Grit through with Perseverance and Purpose**

After failure has struck, and the door to learning is opened through reflection, and control has been taken back through honesty and humility, it becomes increasingly important to grit through the mental and emotional ups and downs with a sense of purpose and perseverance (Duckworth, 2016). Duckworth describes this ability to persist in the face of failure and adversity as the number one predictor for success. She refers to this innate ability to persist as grit and describes it as the combination of both passion and perseverance. The type of passion that gives purpose to the individual's efforts and the type of perseverance that fosters the required resolve and strength to soldier on, ultimately seeing people through their failures, trials and difficulties. Perseverance, as described by Duckworth (2016), is that ability to keep trying and not give up even when there is every opportunity to do so. Those who do not give up as easily, at whatever they may be working at, are the ones who succeed more than those who give up early on. This is a simple but also profound truth. However, Duckworth (2016) explains that it is not

enough to have only perseverance, there needs to exist passion. She describes passion as something an individual feels drawn to. Some might refer to this feeling as that of a calling or an individual's life's work. It is the thing they feel they were meant to do in life. Examples of this are musicians who cannot put the guitar down, or actors who cannot stop acting, or scientists who keep researching. It is that feeling inside, when joined with perseverance, that drives successful leaders and people through and beyond failure. She explains that talent is not enough, hard work is not enough, and perseverance in the face of failure or adversity is not enough. Those who are going to leverage their failures in a way that helps them reach that third tier, the place where people actually get better through failure, only comes through perseverance and purpose (referred to as passion by Duckworth) according to Duckworth (2016).

A good example to describe purpose that is relatable to most of the human race is that which is understood by a man or woman when they are called on to be a Mother or Father. Mothers and Fathers fail every day in many ways. They forget to pick up a child from practice, they lose their temper and yell, they bump their baby's head when they put them in the car seat, they set a bad example for observing children, or they do not know how to help with homework, etc. There are too many failures for most good parents to count. So, why then do they persevere? It is because there is this little, tiny thing that is depending on them for everything. They have in their life a purpose that was not there before and when coupled with perseverance, will produce change in most parents and develop in them a resolve to be a good parent. This newfound purpose and perseverance, over time turns them into a successful parent and leader in their home. Duckworth (2016) argues that it was not their talent as a parent coming in that did it, or their circumstances

growing up, or the support they did or did not have, but it was their sense of purpose and perseverance as a parent that eventually helped them succeed.

Purpose and perseverance in addition to the other components of redemptive intelligence are required of all leaders who hope to one day be successful. As briefly shared in chapter one of this dissertation, Abraham Lincoln as a 32-year-old man found himself in a place of profound sorrow because of significant failures that were caused by his own hand in both his political and professional life (Goodwin, 2019). Lincoln as one of the chief architects and advocates of the state of Illinois set out on his expansive dreams for railroads, canals, bridges, and roads only to come to a halt after the state entered a third year of recession. The crushing debt from this catastrophe crippled the state for years to come. Lincoln took on the lion's share of the blame. He also broke off his engagement to Mary Todd feeling concerned about their chances for a successful future together, leading to him questioning himself on his ability to keep commitments of any sort. His depression was so deep that during this time friends of Lincoln confiscated knives, razors, and scissors from his room fearing that he would kill himself. But then something significant happened in the life of Lincoln that fostered in him the strength that would be required of him in the future, during one of the darkest of times in American history, that of the Civil War. Lincoln, as a young man and in the middle of this great difficulty from failure, found purpose in himself and in his failures that led to perseverance and ultimately improved performance. He said during this time,

If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. Whether I shall ever be better I cannot tell . . . to

remain as I am is impossible; I must die or become better (as cited in Goodwin, 2019, p. 100).

Lincoln would explain that he was more than willing to die at this time, but had done nothing with his life to make any human being remember that he had lived. His greatest passion or purpose he had at this time was to link his name with something that would interest his fellow man. This deeper purpose and desire is what ultimately empowered him as a friendless, poor, and uneducated man to present himself to the citizens of New Salem to let him represent them in the state legislature. In a time of great temptation to give up on his work and life, Lincoln discovered that the failure itself provided lessons that could make him better and that would help him make a name for himself and benefit mankind. The choice for Lincoln was not about whether to give up, it was whether he wanted to die or become better and thankfully for the sake of all mankind he chose to leverage his failures to become better by finding purpose in self and in his failure, as well as persevere through this particular trial.

#### **Stage 4: Forsake with Faith and Resolved Confidence**

After failure has struck, the door to learning is opened through reflection, control has been taken back through honesty and humility, purpose and perseverance have been evidenced through grit, and it becomes increasingly important to forsake the failure with faith or a resolved confidence moving forward. (Simmons, 2023). In this section confidence and faith can be used interchangeably. Faith is a better word for what is needed in the final stage of redemptive intelligence, but confidence is more readily used by researchers. However, confidence on its own might imply an individual is forcing themselves to confidence while ignoring the fear of failure or acting like it is not there.

Faith implies an acceptance of the possibility of failure, but a belief that things will turn out well if they believe. It is a sort of resolved confidence that accepts the fear of failure, but resolutely decides to have confidence instead. This faith or resolved confidence is what is required of the performer during the final stage. It is an acceptance of the three previous stages and a willingness to go through them again without fear if that is required. Choosing to believe, but accepting what comes allows the performer to be in a state of balance in their mind that produces better performance. More specifically it encourages brain activity in the parietal lobe which processes senses and is more directly linked to confidence (Cleveland Clinic, 2022; Luttrell et al., 2013). Resolved confidence during the moment of performance can help to limit brain activity in the limbic system and frontal lobe which control cause and effect thinking as well as emotion (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016). When it is time for a doctor, athlete, teacher, or singer, etc., to perform; confidence and being totally present in the moment with all of their senses are key to performing well. Too much time spent processing emotions and worrying through cause-and-effect thinking can be very helpful outside of the moment of performance, but during performance can become a distraction. Having a faith or a resolved confidence of come what may and love it, helps the performer appropriately maintain the balance among different brain functions that help performance.

The fastest way to know if someone adequately leveraged their failure for improved performance comes down to whether or not they repeat the same exact mistake again. As a player and coach of the Quarterback position for over 20 years, the author learned that the only way to improvement was to not repeat the same mistake twice.

While being perfect and never throwing an interception is difficult over the course of an entire season, learning important lessons from each type of interception and never throwing the same type of interception twice is very manageable. For example, lobbing the ball down the sideline at about 35 yards against a cover two defense is a good way to throw an interception. That exact kind of interception or failure only needs to be learned once. There may be other interceptions, but that exact kind of interception will only happen once if the quarterback shows good levels of redemptive intelligence, ultimately forsaking that mistake with confidence that he/she has learned the lesson and will not repeat it again. Even if approaching something for the first time, confidence when setting out to achieve anything in life can improve chances for success. (Adams, 2015). An example of this being someone who takes 10 free throw shots believing they will make them versus someone who does not believe. Both have equal skill going in, but the one who makes more will most likely be the one who believes, because confidence commits a soul to focusing and doing their best. Someone lacking belief is mostly looking to get past the experience and move along to other things. This same logic can be applied to an individual who is new to public speaking. Their experience in their first few attempts at public speaking will go much better if they can approach it with confidence and show a commitment to doing their best regardless of the level of competence they possessed coming into speaking (Killelea, 2016). Someone who lacks confidence will display body positioning and posture, and voice intonations, etc. that will negatively impact their performance. They lack the commitment and focus, fueled by belief and confidence that leads to success. Both the public speaker standing nervously and the free throw shooter

who simply throws the ball in the general direction of the hoop without belief, are both looking to move on to something different and thus their success will be limited.

Confidence despite previous experience or the opportunity to learn competence is beneficial only up to a certain point. For some overconfidence can deteriorate performance because of an unwillingness to put forth the effort to learn and improve to higher levels of competence (Pieger et al., 2017). This can be seen in a student who thinks they know everything they need to know for an upcoming test and therefore does not put much time or energy into preparing for it. That attitude of overconfidence may succeed occasionally, but not consistently over time. The confidence required of all who hope to improve performance should be that which guides the learner toward greater competence (Adams, 2015; Carlisle, 2000; Killelea, 2016; Lucero & Chen, 2020). This kind of confidence that is gradually garnered due to increasing levels of competence is the exact kind of confidence that is supported throughout the first three stages of redemptive intelligence. Pausing to reflect, taking control with honesty and humility, and gritting through with purpose and perseverance foster opportunities for greater competence. This type of competent confidence not only increases the chances for success, but does so in dramatic fashion. Why then is the fourth and final stage to forsake with confidence required if the first three stages develop competence?

Carlisle (2000) points out in her article that competence and confidence are linked, but they are not synonymous. Confidence cannot always predict competence and competence cannot always predict confidence. Additionally, confidence nor competence on their own always predicate performance. It is the combination of the two that most powerfully produce actions that improve levels of performance at the highest rate.

Theatre halls, sports arenas, medical centers, business rooms, and many other areas have witnessed individuals full of competence ultimately not perform well. Despite the belief and support from others, some individuals are held back by the prisons of their own mind; prisons built by their own lack of confidence in self. They effectively hold themselves back from improved performance levels despite possessing the competence required of them; and the decision to do so is totally within their control. For some reason they underestimate their ability to succeed at a particular task. Confidence is not something people can give or take away from someone else. Others can do things to influence an individual's levels of confidence, but confidence is a personal decision as well as a personal responsibility. Developing competence by placing a high premium on feedback and lessons learned derived from failure only matter if what is learned from failure is confidently applied in successive attempts and improvements are ultimately made (Allen, 2022). It does no good to reflect and know the right lesson, exhibit the humility and honesty to control the right actions that leverage change, persevere and find purpose by gritting through the warfare of failure, to only fail at the exact same failure again. Lessons learned or competence gained from the past, must result in changed actions eventually to move on from the redemptive intelligence cycle/loop for a particular failure. The individual must prove to themselves and others that they have leveraged the failure by not repeating that failure again. Competence gained will never manifest itself in a way that effectively eliminates a particular failure without a decision of confidence that stands resolute in forsaking the mistakes made in the past.

Resolution or resolve is a firm determination to pursue a course of action, and good resolve comes not in the absence of opposition, but in the face of it. As stated



earlier, eliminating anxiety, doubt, or fear completely is not required and should not necessarily be the goal (Foullk, 2009). Resolving within to be confident in spite of these seemingly negative feelings is what is important. Faith and fear cannot exist in the mind at the same time, one must eventually give way to the other (Andersen, 2008). Resolving to confidence and belief is what is required to effectually eliminate actions and attitudes that perpetuate failure in a way that repeats mistakes and limits performance to low or moderate levels. In fact, feeling various levels of anxiety, doubt, and fear can be beneficial to the performer, as long as the final resolve of the performer is confidence. Various forms of nervousness or other physical responses, such as increased adrenaline can sharpen the senses, add excitement, and improve focus (Hardy et al., 2007). These feelings are evidence that the individual cares and wants to do well. While there are benefits to these feelings, if left unchecked they can deteriorate performance. Said in another way, caring too much may inhibit performance. Caring and some of their by-products, anxiety and fear, all need to remain in check to magnify individual competence and skill when performing. While each of these characteristics of wanting to do good and fearing that it will go bad, on their own do not predict success or failure with absolutism. The combination of desire and fear are important to pay attention to, understand, and manage going into each new attempt. Learning to balance these seemingly contrasting feelings in intelligent ways is what resolved confidence provides for the leader and their teams. Accepting and balancing the seemingly opposing forces through resolved confidence is what completes the failure recovery process and allows for uninhibited performance improvement and advancement beyond that particular failure recovery loop. This resolved confidence is just like faith, in that it is hoping and believing in things to

come that in all reality are unknown and remain yet unseen (Meara, 2023). Faith, or resolved confidence preceded every miraculous invention or breakthrough known to the human race. If not true, then the attempter of achievement throughout history would have never tried.

### **Summary**

Nelson (2015), who was a successful and pioneering open heart surgeon, relates an experience in which he illustrates aspects of redemptive intelligence. After a particularly difficult failure Nelson paused to reflect, took control with honesty and humility, gritted through with purpose and perseverance, and finally closed his failure recovery loop for this particular failure by forsaking with faith. He decided to move forward with a resolved confidence in his newfound abilities for improved performance levels. Abilities that came to him because of this particular failure, or more accurately stated, because of his redemptive reaction to this particular failure. In the 1950's, Nelson was approached by parents of a girl gravely ill from a congenital heart disease. Her older brother had died previously of a similar condition to his sister. Although Nelson was not optimistic he vowed to do all he could to save the life of this girl. The surgery was unsuccessful and the little girl died. Later, this same family brought to him their 16-month-old daughter with a malformed heart, again requesting his help. He agreed, but this little child also died. He relates that this third loss in this particular family literally undid him. After this third failure he went home stricken with grief. He relates that he threw himself upon his living room floor and cried all night long upset at his failed attempts to save these lives. The anguish and very keen understanding of the pain he caused this family led him to declare repeatedly to his wife, who was by his side all night,

that he would never perform another heart operation again. After a long and sleepless night Nelson's wife, Dantzel, turned to him and said these words, "Are you finished crying? Then get dressed. Go back to the lab. Go to work! You need to learn more. If you quit now, others will have to painfully learn what you already know" (Nelson, 2015, para. 19). Her words spurred Nelson to go back to work and learn more. He cites almost 60 years later that if it had not been for the vision, love, and grit of his wife in that moment he would not have pursued open-heart surgery or did a number of other inventive things that saved many lives.

In displaying his redemptive intelligence, Nelson paused to reflect when on that sleepless night he repeated over and over again the painful lessons he had just learned. He did not have all the lessons learned that would help him succeed at that particular surgery the next day, but he learned smaller compartmentalized lessons that would help him succeed more often in the future, as well as help other doctors to do the same. He took control of the situation through his humility and honesty. He did not blame the parents for bringing him an impossible case or blame the circumstances of his time for not having the technology he needed, or any other number of things that were outside of his control. He looked at what was in his control and was honest and humble in blaming himself and he was tormented by pain because of his humility and honesty. With the help of his wife, he was able to grit through the pain by finding purpose in the failure. He came to understand that if he gave up now then many others would have to suffer the pain that he was currently suffering. There were lessons and knowledge he could share with others that would make them better, additionally he could become better and fulfill his individual purpose and pursuit of being a successful doctor. This purpose helped him

decide to persevere through the pain, get back up off the floor and get back to work.

Finally, his wife helped him decide to confidently forsake his mistakes and failures with faith in his future abilities to not repeat the exact same failures that were made throughout the process of trying to help this family. Each of these aspects of redemptive intelligence, which were first pausing to reflect, second taking control with honesty and humility, third gritting through with purpose and perseverance, and fourth forsaking with faith ultimately allowed Nelson to leverage this particular failure and its respective failure recovery loop for improved performance levels in the future.

Nelson and many other proven to be successful leaders have learned how to leverage failure in a way that improves performance levels in the future, but they have nurtured and cultivated their own redemptive intelligence levels without much formal assistance. The gap in failure recovery literature today is not that there is not good information out there, but that it is not readily accessible by the general population from various backgrounds due to the inconsistency of language and terms used to describe the process as well as the lack of opportunity of certain communities. In this review some of the inconsistencies and complexities of failure recovery were reduced down to common language utilized by the majority or main voices of failure recovery researchers. This was done by first identifying and analyzing the critical connection between success and failure. Understanding that failure is power because it contains lessons and lessons lead to learning which in turn improves performance. Next it was important to understand that there are only three paths after failure that can be pursued and they are all within the control of the individual who failed. There is a path of sustained lower performance, a return to normal performance, and a path to higher levels of performance. To further

understand failure some historical examples as well as theories were utilized. The lessons from this section were that failure has always been a part of the human race as well as a part of various industries and societies, but may not have used common language or terms that specifically point to that truth. Current literature of today became the next most important area to understand in depth. Despite the at times complex nature of current literature today, four prevalent and common themes were identified. Connecting the example set by the researchers who proposed emotional intelligence, the phrase redemptive intelligence was suggested as a solution for further closing the gap in current literature. The framework of this phrase was then explained and analyzed using sources from that of prevalent failure recovery researchers today. Finally, the literature review was closed out with a stirring example of one successful leader who followed the redemptive intelligence framework model and successfully leveraged a catastrophic failure for improved performance. While failure may feel complex, the solution to most failures is simple and requires only that those involved pause to reflect, take control with honesty and humility, grit through with perseverance and purpose, and forsake with faith. Leaders and teams with strong levels of redemptive intelligence will find ways to follow this framework in failures large and small, understanding that each failure is not just a failure, but an opportunity for improved performance in the future. The term redemptive intelligence serves as a reminder to the person sitting in the ashes of their failure that there is optimism, hope, and redemption ahead if they only allow the simplicity of their personal redemptive intelligence to have full sway in their hearts and minds. If an individual fails to cycle out of their failure recovery loop they need not worry as they will continue having opportunities until their redemptive intelligence for that particular failure

grows to the point of renewal and rebirth, which in turn produces higher levels of performance in the future.

### **Chapter Three: Research Method and Design**

#### **Method**

The study utilized qualitative research to fulfill its purpose which was, analyze the failure recovery process of successful leaders across varying industries to identify common practices that can be employed by leaders and their teams to improve personal and organizational performance from failure. Phenomenological principles were applied to this qualitative approach in that the study sought to describe a common but sometimes complex or unique phenomenon in a way that could be more readily explained in a language understood by societies and people from various backgrounds (Williams, 2021). While there are varying definitions of what qualifies for a Phenomenological study, this study focused on the root form of the word “phenomenon” which is derived from the Greek words “phainein” meaning “bring to light” and “phainesthai” meaning “to appear” (Williams, 2021, p. 367). This research on failure recovery processes of successful leaders helped the potential power for success within failure to come to light and appear more transparently to aspiring leaders.

In seeking to understand better what it is that leaders and teams go through after failure and how to leverage those moments of difficulty for greater performance in the future, it was important to isolate the study to the thoughts, feelings, and words of successful leaders who have experienced this phenomenon of overcoming failure and producing success. Qualitative research was the best method for gaining this type of information as it allows for the reflection necessary for both the participants and the researchers to make the connections that give words to common actions taken that may or may not be fully understood by individuals, including the successful leaders interviewed

(Cena & Burns, 2023). Often successful people can be doing something well without taking much thought as to why they are good at it. Taking time to pause and reflect allows the participant and researcher to make connections and more readily identify common themes and give words that provide meaning and create understanding.

Qualitative research methods are valuable in providing rich descriptions of unique or complex phenomena through discussion and reflection (Sofaer, 1999). This qualitative approach to the research provided a way to reduce uncertainty and increase knowledge about the important topic of recovering from failure. It produced findings from the real-world experiences of successful leaders and their teams in a naturalistic manner (Corbin & Strauss, 1991).

### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling based on simple, but specific criteria from the researcher was used in selecting participants for a specific purpose (Mertens & Wilson, 2012).

Participants from varying industries were needed to establish that the common failure recovery practices could be utilized by the masses or individuals from various national, socioeconomic, technological, healthcare, and scholastic, etc. backgrounds. In order to establish this, leaders and teams from varying industries were studied to both gain some insight into the different environments within which they perform, as well as the cross connectivity between those environments. Participants also needed to exhibit success to be a part of this study. Success was determined based on things like longevity, growth, social influence, awards, finances, and other factors indicating success. The number one requirement for success was that the individual be generally respected by peers within their industry.



This study included six to 10 participants from various industries that met those qualifications. Leaders that did not meet both of these qualifications were not included in this study. Participants from the industries of education, government, business, medicine, theatre arts, athletics, and military were studied. Each participant resided in the United States of America at the time of their interview, but not all participants resided in the same state. Participants residing in states on the east coast, west coast, and multiple states in between were included. The 10 participants included in this research were recruited through phone, in person, and email communication. Participants have been in their industry for at least 10 years and some have been in their industry for 30 years or more. Gender, nationality, and other biologically defining characteristics did not factor into the selection of the participants. However, certain demographic information was collected as a part of the survey process.

### **Research Questions**

**Research Question 1:** After failure has occurred, what are the common failure recovery processes that lead to declining levels of performance, a return to normal performance, and improved performance for individuals and teams?

**Research Question 2:** How does a leader's beliefs on failure recovery processes impact the success of their team?

### **Procedure, Data Collection, and Analysis**

Potential participants were first contacted informally to discuss the possibility of an interview through face-to-face contact, email, phone, or text. For those that were not interested, they were thanked for their time and wished well in their endeavors. All those willing to potentially participate were sent an email with a link to the *Qualtrics* survey

outlining the research information sheet, professional background survey, and demographic information. Additionally, each participant was formally solicited in this *Qualtrics* survey to participate in a 30 to 45 minute interview. Times that would work to conduct the interview were asked for in this survey. The participants' responses to the survey served as their acceptance to participate and began the process for coordinating interview times. After survey responses were received, interview questions were sent with the researcher's coordinated times for the interview. These questions were sent beforehand to allow for reflection time and well thought out answers (Cena & Burns, 2023). Interviews were conducted via zoom technology. Interviews were recorded through a personal zoom account of the researcher. A secondary recording device on the researcher's phone was also utilized as back up. Participants were notified of their interviews being recorded during the *Qualtrics* survey and again at the beginning of their interview with the researcher. Participants were also informed as a part of the *Qualtrics* survey process that they could withdraw at any time. Interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes for each participant. A follow-up email was sent to the participants thanking them for their time and giving them information on how to access the research once it was finished if they desired to see it.

After the interviews were completed, the recordings were sent to be transcribed by a professional independent third party. Upon receipt of the transcribed interviews the researcher listened to the recordings and read the transcriptions to ensure that names, places, and words, etc. were transcribed with accuracy. Qualitative methods were then utilized to do initial coding and category identification, then intermediate coding ensued to select core categories, and lastly advanced coding produced the storyline and helped

connect the data with that of current literature and theory today (Chun Tie et al., 2019) After the initial category identification and meta or core themes were discovered, the older theme groups were disposed of and the new core themes were used (Patton, 2002). However, each participant's unique thoughts were assigned a code and were not lost in the theming process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The resulting data is a complete representation of common failure recovery practices that were learned from the participants. Lastly, this research was conducted on a volunteer basis only and therefore no participant was rewarded or penalized for completing or not participating in this research regardless of whether they did not sign up, dropped out, or completed the process.

### **Instrumentation**

Two instruments were utilized throughout the process to gain insight into the phenomenon of failure recovery processes of successful leaders and their teams. Both instruments were created by the researcher in this study. The first instrument was a simple professional background questionnaire that contained 12 questions. This instrument's purpose was to gain limited insight into what the participant values from their success as well as collect relevant demographic information that could have factored into their opportunities for and development as a successful leader. These questions are listed in Appendix A.

The second instrument used was the interview questions utilized during the 30 to 45 minute interview with each participant. Some of these questions were added onto during the interview in order to ensure understanding, but no questions were omitted. Nine of the list of 19 questions were prompts to gain insight into this study's research question 1. Six

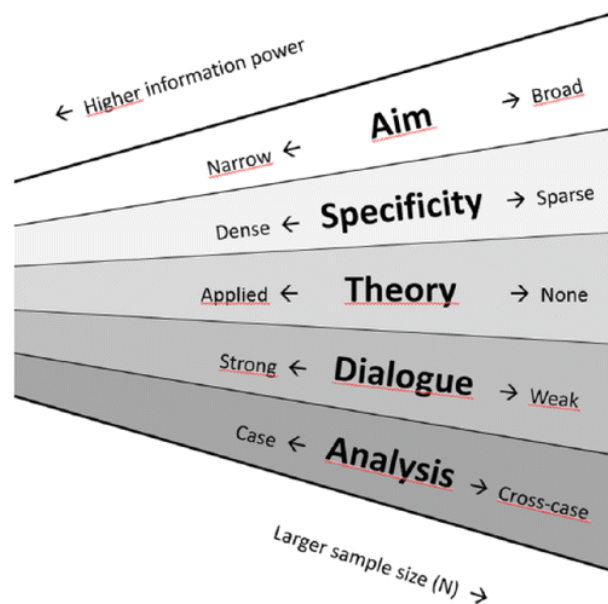
questions were prompts to gain insight into this study's research question 2. Four questions were general questions about leadership to help the participants to elaborate in any other way they felt was important or necessary for the purposes of the study. These questions helped to properly bring to light a common but complex phenomenon experienced by all humans and explain it in a naturalistic manner (Sofaer, 1999). This allowed the researcher to establish common themes that could be explained in a communicable language that could be understood by individuals from various backgrounds. The prompts and questions of this second instrumentation are listed in Appendix B..

### **Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative research produces findings from real-world experiences in a naturalistic manner and that is what this study did with failure recovery processes of successful leaders (Corbin & Strauss, 1991). The information garnered from 10 participants under these conditions was an adequate amount to identify common practices and processes for failure recovery amongst successful leaders and teams according to the saturation concept and information power theory (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018). According to the saturation concept, originally coined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), at some point during in depth interviews the researcher will only hear what has already been discovered and at this point saturation occurs (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once a researcher hits the point of saturation there is little to no reason for conducting any further interviews and this was the case during the interviews of the 10 participants. At some point the researcher did not discover anything new, rather information that was only repeating the main themes of what was already

found in the previous interviews. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) in their research article, *How Many Interviews Are Enough?: An experiment with data Saturation and Variability* found that saturation occurs within the first 12 interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Although, they also found that basic elements for meta-themes were actually present after just six interviews. Going in depth with each interviewee and doing no more than 12 interviewees allowed the study to be data rich as well as avoid the issue of too much data due to large numbers, which would have undermined the researcher's ability to perform a thorough analysis (Lewin et al., 2019). Conducting the research was a balance of going in depth enough with each participant, but not having too many participants overall. While there is no formal tool for judging data richness, these and other tactics employed by the researcher to make sure the participants had every opportunity to share all they wanted to share during the interviews allowed for data integrity. Additionally, less interviews were required to achieve data richness because that which was researched was narrowly focused in five main ways (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018; Malterud et al., 2016).

Malterud et al. discusses that the aim, specificity, theory, dialogue, and analysis; all impact what they call "information power" (Malterud et al., 2016, para. 5). See figure 10 for more detail.

**Figure 10***Information Power*

Note. The more areas covered and the stronger each area is, the higher information power the study will have. As adapted from Malterud et al. (2016, para. 5).

The aim of this study was narrow, in that it focused on one aspect of the participants, their failure recovery process. The study was specific in that it only analyzed successful leaders of teams or organizations. The theory applied is grounded in the four common elements of failure recovery processing as defined by the main researching voices of today's current literature (Duckworth, 2016; Edmondson & Cannon, 2005; Goodwin, 2019; Murphy & Duke, 2011; Willink & Babin, 2018), as well as founded in the concept that there are three paths after failure that each individual can follow depending on their varying levels of redemptive intelligence after a failure has occurred (Allen, 2022; Collins, 2001; Collins & Porras, 2011; Cullman, 1998; Goodwin, 2019). The dialogue during the interviews was strong in that they caused the participants to speak directly about their internal make up and life experiences that have made them

react a certain way to failure. The analysis was purposive in that the researcher chose participants that met a specific criterion involving both their qualities as a leader of a teams and their qualities of being successful as determined by the researcher according to things like longevity, growth, social influence, awards, finances, and other factors indicating success.

The main requirement for success was determined based on the need to be generally respected by peers within their industry. This general visibility and respect from peers also helped to establish the results as credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable due to additional observation and informative reliability of others and the general public (Morse et al., 2002). Additionally, the questions were set up longitudinally in that they asked the participant to reflect on the entirety of their life as opposed to shorter or specific time periods. In doing so, these questions also helped to provide insight into their prior lives which increased perspective and allowed a level of long-term involvement. As Morse et al. stated, there was a prolonged engagement when considering the relationship of the researcher with the participants leading up to the interview and/or the public information available about the participant. These items helped increase validity and reliability of data by specifically mitigating the risk for a lack of intensive or long-term involvement.

Participant and interviewer bias risks were mitigated by the researcher being mindful to not lead the participants down a certain path, but remaining open to the perspectives and insights of the participants (Galdas, 2017). In order to accomplish this, the researcher did not include participants that due to professional relationships, would not feel as comfortable speaking freely. The researcher also ensured at various stages that

each participant was under no pressure to join this study. Ensuring that information was confidential and every effort would be made to not have information link back to them helped participants to speak freely. Interviewer bias was mitigated through the coding process, as any theme determined was only formulated with multiple supporting sources.

### **Summary**

The method used for this study was qualitative as it focused on a common, but complex phenomenon of failure recovery processes and this method was best to harvest good data. There was a narrow focus on participants interviewed as they were required to be both a leader of a team and a successful leader with respect from their peers. All participants were included in the study on a volunteer basis only and no participant was rewarded or penalized for their participation or lack of participation at any stage of the research process. After interviews were complete, recordings were sent for transcription, after which they were verified by the researcher. Two instruments were used to gather data and both were created by the researcher. One instrument helped the researcher to understand what the participant values amongst their successes. The second instrument ensured that the interview stayed focused on answering the research questions. There were 10 participants interviewed to provide sufficient data that was both reliable and valid. The data gathering did produce information that allowed the researcher to establish common themes that can be utilized by others to improve their failure recovery processes and increase their redemptive intelligence.



## Chapter Four: Analysis

### Introduction

Common themes of failure recovery processes became evident after just a few interviews and saturation occurred after just six to eight interviews. There were 10 people interviewed in total allowing for sufficient data to identify common practices and processes for failure recovery amongst successful leaders and teams according to the saturation concept and information power theory (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018). As the interviews progressed the researcher started to only hear what had already been discovered and at that point saturation occurred (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). No new themes emerged after about six to eight interviews (Guest et al., 2006). However, certain themes were reinforced in the researcher's mind that gave greater validity or context to said themes that may have appeared of lesser importance before the additional interviews took place. Furthermore, the various lexicons used gave a fuller picture of the theme. Part of the reason that information power and saturation both occurred was because, as noted in chapter three, the aim, specificity, theory, dialogue, and analysis were strong (Malterud et al., 2016). The dialogue in particular was very strong in that all but one interview thoroughly reviewed and answered the questions during a 45 minute to 140 minute block of time, much more time was spent than anticipated by the researcher with participants. Participants had much wisdom to share and were happy to do it in order to help other leaders know better how to handle failure.

The surveys taken during the research process also allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants and their background that could have played a

part into the formation of their thoughts and ideas which impacted failure recovery processes for themselves and their teams. All but one participant completed the survey. Chapter four introduced the reader to the participants utilizing some of the information from surveys as well as common knowledge about their accomplishments. General beliefs and early development were analyzed utilizing parts of the survey, as well as questions one, parts of questions seven through 10, and questions 17 to 19 from the interview questions. Research question 1 was looked at next using information from interview questions two through 10. Information related to research question 2 was relayed using information from questions 11 to 16. The emerging themes that became evident from the coding process were shared in the Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 sections. Next was a review of lessons learned about the amount of failure endured by the successful versus the unsuccessful, as well as how applicable failure recovery processes are from one trade to the next. This was followed by a short summary of the chapter.

### **Participants**

Each participant was invited to participate in this study because of their successfulness within their field. Success was determined through factors such as their ability to attain higher levels of success comparatively to that of their peers as it relates to things like longevity, growth, social influence, awards, finances, and other factors indicating success within their industry or ideology. Each of these leaders were generally respected by their peers within their industry. Participants from the trades of government, politics, military, business, holistic health, law, homemaker, medicine, education, engineering, music, ecclesiastical, and athletics were interviewed. Some participants have

had success in multiple industries within their career. Participants have held or currently hold positions such as Dean, Professor, CEO, Partner, Government Commissioner, Military Commander, Composer, Producer, Doctor, Surgeon, Lieutenant Colonel, Owner, Coach, Bishop/Pastor, Instructor, Lawyer, Teacher, Mother, Father, Missionary, Engineer, Founder, Board Chairman, Trainer, and President.

Some of their accomplishments have included things like becoming the youngest partner in company history and doing it within a five-year period of time and being an elite leader and mentor in military leadership education and training, receiving awards for Researcher of the Year as well as Instructor of the Year, creating and implementing successful messaging campaigns leading to successful political outcomes, bringing innovative and fresh thinking ideas and approaches to government problems and issues, modernizing and streamlining federal infrastructure rules, writing an award-winning conference research paper, successful parent and mentor of their own children as well as other youth in their community, helping those youth to succeed in ways that allow college education and productive lives to be a reality, serving as a religious leader and helping to generate some of the most significant growth and success in all of North America for their church, and reputation as expert surgeon with sought out expertise in clinical and research per their specified area of emphasis. Several happy and successful marriages that have endured for multiple decades and counting, children that are healthy, happy, and productive members of society for multiple participants, American Orthopedic Association Fellowship, elite ranking and position due to significant personal effort within a global business, doctorate level education attainment, conference champion and National champion multiple years and on multiple teams for collegiate

athletics. Coached candidates/players of the most prestigious athlete of the year awards, nominee for top assistant coach award in all of American, founder and owner of multiple decade company eclipsing 50 million in sales, co-founder of national association within their industry that is the premier association for said industry and has existed for multiple decades now. Starting a new department and establishing it as one of the top contributing departments in the company within a four-year period of time, multiple grammy award winning musician who is a part of the multi-time vocal group of the year band. They have received more than 10 grammy nominations. They have reached number one with a debut single and sold millions of albums and surpassed over a billion global streams. Part of a group that has charted 40 plus top 10, top five, and number one singles in the music industry.

Each of the participants attended college with some completing college courses, bachelors, masters, and doctorate degrees. Ancestral backgrounds included Irish, German, English, Scottish, Jewish, Scandinavian, and French. All are American citizens, born and raised. The ages of participants ranged from 36 to 67 with five participants in their forties. Eight of the participants were male, while two were female. All participants speak English with a couple participants speaking Spanish as well. Eight of the participants came from two-parent homes during their formative years. Two of the participants were a part of both single-parent homes and two-parent homes at different times while growing up. While there were not questions to determine religion or faith, most participants mentioned a participation in Christianity during the survey or interview process.

The participants were assigned a number, one through ten, and will be referred to as such throughout this research. To help the reader better associate the numbered participant with their statements, the following short description of them is provided. It should be noted that these are not a full description of all of their experience in each of their trades throughout their lives. Participant 1 is an engineer and the youngest partner in company history at his growing firm. Participant 2 is a federal commissioner working successfully out of Washington DC throughout multiple terms. Participant 3 is an entrepreneur operating multiple positions and businesses predominantly in holistic health. Participant 4 is a highly sought after collegiate coach for one of the top programs in the country. Participant 5 is a Lt. Colonel and commander of an elite leadership training program in one of the military branches of the United States Government. Participant 6 is an entrepreneur and businessman operating multiple companies in various industries while also providing structure and counsel to leaders within his primary industry. Participant 7 is a homemaker and teacher who is respected by her peers within her community for leadership involving various responsibilities pertaining to adults, youth, and families. Participant 8 is a Grammy award winning musician who has enjoyed a long career in the music industry. Participant 9 is a research award winning Dean at a higher education institution. Participant 10 is an expert surgeon who is sought out by his patients, as well as peers within his industry for his knowledge and expertise.

### **Early Development and General Beliefs on Success and Failure**

Each participant was asked how they defined success and failure and there were two prevailing themes. First, in each case the participant mentioned something along the lines of success being progression and failure being quitting. Participant 1 stated it well

by saying success was “a mindset, progression, improvement” and failure was “quitting or accepting digression or defeat.” There was a strong belief from each participant that if growth and progression were happening then success is only a matter of time. Participant 10 also mentioned how measuring success through growth and progression is not only applicable to the individual, but to the team around them as well. Meaning if people around the individual are succeeding then they are succeeding. True failure sets in when quitting or ceasing any effort to progress starts. Participant 3 explained it well by relating her experience with two impactful leaders in her life,

A professor at school who taught me growth comes in that space of uncertainty, growth comes from failure, that failure is actually what builds growth and then Clayton Christensen, even more like really built on this belief within me, that when you are in a space of getting very comfortable with being uncomfortable, putting yourself into situations where you know that ultimately you're not going to be the best performer in the room, you're not going to be the highest achiever where ultimately, probably, everyone in the room is more qualified than you are. That's where you are putting yourself in a space to be influenced for exponential growth. The real failure is when you are so obsessed with success, or with the outward appearance of success, that you don't put yourself in situations where you will ultimately fail. Where you won't come out on top and where you won't be the best. I think that that's really important teachings because failure is an integral part of who we are. We will experience setbacks and heart breaks and hardships, and that will ultimately strengthen us and make us more capable of becoming who

we are destined to be. So, I'm really grateful for both of those men for not holding back their feedback.

Participant 1 also said success was “trying your absolute best and then analyzing the results of your action, and then making the changes necessary to improve upon those results. To me success is just that constant push and drive.” Participant 7 stated, “Success is progression and learning. Anytime we move from point A to point B, no matter how small. That’s success to me.” She also said, “Things that don’t go well are just learning experiences and not necessarily failures. So, I feel like the only actual failure is just a life of not trying or striving or apathy.” Participant 2 said it in another way by mentioning that things are out of a person’s control sometimes, so what was most important was maximizing the odds for success regardless of the eventual outcome. He said,

If I’ve got an 86% chance of winning and if I stay up all night and grind and work hard I can get like an 88% chance, I’m like, yeah, I’m going to give everything I got all night to increase my odds of winning by 2%.

Each participant gave answers that aligned with these statements on success and failure.

The second theme related to the definition of success and failure was not necessarily stated by each participant in word, but it was extremely evident throughout the research process with each participant. That is the idea that success is connected to joy and failure is connected to pain. Participant 6 did state it simply and clearly by saying, “Success is anything that brings me joy while failure is anything that brings pain, but it spans all aspects of my life. If I’m feeling joy, I’m feeling successful.” He also said that “the pain of failure motivates me to stay as far away from it as I can, the more the pain the more the motivation.” Participant 2 also talked about this pain of failure and how

inspirational it was to do all he could to stay as far away from failure as possible. Not because there is a fear there, but to avoid the pain of it. Participant 9 said that “success hinges on so many more intangible things, unquantifiable things like frame of mind, my health, the joy in my life, my relationships, and things like that.” Participant 8 mentioned that there were many different types of success one can have, but success to him was “having healthy kids in mind, body, and spirit and then maintaining those strong relationships with them.” Statements by participants 8 and 9 supported this idea of joy being success and pain being failure. Also, interesting was that the four participants who were 50 or older shared definitions of success that were more connected to the state of joy in the lives of others around them, than their own personal progression. Participant 10 stated that at some point things change and, “your successes and failure are maybe more defined by the success of the people around you.” He and the other three participants who recognized this in their statements most likely realized that a truly successful person in life cannot be surrounded by unhappy relationships and think their life a success. This wisdom gained with time was supported by each participant in stating that their definition for success has evolved and changed over time. Each being more focused on stuff when they were younger and then more focused on people, processes, and progression as they got older.

Another interesting belief of participants was that their publicly recognized accomplishments were overwhelmingly different than the accomplishments they most valued; implying that successful leaders have their own goals that they are working towards and they are not based on what the general public thinks of them. In fact, Participant 2 stated that everyone cares what other people think of them, but that scar



tissue forms over time with each cutting remark, allowing the individual to not be so negatively affected by the comments of others. He believed that each cut from the words of another person if handled right will scar over and those types of words from those types of people will never be able to cut in the same way again. The leader becomes more battle hardened and capable of handling the opinions of friends, family, bosses, politicians, newspapers, and general public, etc. This strengthening over time allows them to intensify their personal focus on goals that are connected to their values and that matter most to them, goals that do not have a whole lot to do with public opinion. Participant 3 mentioned how difficult it would become if a person's self-worth was valued on opinions of others. It would be emotionally exhausting. Participant 9 talked about a value system to help an individual stay grounded and focused on things that matter most and can withstand the test of time. Participant 8 also mentioned the importance of staying grounded on the things that are important to the leader themselves. All participants agreed with this notion of success being connected to personal values. The strongest evidence of this was the majority of participants mentioning family and relationships among their greatest personal accomplishments. Additionally, while some participants knew the career path they wanted to follow and some did not, the common characteristic of all participants was their intrinsically motivated desire to succeed in life according to their own standards, values, and dictates of their own conscience. While the factors of motivation were not studied in detail in this study, there was clear and evident information presented that manifested strong intrinsic motivation in each of the participants. They had the "want to" factor, while some of the other unsuccessful groups discussed did not seem to be as strong in this area. For these successful participants the

clear career path, strong opinions of others, and popular opinion at the time did not matter as much as their internal wrestle for greatness and living up to the standard and values they placed upon themselves.

Each of the participants also identified early roles in their childhood and/or their early career that they felt developed them as a successful leader. In each case, the positions were not always those that automatically indicated a future successful leader in the making. Regardless of future indications of success, participants found great value in these positions. The value came from required additional responsibilities than they were used to previously, unfamiliar subject matter, and stepping outside their comfort zone. Some of those positions included Interim Dean, Committee Chair, Research Associate, Associate Professor, Research Society President, Executive Council, Attorney in private practice, General Counsel, Commission Legal Advisor, athlete, military graduate, military leadership school student, band leader, staff writer, oldest of brothers and sisters, Head of University Athletics Center for Yoga and Lifetime Fitness, Head Resident, Lifeguard Instructor, Construction Foreman, and Project Manager, etc. Additionally, each participant could point to early childhood teams and experiences that they were a part of growing up and some limited level of leadership with other human beings, which helped develop them. They mentioned being a part of youth sports teams, student body, Boy Scouts, Young Ambassadors, student council, dance bands/teams, debate team, National Forensics League, marching band, fraternity, church youth groups, and neighborhood friend pack. During the interviews there were multiple mentions of early sport/team experiences with failure and success that ultimately helped to shape their approach to failure recovery and helped lead them to successful leadership. When asked if there were

additional items they would like to share about their experiences and background that helped shape them as a leader, multiple participants wanted to emphasize the importance of early experiences in life and how they can help shape and mold an individual. Not all participants mentioned this in closing comments and none said that it was absolutely critical, but the fact that multiple participants felt to re-emphasize it indicates a certain level of importance to those early formative experiences.

Other notable beliefs on leadership, success, failure, and development were that each of the participants either exhibited or when asked, stated that they had a higher standard than that of their peers. Multiple participants were careful to say that there were many that they work with who have extremely high standards, as high or higher than they have and this has pushed them to be better. However, each participant either stated that they have higher standards than their peers or referenced examples where their standard is higher than others. Thus, supporting the belief that if a person wants to beat the competition they have to put actions and habits into play that are smarter or require more than the competition. Additionally, each participant stated that they felt they were completing their life's work. They felt that what they were doing in their life was truly making a difference and was a passion of theirs, one in which they found great purpose. A purpose that is also described by a Japanese term as "ikigai" (García & Miralles, 2017, p. 2); this ikigai being a motivating force that gives a person a sense of purpose or a reason for living. The interesting note here is that this did not necessarily mean solely their professional pursuits, it was stated in a much more holistic manner, looking at all aspects and areas of their lives. Some at first struggled with the question because they did not feel that just a focus on their career was fulfilling of their life's purpose, it needed to

be more all-inclusive of other areas of their life including family, relationships, and service in their communities, etc. It was more about their mindset, processes, people, and direction that they were passionate about and less about the tangible accomplishments their efforts have produced. Participant 10 said it in a good way by stating,

One of my big things in life is just having a successful marriage. I come from a family where everyone is divorced. I mean, when I say everyone, I mean everyone. So, having a good marriage, a stable marriage, a loving marriage is among the most important things in my life. Marriage is critically important to me, and beyond that my profession is, and I think I picked the right profession. I love what I do every day.

He also said that if he dropped dead and could, “look down on myself, on my life I would have no big regrets with where my life ended up, so I’m very proud and blessed to be there.”

Also, noteworthy was that only a few can recall someone really sitting them down to teach them about the specifics of handling failure. Even those who could recall someone maybe doing so struggled to remember a particular occasion where they were taught the proper way to handle failures. Participants 5 and 10 did say that they were taught later in life how to handle failure as students in their professional training. Participant 10 said they were told at medical school that they were going to fail a lot; they were also going to be coached differently, and that they should not take it personally and should focus on learning and not be consumed with the failures that will happen. The majority of participants agreed though, that failure recovery was largely up to themselves, learning over time through experiences how to make connections and learn proper

response mechanisms. Even if participants could point to individuals or schools that taught them how to handle failure, it was apparent to the researcher that it was a bit of a ponder and reflect in the moment exercise to self-discover their process for failure recovery. It was not a clearly known step by step process that participants could quickly cite. Each participant could, however, point to significant mentors in their lives that have taught them how to handle failure.

Multiple participants said that the life and teachings of Jesus Christ were most impactful in their life for learning about failure. Other mentors included chance encounters with talented individuals in their profession, figures in the community, successful leaders they were close to through church or work, and spouses. The most common mentor for these participants mentioned by almost all participants were parents, especially their mother. Participants 6, 7, 8, and 10 shared specific examples of what their mother both taught and did for them. It was evident as they spoke that each of their mothers played a significant influence in their lives. The common characteristics of impactful parents were their positive support, comforting presence, and listening ear. Participant 5 stated, "I believe that leadership starts in the home. Moral courage is developed in the home." He elaborated to explain that people can develop through the program he runs, but what they come in with has a big impact on how well they do when they hit their breaking point. He has noticed that those coming from strong homes and families are usually able to respond effectively in a crisis. His and others' beliefs suggest parents play a key role in the development of successful leaders. The fact that eight of the 10 participants surveyed in this study indicated being a part of two-parent homes and two

of the 10 indicated having a strong motherly influence also supports the connection between strong homes and successful leadership.

In summation, Participant 5, whose role currently in the military is to train and develop elite leaders, connects and encapsulates these concepts of progression/quitting and joy/pain well in a personal experience he shared. He said,

I used to think of success and failure as tangible things, grades, awards, wins, etc. I've learned a lot from the military that has shaped my view on success and failure, and redefining those. One situation in particular, where as a cadet I was thrown into basic training, a crazy environment that I wasn't totally prepared for or anticipated. I learned that success was more about not quitting. I didn't realize it at the time, but definitely as an instructor of that training later it became clear to me that everybody has a breaking point and it's not really about who has the higher threshold of where that breaking point is at. It's really all about who responds once they meet their breaking point. As a cadre you're trying to have everyone meet their breaking point and then build as a team afterwards. How do they recover from that breaking point? How do they help others break through themselves? I kind of go to that higher level, and so for me that kind of redefined what success was and what failure was. It was more about the grit you can develop to continue on, to press through, to not quit, and to keep advancing.

This idea was also supported by Participant 2, who earlier described the scar tissue forming over a wound repeatedly, and through that a new and higher breaking point being established consecutively, and through that, growth and progression taking place.

Participant 5 also elaborated that in his current role the individuals that struggle the most

are those that have not had to reach their breaking point much in their life and therefore do not really know how to react when they do. The scar tissue has not formed multiple times over many years fostering progression. To him and other participants, an enduring and long-term success/joy cannot be had without first understanding and experiencing the pain of failure. It is an extremely critical place to go before an individual can truly emerge as a successful leader. Participant 6 further states that when someone finds themselves in that place after the breaking point, it is important to have “bravery to face the anxiety or the failure and take the next step forward, not backwards.” Only in doing so can someone, anyone, pass from pain to joy.

### **Research Question 1**

Research question 1 states, after failure has occurred, what are the common failure recovery processes that lead to declining levels of performance, a return to normal performance, and improved performance for individuals and teams? The leaders who participated in this study both confirmed and expanded upon the four main themes of the written literature that sought to answer this question in chapter 2. During the research of the three different response types to failure, there were six common themes identified through the surveys and interviews. All themes were corroborated by someone else in the study. There were varying levels of the amount of participants mentioning the same themes, but all themes represent more than one voice who felt the way they did. Additionally, there were different lexicons being used by each participant, but again the intent and the meaning of the different words supporting each theme were shared and supported by others in the study, if not all others in the study. Also, participants answered these questions utilizing both their own experiences, as well as what they have observed

in others over the years. Both vantage points were used as one in this research and not presented separately.

### **Improved Performance and Emerging Themes**

Participants discussed a variety of reasons that individuals and teams are able to leverage their failures into improved performance in the future. What became evident to the researcher is that while not every element needed for successful failure recovery was mentioned in word by each participant, each element was present in some way through stories or examples from their lives that were shared. Additionally, these important elements to failure recovery are usually interrelated and connected to one another. Meaning when one element is present the other elements are typically present as well, even if not fully recognized by the participant to the extent that they relay it through spoken word. As stated earlier, there were four main themes from the written literature that contribute to a positive failure recovery process. They were pausing and reflecting for lessons learned, controlling controllable things with honesty and humility, gritting through with purpose and perseverance, and forsaking the failure with faith and a resolved confidence. Each of these four themes were also present in the interviews and surveys, but some edits, as well as additional themes became evident throughout the research process. Some of the common words and phrases used in the interviews were recognition of failure, emotional management, optimism, hope, opportunity, commitment, purpose, heart, investment, competitiveness, detach failure from identity, confidence, humility, ownership, fix-it, reflect, analyze, learn, grow, specifics and details, grit, hard work, purpose, perseverance, confront, bravery, and support mechanism. In reducing these down to common elements there were six main themes present. First,



bravely acknowledge and process painful emotions with hope. Second, pause and reflect for lessons learned. Third, fix-it with humility and honesty, Fourth, grit through with purpose and perseverance. Fifth, forsake with faith and resolved confidence. Lastly, support with joyful optimism in self and others. Participant 6 shared a story that illustrated very well some of these elements. He shared,

We had a tower that we were working on fall over and two of my colleagues, my brother and my partner, were on the Tower. They fell with it and were seriously injured. I was probably about 6 years in the industry at that time and one year in business for myself. Well, you don't have towers fall over. You don't think about a tower falling while you're climbing on it, you just pretty much assume it's like a building. You go in the building. You go to the top floor, take the elevator or stairs, you go down, walk out, and the building is still standing. We thought the same thing about towers. Well, we found out that there was an inherent potential problem with towers and that was corrosion. Not on every tower but corrosion on some of the anchors that hold the guy wires that hold the tower up. If the anchor breaks, the guy wires release and the tower falls, and that's what happened. Well, the corrosion was 7 feet underground. We couldn't see it, but it was there still. So that was a failure. Pretty big failure, almost deadly, could have easily been, should have been deadly. And you don't recover from deadly failures. People don't. Maybe they do in the next life, but not in this life. But by God's providence, the fellows didn't die. And so how did we respond? Did we maintain the status quo? Did we stay in the doldrums, or did we outperform? After that event, after all the trauma was settled and the guys got better we decided whether we were going to

stay in business or get out of business? We decided to stay in business, but are we going to stay in business and continue to climb towers with potentially corroded anchors that we could die climbing on in the future? No, we weren't going to do that. So, we did some research and we found that there was a preventative process system that you could keep those anchors from corroding. We created a product and sold it to the industry, that was about 30 years ago, since then we've protected thousands and thousands of tower climbers with this product, as well as educated and changed the whole industry standard of how towers are designed and built and protected because of that. So that was one of those examples of failure where we got better from failure.

Participant 6 said he remembers thinking right away after the tower fell that he did not want to be alive. There was an immediacy of recognizing both a failure has happened and there was strong emotion to process. Each of the other themes would play out throughout the failure recovery process after this event and will be mentioned throughout the following sections.

*Theme: Bravely Acknowledge and Process Painful Emotions with Hope*

According to participants, bravely acknowledging and processing painful emotions with hope becomes critical before there is ability to think about lessons learned. Before the pain can be dealt with, Participant 5 and others said the individual must “admit that the failure did happen.” Imagine how absurd it would be to see someone who lost a finger walking around in denial that it happened. Nobody would be able to help with the pain because there is nothing to help with in the mind of the individual who is suffering. While physically that may sound absurd, people do it all the time when it comes to pain

that is emotionally felt. Many people try to jump right past the emotion and right into the lessons learned without taking time to acknowledge failure and process the painful emotions. A leader can try coaching someone on the lessons learned after a failure occurs, but if the individual has not processed the emotion yet then every word will go in one ear and out of the other. It becomes important to allow time to first fall back on the mentors, processes, purposes, commitments, and values that can help a person emotionally process the pain and get back into the mindset of setting goals and charting a path forward toward those goals. Depending on the size of the failure and the emotional intelligence of the individual, this acknowledgement and processing can happen quickly, slowly, or not at all. Each of the successful participants in this study exhibited examples and shared stories that demonstrated a strong ability to process emotions effectively and quickly, relative to the size of the failure.

Participant 10 shared a story about not making the baseball team when he was a young kid. A lot of his friends were on the team and he was very disappointed. His parents asked him whether he was disappointed because he loved baseball or because his friends were on the team. He had not really considered that and realized throughout the conversation that he really did not even like baseball, but loved tennis. He switched his focus and has enjoyed watching and playing tennis his entire life. Participant 9 also agreed that processing the emotion is important because it allows a person to remember their personal values, their goals, and why they were doing it in the first place. Participant 3 said, “she takes time to step back, take a breath, quiet my mind and ultimately realign with the big goal and what the end in mind is.” This processing helps a person know to either get back up and keep going or to change course to goals that are more suited to

their skills, talents, and desires. This is much different than quitting or giving up because a person lacks belief or the grit to keep soldiering on with purpose and perseverance toward a worthy pursuit that matters to them. Many participants also discussed how important it was in this process to not attach personal self-worth to the failure.

Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 9 all discussed how damaging it can be to become overly wrapped up in the failure to where it impacts an individual's self-worth and confidence. They mentioned how important it was to recognize the failure enough to go and learn the lessons needed, but not sit and wallow in it to the extent that they start questioning their self-worth. On the other hand, embracing the pain and leaning into it to the extent that it becomes helpful is critical to real change that encourages growth beyond the failure. Participant 1 elaborated on this point by saying to “never shrug it off, but take it seriously and let it be painful. Don’t let people tell you you’re ok and to not worry about it. You’ve got to let it eat at you” a little so that there is this desire to change. If there is no pain then there is no drive or desire to stay away from the pain. Participants 2 and 6 also corroborated this belief in the importance of pain during the failure recovery process. Other participants exhibited examples of the benefits of allowing pain to be a part of the process. Pain needs to be allowed to have full sway in the heart and mind of the person who failed so that it can work its effect. However, there is a line that should not be crossed to where the pain starts to become detrimental. In addition to commenting on the benefits of pain, the participants also commented on how destructive staying with the pain too long can become. Throughout the research process it became evident that striking the right balance between damaging pain and helpful pain can be done by remembering that there are two types of pain during the failure recovery process;

constructive pain that builds and destructive pain that destroys. The difference between the two hinges on the element of hope being present or not. It became clear to the researcher that participants discussed the constructive pain with a brightness of hope while they discussed the destructive pain with an absence of hope. Therefore, if hope is totally present while the pain is felt then it comes from a good place and is constructive pain. If hope is absent while the pain is felt then it comes from a bad place and is destructive pain. Remembering that is the final piece, to bravely acknowledging and processing the emotional pain with hope. Participant 6 described the importance of hope well in this way, "It's just how we react to the failure, with an upward trajectory at all times. Vision up, never vision down, always vision up." That is what hope ensures, that vision is always up.

*Theme: Pause and Reflect for Lessons Learned*

After the emotional process has taken place all participants agreed that taking time to reflect and ask questions so that learning can take place now becomes critical. Participant 6, in his story about the tower falling, did this by finding out why the tower fell. Instead of running away fearfully from his industry, he dug in and did all he could to discover the why, an answer he eventually learned in detail. Multiple participants mentioned that learning the lesson in detail with specifics and not just general or high-level learning, allows someone to know what to do and how to move forward with plans that fix the problem. Participant 4 mentioned how detailed responses and plans were highly necessary for a leader to be able to provide for their team. He has seen the difference between success and failure hinge on a leader's ability to provide details that

have substantive information with enough detail to be readily used. Only specifics can do this, not generalities.

Participant 5 described how his training program relies on this stage of the failure recovery process, the ability to learn the right lessons through what they call a debrief. He described how many walk away from failures only scratching the surface of the real issue at hand. It is a bit of a process to get to the right reasons that will provide the right solutions. This process involves root cause analysis, meaning analysis that gets to the root cause of the problem. In any failure there might be 15 reasons for the failure occurring, but what is the core issue that needs to be adjusted in order to fix everything else? If a team has had a repeated problem despite multiple attempts to fix the problem, it is likely that they have not yet asked enough of the right questions to discover the root cause. Participant 5 said it is important to ask why five times during analysis. Doing so helps the team to get past the surface and into the underbelly of the problem. Participant 2 also agreed that analyzing the failure and doing a post-mortem was critical to understanding “the specific things I can control to do better and effect the outcome.” He also said that during this stage of failure recovery, “I really pause, I really stop, I really take a lot of time, and I get a lot of clarity of thought.” He mentioned how he is looking for that “north star” that will just hit him as he is processing and analyzing. He described that analysis process as follows,

I also analyze all of the different options. Like I’m spinning a cube and thinking through what failures will happen if I go down this path vs. this path, etc. I am always sort of flipping, spinning, and changing. Thinking about if things don’t work out will I still feel good about what I did or wish I had never done this

before? Or do I feel good like I took my best shot? As I'm doing this there just comes this sort of North Star to me. I talk with my advisors to check me and then I follow that option. I'm someone who talks it out. I talk with a lot of people to get their perspective.

Participant 1 talked about how important it was to use data and processes during this reflection and analysis. When considering the different paths forward and what changes to make, go back and look at the data and see what it has to say about what happened and how to proceed forward. Analyze the processes, each phase of the process and see where the ball was dropped. Participant 10 also talked about root cause analysis and how it helps them to ensure "never events" never happen, or never happen twice. He works in the medical world and he discussed how when "never events" are discussed it is an all hands on deck type of process and a very serious thing that everyone on the team is a part of. It is a process of going through each aspect of their process under a fine-tooth comb to ensure they get to the root cause and correct the thing that needs correcting in order to ensure that the particular "never event" never happens again.

Participant 5 talked about how his whole focus in his training program is to help develop critical thinkers who can solve problems and find solutions through this debrief process because these are the people who eventually find success. Participant 6 also agrees with this narrative and described what he had done over the years to help pause and reflect for lessons learned. He said,

Over the years if a mistake was made I'd pull them in and have them explain what happened. Then I'd ask them what they learned? Then I'd ask if they were ever

going to do that again? Then I'd send them on their way with that feeling of support and confidence from me that they'll do better next time.

All participants in the study seemed to point to this theme as the single most important theme to the failure recovery process. Each of their definitions pointed to success being progression and noted how progression cannot happen without learning. There are additional themes before and after this theme, but if this phase of the redemptive intelligence process is removed then nothing else can happen and nothing else matters because change of heart, mind, and actions cannot take place unless there is knowledge gained from lessons learned about what to do next. After these root causes are determined and lessons are learned with a level of necessary specificity, then an individual is ready to go about fixing the problem with humility and honesty.

*Theme: Fix-It with Humility and Honesty*

Specific lessons learned with details help to fix the situation in whatever way it can still be fixed, while also fixing-it for future situations. Participants 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10 all specifically mentioned "fixing-it" as one of their first responses after failure while other participants commented on themes related to it. They all recognized that there are things that cannot be controlled or fixed any longer, but the things that can still be controlled or fixed should be fixed right away. Participant 3 highlighted this when she said that a person should look to fix-it by, "fixing what you can fix." There is an acceptance and a letting go of the things that are no longer controllable and cannot be fixed, but also a realization that many great things will be left undone if an individual walks away from the failure completely. The important thing to remember is not everyone will fix things the same way and that is ok, but get started on fixing something



and the other areas that can be fixed will become clear. Participant 1 talked about the importance of not waiting too long in the reflection for lessons learned stage. He said, “Act swiftly. Don’t get lost in the analysis. Make a decision, and move confidently forward.” He then cited a version of a General Patton quote stating, “a good plan violently executed today is better than a perfect plan next week” (American Military History, 2022). Participant 5 referred to this type of fixing-it when he said, “see something, say something.” Participant 4 said that one of the first things he does and anyone should do after failure is to, “do whatever you can to fix-it.” He emphasized the “whatever you can” by talking about commitment to each other and commitment to purpose as the driving force for doing whatever can be done to fix-it. It takes heart and a level of care to be willing to fix-it. Participant 10 said, “anytime you’ve got a failure that can point out a blind spot or a weakness, if you fix-it so it doesn’t happen again then you’ve gotten better.” Fixing-it can be both fixing the issue going forward by adjusting processes, thinking, and actions, etc.; but it can also be fixing the controllable things that can still be fixed in the current failure. Participant 7 talked about this as well as two necessary characteristics to succeeding in this fix-it stage of the failure recovery process.

Participant 7 said, “when something doesn’t go right, I feel very motivated to try it again. To work on it and to conquer it. It really pushes me.” She went on to say, “there’s a humility and acceptance that I could have done better and that helps me to get through the heaviness of it.” She describes humility and an acceptance of truth, or honesty, as key elements to a successful fixing-it process. Participant 6 showed that humility and honesty were vital in his acceptance of the facts that there were corrosive processes that brought that tower down and presently there was nothing done to prevent

that corrosion. He was humble enough to not blame the tower owner or others who could have been at fault. He humbly decided to take it on himself and find a solution, which he did. When there is a willingness to take this type of extreme ownership on and put all defensiveness and excuse making to the side there are some great things that can happen and Participant 6 did that in this case. It is important to note that the importance of humility and honesty are crucial at every stage of the failure recovery process, but are highlighted in this stage because good fixing can only happen when someone has the ability to see what needs to be fixed and that can only happen with honesty and humility. They need humility and honesty to see themselves and the world around them as they really are and not as they wished it was. Participant 2 corroborated this idea when he said, “humility is an accurate assessment” of self and the world around oneself. This humility was referred to by all participants in some way, many using the term “ownership” to speak of the importance of humility and honesty.

Participant 1 said to get better and improve someone needs to take extreme ownership, show humility, and not blame others, but blame self. Participant 5 said that those in their leadership training who typically focus on themselves and show high levels of ownership are best. Participant 6 mentioned how important it was to “own it, don’t blame it on someone else, don’t shirk your part.” Participant 10 said it more strongly in stating that the “worst thing in failure is to lay blame to a single person. You start singling people out, especially in public, and it’s really hard to get them back. You should never do that. It’s just immature.” He and many other participants agreed that these concepts of honesty and humility were very important throughout the redemptive intelligence process, but especially so when someone starts fixing-it. After someone has

bravely acknowledged and processed painful emotions with hope, paused to reflect for lessons learned, and started fixing things with humility and honesty; much of the work is yet to be done.

*Theme: Grit Through with Purpose and Perseverance*

Most participants agreed in one way or another that certain levels of grit, resiliency, and hard work were required to make improvements. Participant 8, after receiving some feedback that he was not good enough, decided to spend five hours a day and six days a week practicing his instrument. He never missed a practice day from the time he was 22 to 26. He really felt this level of grit and resiliency set him apart when he was in Nashville and no longer the most talented musician around in his smaller town. He mentioned always feeling like the solution to needing to get better was simply mathematical. He needed to just practice more, as well as practice smarter. He said his practice process involved slowing everything down, focusing on each component, working on it until the mistakes were ironed out, and then speeding it up and working it over and over again. He was striving for perfection. He wanted to go into performance night with a 99% chance of success, not a 50% to 90% chance. Participant 2 said that he was not always the smartest, but he had the “capacity for drudgery” where he could do things longer than others were willing to do them. As shared earlier in a quote he said, he was willing to pull all-nighters to gain just a 2% increase in his chances for success. Whatever he could do to maximize his potential for success, he was going to do. Participant 1 exhibited through multiple stories how he was able to make partner at a young age and within a five year period of time, because he was willing to work harder, longer, and smarter than most. Participant 5 mentioned earlier how he was not totally

prepared for basic training, but learned that the way through was to keep showing up after difficulty or failure. He elaborated that later when he was in charge of conducting basic training, it became apparent that the goal was to push individuals to their breaking point, no matter where that was, and give them the opportunity to respond. The subsequent level of grit and resiliency in their response was a greater indication of future success than where their personal breaking point was in relation to the breaking points of others. Meaning if someone knows how to respond right, it does not matter how low that breaking point is the first time. It will build over time and if an individual or team will keep responding after a breaking point is hit, then progression and success are guaranteed, eventually. Every other participant supported this belief in the importance of resiliency and grit. They did so through stories and examples from their own experiences and that of others. Participant 9 cited that resiliency is the thing he is most proud of in his children.

Participant 8 shared how his band's mantra when things were not going right was to "just go write some music." Meaning, stop worrying about the past, or the breaking point that was just hit, and just get back to work and make another song. He shared a good story about the benefits of doing this, especially when in the lowest of lows. He shared how there was a time when they thought they had to quit because of something that seemed outside of their control. The details of what happened next cannot be shared in this study, but everyone in the group ended up being of one mindset and decided they were not going to quit even though that would have been a very easy decision to make. At this point they had already enjoyed an awesome career and much success. They had not won a grammy, but they had enjoyed multiple number 1 singles, top 5, top 10, and

top 20 songs. Many other individuals and teams would have retired and been very pleased with their careers and rode off into the sunset. There were also a lot of other personal things going on in their lives that were among the most difficult types of things that human beings deal with. Additionally, their record label, who they had a great run with, was bought out by a foreign label and the group ended up getting dropped along with a ton of other musicians. Participant 8 thinks that there was so much going on that if a couple of them would have quit then he thinks they all would have. However, as shared earlier, their mantra when things were not going right was to just go write some music. “Go record something and something good will happen.”

Participant 8 and his group ended up putting some songs together and got picked up by another label. This label was not as popular and was different than what they were used to, but they decided to go with them. When they finally sold their new album it was a bit of a flop. It sold way less copies than they had become accustomed to. It felt to the participant like facing this whole process was a big failure. Being in a difficult time in the band’s history, getting dropped by their label, signing up with the new label, doing the project itself, low sells, all of it. It felt like a failure from the start, like they would have been better off to not even get started. It was a long way from where they were, but in Participant 8’s words, “at least we went and did it. We were aggressive and got out there and did it. That was our philosophy. Just go do something good and go make music and something is going to happen.” As fate would happen, one of the most popular songs on the album that felt like such a failure from start to finish was nominated for a grammy and ended up winning it. They had won their first grammy in their long and successful career by sticking to their values and their mantra and exercising high levels of

redemptive intelligence. "Going through that crap together made us stronger" and they have never been healthier or better.

While perseverance is important to future success, grit will not be exhibited without understanding and knowing purpose. In every good success story involving certain levels of grit and resiliency, there is always purpose. Not only was knowing and remembering purpose mentioned by participants as an important factor in their failure recovery process, but it was also purpose supported by their examples in the stories they shared. Each of these 10 participants are extremely successful in their careers. They are respected by peers within their industry and are admired and respected by many outside of their industry. They have built a reputation for themselves that is founded on enduring principles that have aided them in their success, but when odds were against them they remembered that they had a purpose and so their efforts towards goals that they cared about also had purpose. This purpose drove them out of the pain of failure and into the joy of success time and time again throughout their careers and will continue to do so. While that process for Participant 8 ended up in a grammy award, each participant has won or will win their "grammy award" because of their high levels of grit, supported by and evidenced through a clear understanding of purpose and a willingness to persevere with high levels of redemptive intelligence when others are not. After processing emotional pain, reflecting for lessons, fixing-it with honesty and humility, gritting through with purpose and perseverance it comes time to prove that all of that work results in forsaking the failure with faith and resolved confidence.

*Theme: Forsake with Faith and Resolved Confidence*

All participants mentioned this need to forsake or not repeat the mistake going forward for there to truly be learning that leads to progress. Participant 2 said, “make new mistakes, just never make the same mistake. You should never make the same mistake twice.” Participant 6 said about his failure recovery process, “You celebrate the good things and don’t beat people up too much and learn the lessons, form a plan, put it into action and don’t repeat the same mistakes.” Participant 1 also discussed the importance of an “excited anger” or passion to “not repeat mistakes.” This not repeating of mistakes is usually preempted by the participants’ confidence that they have learned what they need to, to overcome the failure and ultimately forsake the mistakes of the past and not repeat them. Participant 1 shared a story about how his newly formed department was hitting almost all of the metrics in their engineering firm and receiving much notoriety by admirers who were watching, but for the CEO they were failing and falling short on one key metric. Rather than look at the obvious difficulties that stood in their way to achieve that metric/goal or worry about why the CEO was not applauding their obvious success, Participant 1 decided to ask more from his team. He went to work and inspired his team to have confidence that they could achieve the lofty goal placed upon them by the CEO. Armed with confidence, the team then went to work, forsook the lesser performance or failures of the past, and achieved the metric/goal. They achieved their desired outcome, and stopped failing in the eyes of the CEO.

Participant 5 shared a story about how he missed out on an opportunity he wanted in part because he was not more aggressive in expressing his desire or capabilities for the position. As he pondered about this situation, he realized that there were things he could

have personally done to help the situation, but he also recognized that a letter from his commanding officer would have gone a long way. His commanding officer really liked Participant 5 and would have been happy to refer him, but that was not how things were done. Participant 5 started to question that and later in a commanding officer position, started to write reference letters for some of those he felt deserved it. He has been admonished from those receiving the letters that his letters were the difference in the individual receiving the desired position. This success happened for many reasons, but primarily because Participant 5 resolved within himself to confidence and had faith that doing something that is not normally done would indeed make a difference. Participant 6 also mentioned the importance of confidence, both instilling it in the team and having it in self. He said after a group knows what to go do they have to, “then have the willingness and confidence to go do it and put it into action.” Everything up until confidence in action starts to happen is just ideas. There are many dreamers who have marvelous plans and ideas of what could be done, but they remain undone because among other reasons there was not the confidence to put the idea into action. Many talented people falter at this step. They have the ability but do not seem to have the confidence or exhibit the faith to make a decision and start moving forward.

Participant 7 expressed that faith in the ability to improve is vital to moving forward in the failure recovery process. This faith for improvement in the future and a resolved confidence to try has to come from within the individual, but can be inspired by various external reasons. Getting to confidence was different for each of the participants. Participant 7 described that her faith in progression and to try again comes from her belief in Jesus Christ, in her purpose in life, in her processes, and in her goals. She said,



It has to be confidence in the process. First thing you do when you screw up is look around to see if anyone saw you do that thing, but there is a lot of value in remembering that you are looking toward the goal and not towards the approval of other people. This is where faith sets in. I'm so thankful for a Savior that allows me the space to try to learn from my mistakes. Remembering that it's not about perfection but progression and learning. Thinking how this is what's supposed to happen for learning and growth to take place. It's really the purpose of life. Remembering that through this I can become the person that I'm supposed to be or intend to be.

Other participants also mentioned gaining confidence through remembering the goals or the vision of where they want to be. Participant 1 also corroborated Participant 7's comment about processes. He said that "going through your process helps to stay grounded and get back to confidence." Others corroborated this belief in that the majority of participants said their process after failure is not much different than their process after success. Some of the emotions are different, but falling back on that consistent and well-known process can be very helpful in resolving to confidence and having the faith to take steps moving forward again.

One participant shared how leaning into confidence and choosing to believe can be aided by remembering past successes. Multiple participants said relying on the support of the team and mentors is key to gaining confidence. Participant 10 said it this way, "there's so many failures where self-analysis, self-criticism does not get you where you need to get. I really think it's a team game. You have to have a mentor or multiple mentors." Participant 4 also mentioned how important the supportive environment is to

an individual's capacity to overcome failure and get back to confidence. Participant 2 talked about his ability for drudgery being something that helps his confidence. It does not matter so much where the confidence comes from, but it has to be present in order to achieve success. Participant 8 said it this way, "you have to have confidence, even if it's a false confidence, so that the nerves are not there and you can just flow" and perform at your highest level.

The interesting thing that was apparent throughout the research process with each of these participants was this air of confidence in each of them while at the same time deep humility. There was this recognition in each of them and an understanding that failure is a well-known companion of the past and will be in the future. Acknowledging this probability for failure in the future almost freed them up to be confident. It is because they were not so concerned with failure or fearful of it. There was confidence in knowing they have dealt with failures in the past and made it through just fine so if they have to deal with it again they will be fine. Now they were all driven to succeed, but more because they wanted to, not because they needed to. They were not afraid of failing. They did not want to fail and were committed to not fail, but they were not afraid of it. It was just a humble acceptance of the failure recovery process as a necessary path to growth and if growth is happening then success is just around the corner. The connection between humility and confidence seemed to suggest that confidence is not as glamorous as one might see from the movies or read about in books. Most of the choices toward confidence come in the quiet spaces of the mind and do so while feeling humble and staring in the face of adversity and potential embarrassment. The trick to faith and confidence that leads to success then becomes very simple. It is a quiet, non-attention

seeking choice within one-self to believe that trying and taking action will make a difference. That type of confidence is truly a simple choice and these participants have discovered the simplicity of that choice. It has become easy for them, even second nature, to have the confidence that is behind their growth and successful achievement. Even though this choice is simple, it is also strong and resolute in that it cannot be bypassed. All who hope to get moving, forsake mistakes, and eventually achieve success will find that faith and a resolved confidence are a necessary requirement.

*Theme: Support with Joyful Optimism in Self and Others*

Lastly, the final theme for improving performance after failure that was most evident in each participant during the interviews was this idea of the support that comes with joyful optimism in self and others. As the interviews progressed it became the most prevalent theme that was the backbone behind the success of each of the participants as well as the backbone of each of the other themes. Each participant had this optimism for themselves to achieve their goals despite all setbacks. It was inspiring to the researcher. They did not think about the setback for long. They just got back to work and knew that they would ultimately achieve. It felt as if each of them could respond either right away or within a short period of time after a failure occurred, “well of course I’m going to achieve.” This optimism was different than just a belief to achieve, it was patient, wise, energetic, it was even palpable, it was future focused, and it was ever present. It is not that they did not feel the pain/emotion and need time to process, but they were always supported by this joyful optimism in self and in others and did so relatively quickly. As Participant 6 put it, “there wasn’t time to sit in the doldrums of despair.” Participant 2 said, “that’s just an ego thing when we want to say I’m the worst. It comes from a selfish

place. Be humble and assess what went wrong and what could get better.” Participant 1 also said that people who struggle after failure do so because they are insecure and take things so personally. They lack that joy and optimism for themselves and the world around them. Each participant mentioned that they do not sit with despair for too long. Participant 9 taught that it is simply not a helpful or productive thing to do. Confronting the pain of what happened and processing and dealing with it is good, but staying there is not. As Participant 5 said, “you can visit pity city, you just can’t stay there.” Each of these participants were really good at not staying in “pity city.”

This optimism in self also required a certain level of optimism in others because nothing, or at least not many things, are achieved in this world without the help, support, or opportunity being afforded by others. Each participant shared stories of how they worked with or depended on others for their success, they truly could not do it alone. “It’s a team thing” as Participant 10 said. He also taught that personal failure is really difficult to deal with, but team failure is much easier. There is always blame that can be shouldered by everyone taking responsibility for actions of the team. No one person gets singled out, they all are working toward common goals and win and lose together. Participant 4 also made a strong statement about the importance of support mechanisms and the brotherhood that is formed through, from, and for adversity. As participants 4, 10, and others expressed why that support of team was so helpful, it was clear that it came from this place of ever-present joyful optimism about self and others on the team to succeed in the future. One person with joyful optimism in self will find success, but a team of people who approach life with joyful optimism can do some pretty remarkable things. Participant 9 expressed how critical it was to get people who do not dwell on

failures, but create opportunity from it when selecting candidates for job positions.

People who have positive attitudes are optimistic in their demeanor. He has led candidate search efforts for multiple deans and found that this ability to be positive and optimistic, and problem solve in the face of adversity is what is most indicative of success in that position and others. Participant 10 said that he personally looks for people that are kind, conscientious, and hard workers. People that will not make excuses, but will get stuff done. Participant 5 said he looks for people that are humble, approachable, and credible because if they have these things, then despite the failure they can get back to confidence and optimism.

As each participant described values that were critical to individual and team success, it became apparent that what Participant 9 had said during his interview about the importance of a “value system” to hope and optimism being present was true. He said that “sometimes hope seems lost.” but a value system is what helps hope to return and that joyful optimism to be felt once again. He said for himself personally that “it would be hard to describe my approach to successive failures without just anchoring it all in my value system.” He and each participant expressed similar, as well as different value systems, that included things like Jesus Christ, family, teachings from mentors, human qualities, and team characteristics, etc. Each individual value system, uniquely chosen over time by the participant, provided value to that participant, which acted like a strong foundation during a tumultuous storm. The value system acted as a strong catalyst for returning to thoughts and behaviors, which instilled joyful optimism and supported the individual on to future success. While all values had potential to be helpful and were important, the researcher learned that the stronger and more long-lasting the value system

was, the brighter the joyful optimism would beam, showing a path forward out of a moment of darkness in the life of the individual.

Participant 8 additionally had this joyful optimism in himself and in others. He always knew that he would achieve his goals because to him it was only “mathematical.” Meaning all he had to do was put more time in and eventually he would get better and ultimately achieve. He never got too down when failures came along. He shared multiple stories of his extremely supportive parents and of his belief in them and the advice that they gave. He also recounted a story about a very talented musician that he watched perform one day. After this musician’s performance Participant 8, being optimistic enough about himself and others, went and asked the musician if he would support his efforts by doing a lesson with him. The musician agreed. His supportive father drove him out to where the musician lived and they spent three hours together. Participant 8 remembers paying him \$80, but he said the lesson was worth \$80,000 or even \$800,000. It totally changed the way he practiced and thought about life. This session happened because of his joyful optimism in self and his joyful optimism in others around him on his path of progression toward achievement.

Returning to the story in the beginning about the tower falling, Participant 6, after processing the emotion of the tower falling and his brother and friend almost dying, he had a joyful optimism that he could be a difference and that he could get the support from others that he needed to make changes that he saw as necessary. He exhibited this joyful optimism in self and others by banding together with his injured team and going before the industry association in Washington DC to address some of his concerns and present facts about anchor corrosion. His joyful optimism in others paid off and his concerns and

facts were adhered to by the association. They supported his efforts by writing changes into the design and protection of guy anchors. Their effort was published in the next standard and has been a part of the next generation standards ever since. In fact, the support he and the team had from his joyful optimism in self and in others aided each of the other phases of redemptive intelligence that were present in his story. It was the central element that acted like the lifeblood to each of the other themes. Joyful optimism in self and others supported bravely acknowledging and processing painful emotion with hope. Joyful optimism in self and others supported pausing and reflecting for lessons learned. Joyful optimism in self and others supported fixing-it with humility and honesty. Joyful optimism in self and others supported gritting through with purpose and perseverance. Finally, joyful optimism in self and others supported forsaking with faith and resolved confidence. Additionally, the most basic form of success described by participants was joy and the most basic form of failure was pain. Individuals with joyful optimism in self and others will support themselves and others through each element of the failure recovery process and find themselves successfully traveling from pain to joy.

### **Normal Performance**

Each of the emerging themes presented in the Improved Performance section are the same themes that are discussed in the Normal Performance and Lower Performance sections. They are just the opposite or middle levels of performance in relation to those themes. Each theme will not be discussed in the same format, level of detail, or even with the same verbiage as in the Improved Performance section. The main topics related to normal performance and lower performance will be discussed, but each of these topics falls into one of the themes presented in the Improved Performance section.

Participant 3 described this group as those who try to do the same things and expect different results. She also said, “they are unwilling to get uncomfortable to get to a higher place.” This group does not control things that they can control to get better, but on the other hand they do not give up and quit. They are in the middle ground area. They do some things right, but do not make the necessary changes that are needed for improvement. They are either too comfortable with their current level of performance or they do not have the level of commitment, grit, resiliency, or purpose to make changes. They typically are a group of people who work hard, but not extremely hard. There seems to be this unwillingness to get too uncomfortable. Participants 3 and 9 also said that for some the pain of failure is too much or they attached some of their self-worth to that failure and therefore do not believe they were made for more, or that they could achieve more with a continued effort and focus on their goals. Participants 5 and 8 said that some of these individuals turn towards recreational drugs or other perceived to be manageable coping mechanisms that dull some of the pain. Some suffer from mental illness that they either cannot overcome or they tell themselves that they cannot overcome. Yet for others, as mentioned before, it is not that they do not believe in themselves and their ability to achieve or turn to coping mechanisms, they are just content with where they are. Participant 4 mentioned that they lack the competitive drive with self or with others to want more. Participant 7 also corroborated that by stating, “this group dismisses events so that they don’t have to look at them, they just push them aside and sustain mediocrity to sustain the status quo and they are good with that.”

Another theme discussed for this group was their lack of ability to learn.

Participant 6 said that they seem to lack the ability to just learn the lesson once and make



changes to not repeat it again. He had employed a lot of people who tantalized the company with good performance only to go back to old mistakes they could not quite leave. Participant 9 mentioned that this group seems to either not want to listen to feedback or they lack the ability to pick up on subtle feedback that is around them. They end up missing out on the opportunities that this subtle or direct feedback gives them. Participant 3 said that they refuse a growth mindset, to look at things from a different perspective. There is no reevaluation to change the circumstances. They just repeat the same things over and over again. Participant 2 described this as retooling or recalibrating, they just do not come up with new approaches, they run into the same walls over and over again. Participant 1 had a similar, but somewhat nuanced take from his own experience, stating that “I needed to use my brain to actually come up with smarter ways to do things, we needed to actually change the way we were doing things.” He also said, “it’s not just working hard you have to work with your mind and do things smarter, you have to learn.” Participant 8 also talked about how important it was to practice smarter and not just hard. He also mentioned how other musicians just did not want to try new things. They just went back to the way they always did things and had this attitude like that should be good enough to make it.

Participant 8 shared a story of a very talented individual in their industry that had not gotten his break in Nashville yet and started to become disillusioned with the path to success that he was working toward. This friend of Participant 8 mentioned, “it’s all political,” as the reason for his lack of success. This friend stopped believing in the process and in the involvement of others in that process and through that stopped believing in himself ultimately achieving. He lacked the joyful optimism in self and

others that was required for continued progress. His competitive spirit and drive to achieve suffered. He still loved music and was still really good, but did not keep improving. He attached some level of worth to “making it” in his mind. As opposed to “making it” being more of a state of progression than a state of receiving some tangible thing. This was something all of the participants mentioned as being their definition of success. It did not have to do with things, each successful participant had some definition of success that related to progress, learning, or growth. In juxtaposition to this, individuals at this middle level related success more to things. If they had certain things then they did not feel as much drive for progression, learning, or growth.

### **Lower Performance**

Themes in the Lower Performance section are the same themes as those that are presented in the Improved Performance section and further elaborated on in the Normal Performance section. This Lower Performance section represents the opposite end of the six themes presented in the Improved Performance section. As was done in the Normal Performance section, each theme will not be discussed in the same format, level of detail, or even with the same verbiage as in the Improved Performance section. Like in the Normal Performance section, the main themes of lower performance will be discussed, but do not constitute a new theme, as they fall into one of the main themes presented in the Improved Performance section.

In general, the people at this level did the opposite of the six themes that aided improved performance after failure. First, they do not bravely process painful emotions with hope. Second, they do not pause and reflect for lessons learned. Third, they do not fix-it with humility and honesty, Fourth, they do not grit through the pain with purpose

and perseverance. Fifth, they do not forsake with faith and resolved confidence. Lastly, they do not live with joyful optimism in self and others. While participants gave these as various reasons people perform worst after failure, the most common theme for those in this category is because they emotionally do not process the pain of failure in brave, hopeful, and healthy ways. Participant 1 mentioned it as the “victim mentality” that these individuals get themselves into, where they blame the world and circumstances around them. He said, “they get insecure and just say they are not good enough. They live in that world of almost depression because they don’t believe they can ever be good enough and they lose any optimism.” Participant 1 and 2, as well as others mentioned how they start to play the blame game and turn on others. Each successful leader and participant conveyed in one way or the other a particularly strong distaste for individuals who blame others. Participant 1 cited this as the “biggest characteristic of failed teams.”

Participant 3 also agreed that they emotionally do not process failure well. Saying that they, “personalize everything” and understand a bad moment as meaning they are a bad leader, bad manager, bad participant, bad player, or bad person, etc. Participant 5, who was mentioned earlier for running a program focused on pushing people to their breaking point, said, “people struggle to redefine success and failure, some have received too many gold stars in their lives that when they don’t receive them they have a breakdown.” He was teaching that in his program the most successful students are those who can reprogram their definition of success to be that of progression, so that they do not need the gold star anymore, they just need progression, growth, and learning to have success. Participant 8 agreed that they get too caught up with rejection and just give up

and give into the stereotypical drugs or other coping mechanisms to handle their emotions, since they were not able to process and handle them on their own.

Participant 7 explained in a good way, this process of not emotionally handling the failure by saying,

I feel like it's this negative self-talk, like the failure is directly associated with how they feel about themselves, or their worth or even nature, and so I think it would be hard to want to try again. Or to just even face the risk or the fear of failing again. So, it's almost safer to not try. You can either expand your box or you can shrink it down and I feel like in that you kind of just shrink down what you can do or what you're capable of because of a fear of not wanting to show up that way and other people seeing you that way. It's just easier not to risk it. So, you become more closed off.

Participant 9, along with others, corroborated this line of thinking by explaining that it is a real danger to start attaching some of those professional achievements to self-worth.

That is when self-worth becomes something that is not anchored toward universal attributes that are longer lasting. Self-worth becomes something that is consumed with professional or temporary attributes that the organization or others might value. Rather than the individual having their own value system that can withstand the test of time because it is rooted in something that is longer term, even eternal, they start to attach themselves and their value to things that are ever changing or fleeting in nature.

Participant 9 said, "that's where the slow descent to self-worth begins and the ensuing spiral of failures start." He did a good job of illustrating how pivotal a person's value system is, stating that he had never met a successful leader that did not have a value

system. Assuming that is true for everyone, then the opposite might also be true that there was never an unsuccessful person that had a value system; one that was strong and made of longer lasting, even eternal values. A strong internal value system helps an individual to not shrink their box, as Participant 7 said, but stay open to expanding their box despite the failures in their life.

Another issue identified was an unwillingness to take responsibility. They deflect and do not take ownership. This was something mentioned by multiple participants. It becomes hard for them to fix anything because they lack the honesty and humility that helps them to recognize that there is anything to fix. Participant 3 explained in a good way why this is such an issue for the learning process. She said,

They deflect. They have an inability to see their part in the problem, and they make a lot of excuses, and they give all of their power away. And so it's, it's difficult as a leader to work with someone like that, because if none of the problem is their fault, then they can't possibly be a part of the solution. And so, teaching people radical accountability where everything, everything's on me, like all of the problems, I can take radical responsibility for all of it, because that liberates them to then like change it all. Like, I have the ability to be free and liberated. That's really important. But there are some people that just aren't in a space to be ready for that, for whatever reason and so they got to do some personal growth and development.

This point was discussed a bit in Chapter 2, but when people do not take responsibility and deflect or make up excuses, they are essentially giving up their opportunity to impact

anything going forward. If they had no control or part in the failure, then they are essentially admitting their inability to impact anything going forward.

Why they do that is a bigger mystery, but Participant 1 said that it comes from a place of insecurity. He said,

They get insecure and just say, oh man I'm not good enough. They live in that world of almost depression because they don't think they are good enough and so they're insecure. They don't believe they can ever be good enough and they lose optimism.

Again, the absence of this always ongoing joyful optimism makes it difficult for them to keep trying. Participant 4 referred to it as the "care factor," saying that if people are not committed then energy to keep going at that goal is not going to be there. He also said, "So, getting people to have purpose in your cause I think will help with the support of failure whether that be in a moment or for a season." It is important to note that this heart, passion, purpose, care, investment, energy, or joyful optimism did not mean that participants were bouncing off the walls and overly positive. They had energy, but they were very realistic in their speech and approaches that they took. It was not all about energy. There was a need for logic, details, and specifics, but they also recognized a need for the heart to be involved in the successful achievement of anything.

Participant 5 did a good job of summing up some of what has been shared previously, but included a few more reasons why some people get worse after failure. He said that some people are not humble enough to accept the mistakes when highlighted. Some people have an inability to learn from mistakes even when they can accept them. Some people learn from their mistakes, but have a really hard time implementing

solutions that work and thus repeat mistakes. Some are not emotionally in a place where they can handle the mistakes and cannot roll with the punches. Some can roll with the punches, but cannot communicate well enough to see to it that changes are made. While struggling in one of the six areas of redemptive intelligence are some of the reasons people struggle after failure and end up becoming worse, all participants agreed that the most prevalent concept was the connection to unhealthy emotional processing that inhibits successful progress and learning.

### **Tips and Tricks for Improved Performance**

The participants shared multiple tips and tricks for handling failure recovery that are simple in nature. While some of these tips and tricks were a part of the emerging themes in the Improved Performance and Emerging Themes section, this section served to quickly relate some of the actionable tips and tricks that came out during the research process. This is not a complete and exhaustive list of each participant's beliefs, but shares some of what the participants discussed. These ideas were shared as a collective whole and not designated by participant.

One tip is to engage in prayer and allow "yourself to feel support from a loving God who cares deeply." Getting to that place of inner peace, strength, and power. Finding balance through quietness, contemplation, meditation, connection to God, connection to other trusted sources. Voicing it out with trusted individuals. Slowing things down and clearing the brain. When negative voices start coming into mind then slow things down and get clarity of thinking by focusing back on the solution to getting to where you want to go. Do not think about what is in the past at some point and simply start moving forward taking one step at a time and the path will become clear when moving forward.

“Hold lightly to your own views and try to put yourself in the shoes of others and lean unto their views.” One participant said,

It was Victor Frankl who taught that we progress, and we essentially expand our agency the most when we can create space between stimulus and response.

Between what has happened and how we're going to respond to it. So, as you start feeling those negative emotions moving up, or those negative thoughts. You think this is not who I am, and this is not how I want to feel. This is not productive, and particularly as a leader. This is not what I need to be reflecting right now. If you can take that space and expand it as far as you need to, and sit with things as they are. It is extremely helpful. I find that the leaders that just immediately try and say, okay, well, this is what we're going to do and here's where we're going to go, a lot of times are led by emotion. When we're led by emotion it doesn't often go as well as when we're led by inspiration. And so just creating space between stimulus and response. For me again, that means, you know, just coming back to my breath, getting really quiet. I'm giving myself a little bit of space to think about, things, to pray about things, and then come back to the situation, even if you just have a minute or 2. Even if I mean in the heat of the moment, you just have a few moments to just get really quiet and call on that that higher power to help you create that space that you need to be given that guidance. It makes a profound difference. So that would be the tip that I've learned. That's made the biggest difference for me, is to do whatever I can to create more space between my stimulus and the response. Because that space is where our agency exists, that space is where we can be the most inspired leaders.



Just start by fixing something and do not analyze too long. “Compartmentalize the failure and log it away in the back of your mind.” After the failure is done and emotion is processed, “you can be the defendant another time, but right now you are the prosecutor, so play that role. If there is defense language in your thoughts or speech remind yourself that you are not the defendant right now.” This participant also said, “You’re the detective walking into a crime scene and you’ve got to solve the problem. It’s like a third party coming in to solve it.” Another participant said to remember purpose and direction, whatever that might be and wherever it might be headed. Look for the “North Star” when processing through things, clarity and inspiration will come. “Stop and make a personal assessment. Is this really possible where I want to go? Do I want to go there?” Remember humor is great, “you got to be able to laugh at yourself.” Help lighten the mood for the team with well-timed humor. Remember that rejection and failure is creating and strengthening resiliency little by little with each rejection and each failure. Lastly, have and talk to mentors, trusted individuals who will give kind and honest feedback.

### **Research Question 2**

Research question 2 states how does a leader’s beliefs on failure recovery processes impact the success of their team? All participants agreed strongly that failure has had a large impact on their future success, with seven of the 10 participants indicating their failures having been a 10 out of 10 for their level of impact on future success, with none of the participants rating lower than an eight out of 10. Leaders specifically agree that a leader’s beliefs on failure recovery processes impacts the success of their team.

Participant 5 said,

It absolutely impacts the team. Everyone is looking for to the leader for guidance in wins and failures. Instill confidence in the team. Pretty dang important because if the leader stays neutral then the failures are probably going to continue.

Participant 10 also commented that this is,

an interesting study because human interaction with negative things like failure are among the hardest things to deal with as humans because we're all sensitive, we all have egos, we all want to perform, and none of us want to be criticized in front of our peers and our colleagues. So, I think our failures shape so much about us.

Suggesting to the researcher that everyone is a product of their failures so it definitely has an impact on the team whether the leader recognizes it or not. In the case of these 10 participants each of them expressed that failure recovery processes of leaders impact the success of the team. How that is done is through many different actions that the leader takes because of their beliefs. One of the ways that a leader's beliefs on failure impacts a team's success is through the level of detail that is examined after failure occurs.

Participant 6 expressed how important it was to not just gloss over things, but to give details of how improvement can be made. He said, "you can't just go tell everyone things are going to be good without specifics." As was mentioned previously, Participant 4 also saw it as absolutely critical to be able to provide detailed responses when things are not going right. He commented on his deep desire to provide answers for his players after failure or during adversity. He cited a previous experience with failure where he felt he could have provided better detailed answers and how that could have been the difference in a team failure that occurred. He did not look around and blame others, but

looked at himself and worked on always being able to provide those answers. This desire to always provide the tools needed for success is what drives him. He felt it his calling in life to care for the people he works with and do all he can to help them succeed. He feels a love and passion for his players and stated, “a brother is born for adversity” (King James Bible, n.d.) during the interview process; meaning friends are there in good times but a brother is born during times of adversity. Whether in good or bad times Participant 4 is a brother to his players and does all he can to support his team, especially those who have become brothers born through, from, or for a time of adversity. He is now one of the most successful and sought after college coaches in his sport and much of his success and the success of his teams have come from what he learned through his failure recovery processes and redemptive intelligence.

Some of the common words and phrases used in relation to research question 2 were positivity, calm, no sugar coating, slow things down, allow people time, grace, show competitive drive, show support, criticize privately, praise publicly, pay attention to human factors, no knee jerk reactions, transparency, be the example, instill confidence, allow time to process, encourage and guide, set new goals, try again, acknowledge failure to honor efforts, focus on hope and opportunity, learn, get better, get back to work. Some of these words pointed to another belief of participants that if a leader has not learned how to recover from failure properly and shows arrogance, cockiness, anger, or lots of other immature negative emotions, then they will lose their team. Once a team is lost, it is a lot of effort to get them back, if it is even possible at all. Participant 6 said, “if the leader beats the team down and doesn’t give guidance things are not going to get better. If you give encouragement and guidance then that’s really helpful to a team” after failure

has occurred. To help keep it positive and not lay blame, participants 2, 3, 7 and others said it is important for a leader to give space and ask lots of questions to allow the team time to process what happened and encourage discussion on what they learned. The discussion will lead to discoveries they could not come up with on their own.

Additionally, each participant expressed that what they like to see from their team after failure is the same as what they like to see from themselves after failure has occurred.

They did not have different requirements for the team than for themselves. Their expectations for self might have been higher than the team for some participants, but they were not different. This suggests that the failure recovery processes of leaders are inextricably linked to the processes that they engage with their team through when recovering from failure. So, if a leader wants a team to remain positive and not lay blame and take responsibility then they need to do as Participant 5 said and “be the example.”

Being the example can happen in many ways, one of which is how important it is for the leader to recognize failure with the team. Participant 9 said, “I don’t think it’s true leadership unless you can acknowledge failure, it’s part of the learning process.” He also said that “if you ignore the failure you ignore the consequences and all the poor decisions along the way” and those poor decisions will keep impacting other efforts. It is better to address things with the team when failure happens and learn from them than to hope that failure does not come back around again. Participants 5, 7, and others mentioned the importance of being the example by admitting fault can be extremely powerful, inspiring, and very helpful to team culture when they see the leader model the way with humility. Admitting fault for self and acknowledging failure are important because it is the leader’s role to set and maintain the standard and doing these things helps the team recognize that

the standards are not slipping. Another way in which a leader can be the example is by selecting the right people to be on the team. Each participant agreed that selecting the right people to have on their team was an important element of a leader's beliefs on failure and their impact on their teams. Each of these successful leaders demonstrated that they are extremely thoughtful and careful about building their team. They have very high standards, and a very thorough and rigorous process. Most of what they are looking for from team members selected relates to attitudes that are manifested when adversity or failure happens. Leaders know that failure will happen and when it does, they want to know that their team can respond appropriately. Participant 10 said it well by stating,

Hopefully you've created a strong team because boy having the right team is so important. If you have a strong team and you fail you can usually bounce back pretty quickly because you've created team dynamics where when a team fails you don't point at individuals.

He felt one of the most important things a leader could do is put a strong team around them, because if a strong team was present then the strengths of the leader were not as critical to each success the team was working toward.

When asked about the first thing for a team to see from a leader after failure, some of the common words and phrases were, set the example, even tempered, do not dismiss, deflate attention, make a joke, laugh at yourselves, point it out, do not take things too seriously, start the analysis, long term vision, express confidence and trust, transparency, empower, everything is ok and is going to be ok, silver linings, humility, patience, honesty, love. Right after failure occurs and all eyes are on the leader, Participant 6 said to "point to the silver lining in the dark clouds. Point to the wins we got

and build people up.” He also said light heartedness and transparency opens people up, saying things like, “Well we got our butts kicked out there didn’t we? Then everyone responds with, oh yeah we did, I’m glad you said it out loud. Yeah, we did, but we can win again.” It can diffuse the tension and break the ice because for most people if their leader is calm, then they are; if their leader is confident, then they are.

Lastly, participants talked about how a leader can bring their team back to the big picture, lay out a vision, and empower the team to work through the failure, so that they can grow. Participant 5 said that it is better that the leader not get in the way, “These are talented people who know how to solve problems, so express belief, set some vision and expectations, and empower them to figure out the answers.” Then he said to stay involved and “let them skin their knee, but don’t let them break their leg.” Participant 3 also talked about how important it was to bring the person back to the big picture and show some love and heart in leadership. She said, “I think the most important thing that your team can see when they look at you is that you have a vision of them that is larger than this present moment.” So, allowing that first thing seen to be vision, empowerment, calmness, positivity, and even love can be very powerful for setting a team on the right course toward improved performance after failure.

### **Amount of Failure and Common Processes**

One of the beliefs of the author going into the study was that successful leaders don’t fail less often, but fail with higher levels of redemptive intelligence after failure. The research supported this general belief, showing ample information to suggest that not only do successful leaders not fail less often, but they might actually fail more often. During the interview with Participant 9, and while striving to connect his comments with

other participants, an idea emerged that was corroborated by others. During questions related to why some people follow the lower performance path, it became clear that the main issue for those on this path were that they struggle to acknowledge and process the emotional pain of failure with hope to such an extent that they end up quitting and giving up. Quitting ensures two things. First, future pain will be limited if not become obsolete per that type of failure. Second, it ensures that there is less or no failure per that particular type of failure that comes from effort towards that particular event. This is because the individual has stopped attempting. If they stop attempting they will not know the success and overcome the failure, but they also will not have to feel the defeat or failure, because fewer or no attempts are being made. Conversely, for those that eventually overcome the circumstances of that failure, there are more attempts at overcoming that particular failure. They may immediately succeed on their next attempt, but most the time there will be multiple failures before individuals eventually succeed. The individuals (unsuccessful leaders) that do not attempt will have fewer attempts, fewer failures, and not know success. The individuals (successful leaders) that make attempts will have more attempts, more failures, and know success. Additionally, those interviewed showed very high levels of redemptive intelligence during their attempts and failure recovery, as was evidenced in the emerging themes generated from the participant's responses. Their examples and responses not only corroborated the current literature from Chapter 2 but clarified and expanded upon said literature.

Another belief of the author was that there exist common failure recovery processes amongst all industries. Also, that these common processes will lead to redemption after failure when they are adhered to and abided by, regardless of the

industry. The research supported this belief, as was evidenced through the common themes established in answering research question 1. While the specific tasks are obviously different from one industry or ideology to the next, the successful leadership and team dynamics which fostered success, as well as the unsuccessful leadership and team dynamics which fostered failure, had common themes across industries and ideologies, as well as manifested similar effects on all human beings from every field. The common failure recovery processes that were manifested throughout the research that led to improved performance or future success were first, bravely acknowledge and process painful emotions with hope. Second, pause and reflect for lessons learned. Third, fix-it with humility and honesty. Fourth, grit through with purpose and perseverance. Fifth, forsake with faith and resolved confidence. Sixth, support with joyful optimism in self and others.

### **Summary**

This research effort included 10 participants that were successful leaders based on various factors, including respect from their peers within their industry. Each participant came from varying ideologies and industries, some spending time successfully in multiple industries. Nine of the 10 participants completed the survey and nine of the 10 participants completed each question of the interview questions. Information power and saturation started to emerge after six to eight interviews. Participants' views of success and failure began with more of a zero-sum game approach where "things" were very important, but over time it became something more holistic that focused on progression being the definition of success and giving up being the definition of failure. Additionally, success was related to joy and pain was related to failure by participants. Research



question 1 first examined improved performance failure recovery individuals where six emerging themes were discovered. Lower performance was examined next where the opposite of the six themes was viewed as common characteristics of those who find themselves on the lower performance path after failure. Additionally, an inability to acknowledge and process the emotional pain of failure with hope, which led to giving up, was the main reason for individuals finding themselves on this path; which makes sense because the first thing done by those who enjoy improved performance is to bravely acknowledge and process painful emotion with hope. The return to a normal performance path was examined next and characteristics of this path were the middle ground of the six emerging themes. People on this path did not operate with high levels of the emerging themes, but also did not operate with low levels of the emerging themes, they found themselves doing some themes right and some themes wrong while repeating a lot of mistakes. Some tips and tricks for high performance after failure were then shared and research question 2 was then answered. The research found that leaders believed very strongly that their failures and beliefs on failure recovery processes absolutely impacted the team and their performance. Various topics and informational highlights related to a leader's impact on teams due to beliefs on failure recovery processes were shared.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

### Introduction

A qualitative study with 10 participants from varying industries and ideologies was conducted utilizing a survey for predominantly demographic and personal accomplishment insight. Additionally, these 10 participants were interviewed using a 19 question interview to understand their beliefs on failure recovery, success, and a leader's impact on teams, because of their failure recovery beliefs. This research confirmed that there are three easily identified paths after failure that are followed by individuals after they have endured a failure. Each of the participants could easily recognize separate characteristics of individuals who followed each of these paths, including the path to improved performance, a return to normal performance, and the path to lower performance after failure. The level of proper engagement to these six themes is what indicated which path was followed. These six themes that were also largely supported by current literature were first, bravely acknowledge and process painful emotions with hope. Second, pause and reflect for lessons learned. Third, fix-it with humility and honesty. Fourth, grit through with purpose and perseverance. Fifth, forsake with faith and resolved confidence. Sixth, support with joyful optimism in self and others.

Research also determined that participants believed strongly that failure has had a tremendous impact on their personal success and they absolutely agreed that a leader's beliefs on failure recovery processes have a large impact on the team's level of success after failure. They each shared valuable insight into how proper failure recovery processes and beliefs lead to success and how they impact individuals and teams. Tips and tricks of how to respond in a way that leads to higher levels of performance after

failure were shared by the participants. Those characteristics that lead to the highest level of performance for individuals and teams received the lion's share of the focus in this study.

### **Overview and Purpose of Study**

This study was designed to learn from some of the most successful people in their industry about failure recovery processes and their relationship to success. It was determined that a qualitative study was best to learn from leaders about failure recovery and that the proper amount of participants to interview would need to be between six and 12 participants. When done, the research involved 10 participants. Common themes were established and valuable lessons were learned about how successful leaders recover from failure in healthy ways that serve as a catalyst and a launching pad for increased opportunities and future growth and success.

Throughout the life of the researcher, he had observed much of losing and winning in athletics, business, education, music, legal, government, military, family, ecclesiastical, and medical, etc. He started to recognize that the successful people seemed to fail a lot, as much even as those who were unsuccessful. They just seemed to respond to those failures much differently. He wondered about what those key components of healthy failure recovery were. He had his own experiences with success and failure and noticed some common themes for himself personally that helped him to leverage failures for future success, but the complete picture was largely a mystery and he wondered how his beliefs compared to proven successful leaders. Additionally, the researcher had been blessed to know and associate with some highly successful people. Eventually the long held desire for knowledge from successful leaders, the questions about failure recovery

and their connection to success, and the access to successful leaders gained over time all met at an intersect and this study was born.

Another key element for the researcher was long ago learning about the term emotional intelligence and how it is a relatively simple term that was born in the early 1990's by researchers Salovey and Mayer (McCleskey, 2014). It was profound in the eyes of the researcher that this simple term naturally inspired some personal reflection in individuals as to where their emotional intelligence levels were. Also, profound is how this term is now commonly held in various organizations and in various industries just 30 years later. It was significant that such a simple term had such an appetite in such a progressive world. Additionally, this term also had a framework to go along with it and involved five levels of emotional intelligence including: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Panait, 2017). During this research on failure recovery, some of this learned information and personal takeaways from it started to connect with information being learned about failure recovery. It became evident through this research that the ability to recover from failure was also an intelligence, just like understanding and processing human emotion was an intelligence that people had in varying degrees. From there the researcher began seeking other connections between the model set forth by Salovey and Mayer and the forming model of intelligence related to failure recovery (Panait, 2017). During this process, two questions presented themselves. What was the framework for this model and what was the name of said framework? Emotional intelligence is an easily understood name, but also requires some thinking in its exact application when first learning about it. To allow the concept to really sink into the mind in a way that is not easily forgotten, it requires the learner to reflect and think

about it for a moment. As the framework for failure recovery was being discovered, the researcher was looking for the same type of thinking to be inspired by the framework name that would allow reflection as well as connection to strong emotion. As this was pondered the question came, “what is it that failures want most after failure has occurred?” “Redemption” came the answer and the term “redemptive intelligence” was chosen.

### **Research Questions and Discoveries**

**Research Question 1:** After failure has occurred, what are the common failure recovery processes that lead to declining levels of performance, a return to normal performance, and improved performance for individuals and teams? This question was answered and involved varying levels of commitment to the six themes that emerged from the study. The more commitment to incorporating the themes a leader or team has, the more they will follow the path of improved performance after failure. The less commitment a leader or team has to the emerging themes, the more they will follow the path of lower performance after failure. If they are somewhere in between in their commitment to the emerging themes, the more likely it is that they will recover from the failure and return to normal levels of performance but not see an improvement or a decrease in future performance. The common failure recovery themes that were discovered were first, bravely acknowledge and process painful emotions with hope. Second, pause and reflect for lessons learned. Third, fix-it with humility and honesty, Fourth, grit through with purpose and perseverance. Fifth, forsake with faith and resolved confidence, and lastly, support with joyful optimism in self and others.

**Research Question 2:** How does a leader's beliefs on failure recovery processes impact the success of their team? This question was answered and among a ton of valuable detail from the participants on how to impact a team through healthy failure recovery processes, there were two main highlights. All leaders rated the impact of failure recovery on their personal success very highly. They also were in unanimous agreement that a leader's beliefs on failure recovery do impact the success of their team. That impact is felt in a multitude of ways, but largely through an effective debrief environment and process that encourages full participation and detailed learning that produces effective specificity. Additionally, showing vision, empowerment, calmness, positivity, and even love can be very powerful for setting a team on the right course toward improved performance after failure.

In relation to both research questions it is also important to note that successful leaders do in fact fail with higher levels of redemptive intelligence after failure. The more they use the common processes and themes discussed in this research, the higher their redemptive intelligence proves to be, and the greater the future performance and ultimate redemption will be. Additionally, successful leaders do not fail less often, but there is a high likelihood that they actually fail more often and do so with higher levels of redemptive intelligence. This is because they push their boundaries more than those with lower levels of redemptive intelligence and put themselves into more positions where failure is an option. Therefore, failure is bound to happen more often for successful leaders than those who do not regularly allow themselves to be in a position where failure is a possibility. Also noteworthy is that these common themes or processes leading to higher levels of redemptive intelligence and employed by successful leaders of various

trades were transferable from one industry to another. As long as leaders abide by these common themes and processes, they eventually lead to some level of redemption and improved performance in the future. The processes to abide by were the common themes discovered throughout this research. Those themes were bravely acknowledge and process painful emotions with hope, pause and reflect for lessons learned, fix-it with humility and honesty, grit through with purpose and perseverance, forsake with faith and resolved confidence, and support with joyful optimism in self and others.

### **Interpretation of Results**

The main takeaway for this study is that there does not need to be a mystery in the minds of leaders and teams about what to do when failure strikes. The proper way to handle failure is known and leaders can use redemptive intelligence and its associated framework as a springboard for future success. Rather than blindly feeling their way forward after failure and changing their process each time a new failure arrives, they can adopt all or some of the framework that has been discovered through this research. While the framework provides the specifics that will most judiciously lead to improved performance, just incorporating the term redemptive intelligence into a team will slowly have its effect. Therefore, the most important element to all of this research for leaders and teams is to simply start using the term redemptive intelligence. Even if they do not know the framework or apply it perfectly, a regular use of the term redemptive intelligence will do the same thing a regular use of the emotional intelligence term has done over the last 30 years. Most do not know the framework for emotional intelligence, but just taking a few moments to consider the term does four things; the same four things the term redemptive intelligence will do.

As discussed in greater detail in chapter 2, using the term redemptive intelligence does four main things for leaders and teams. First redemptive intelligence infers that there is a right and a wrong way to handle failure, or at the very least a more intelligent and less intelligent way to handle failure. Second the word redemptive is a relatively easy word to understand and provides personal connection and a path forward for the learner's redemption after failure. Third, its connection to intelligence provides incentive for people to pause and reflect on their own redemptive intelligence level and work to improve it. Fourthly, redemptive intelligence offers a framework of common processes that is supported by current literature and the participants from this research, should the leader or team choose to use it.

The research gathered during this research corroborated the four main themes determined from the current literature. Those four themes from the current literature were first, the importance of reflection to learn core lessons. Second, maintaining control of the controllable items through humility and honesty. Third, gritting through the pain with purpose and perseverance. Fourth, forsaking the failure with faith and resolved confidence. The research only changed the second theme from maintain control of the controllable items through humility and honesty to fix-it with humility and honesty. This was done because multiple participants used the term fix-it and it provided a more clear meaning of that stage. However, it did not in fact change the integrity of the meaning of this stage. Two other stages were added after the research was done. It became very apparent from each of the participants that the main reason people go to the lower performance level after failure is because they struggle to process the emotions of failure in healthy ways. While that idea could be loosely tied to pausing and reflecting for



lessons learned, it did not in fact convey the extremely significant step pointed out by participants to bravely process emotional pain with hope before they are ready to move on to pausing and reflecting for lessons learned.

The last element that was a surprise to the researcher was this idea of the support that comes through a joyful optimism in self and others. The final of the four stages from the current literature expressed a confidence in self to forsake failure and not repeat the same mistake twice, but this idea of joyful optimism in self and others was something different. It was a constant and unwavering, as well as a palpable optimism and joy, that each participant trusted in their eventual achievement. These successful leaders simply did not doubt themselves as much as the average person does. Some did not doubt themselves at all, it seemed. These are the types of leaders that will never give up on goals that are in line with their belief and value systems regardless of the difficulties that stand in their path. They also have this ability to bring that optimism and joy to not just themselves, but to others. They also recognized the importance of being surrounded by team members who can bring that joyful optimism to them when they might be lacking. Some participants may not agree with that joyful optimism wording and some who have read Duckworth's work could argue that this theme is expressed in her definition of grit, which involves passion and perseverance (2016). However, to the author there were some key missing elements when considering her definition and other phases in the redemptive intelligence framework. Passion in pursuit of a goal is important and is part of the grit phase in this researcher's redemptive intelligence model, but it is not the same as this joyful and optimistic existence in the world regardless of professions, goals, and setbacks, etc. Joyful optimism was deeper than passion for a goal, and it was more

infinite in nature than it was finite. It was like this joyful optimism in self that almost had nothing to do with any pursuit that was related to a set task or goal. It was an optimism they possessed in their own personal growth. That as long as the growth was happening then achievement and success were also happening. Additionally, this last element included a joyful optimism in others and even outside forces working together for their own personal development and good. So, the researcher felt it necessary to become its own theme and phase in the redemptive intelligence framework. A theme that sits in the middle of all the other themes and helps support each of them to transpire with more efficacy. Figure 11 shows how each theme or phase connects to one another. As was stated earlier in this research, each phase does not need to take place in a successive relationship to one another even though there is a natural order that suggests first a person process their emotions, then look to learn lessons, then fix-it, then grit through, then forsake the failure. Each of these phases being influenced by the failed individual's joyful optimism in self and others.

**Figure 11***Redemptive Intelligence Cycle: Complete***Recommendations for Future Research**

The researcher recommends that a more diverse participant pool of successful leaders is used in the future. Most of the researchers on this topic are women, but only two women were included in the study. That was somewhat unintentional, but the personal connections for the researcher led to more men than women. However, it would be interesting to see if there are themes that are missed because of not having more women in the study. Additionally, each of the participants were American and had not spent any significant time in another country, let alone succeeding in another culture or custom. While this study is an accurate representation of leadership in America, it may not have the same themes that the successful leaders of Brazil, China, Russia, or England may convey. Although the researcher believes that the term redemptive intelligence transcends country cultures even if the phases in the framework are expressed differently.

Another element related to participants is the variance in team sizes that they are used to working with. Some may work in team sizes that are fewer than 10 and some might be greater than 200. This presents an element of tactical application of the redemptive intelligence cycle and framework that could vary based on size of organization. It would be interesting to study participants that are of a similar size of organization and compare them to organizations of a different size.

Additional items to keep in mind are the interviewing tactics to illicit the best responses. The researcher would ask multiple questions at once and cause some confusion and need reclarification in what was asked. To avoid this in the future it would be best to do a few practice runs of the questions and seek to eliminate any excess questions that are redundant or essentially repeating other questions. This would allow the interviews to not feel rushed while still achieving the same results and themes in a more concise manner. Practice runs will also help to set a more accurate time allotment to plan on for the researcher and the participants. The only other idea for future research would be to see how the themes change if there were participants included that are the opposite of successful leaders.

### **Recommendations for Leaders of Varying Industry**

The recommendation from the researcher for leaders of varying industry is to provide redemptive intelligence education for their people. Chapter 2 referred to a hospital that did not employ any form of redemptive intelligence education and continued to allow the employees and patients to suffer through the same repeated failures rather than fixing them. Contrary to that, one of the participants in this study shared how his hospital employs very serious redemptive intelligence efforts through root cause analysis

to correct mistakes. He shared stories of how they avoid “never events” or at the very least limit those mistakes that should never happen by going through some of the steps of redemptive intelligence from the framework in this research. All organizations should show that they care about their people and their customers by making redemptive intelligence a well-known effort in their company. While it is good for an organization to build their own models and processes for effective redemptive intelligence to take place, the author recommends that leaders employ simple, but detailed processes that factor for the six themes of the redemptive intelligence framework from this research. That will provide the best environments for employees, where the greatest and most effective learning, confidence, and redemption after failure can take place.

Additionally, the researcher would call on all educational institutions including primary, secondary, and higher education institutions to employ formalized structures, courses, and classes for teaching the concept of redemptive intelligence with specific detail related to the framework developed in this study. The researcher also calls on parents and families to employ redemptive intelligence and the elements of the framework from this study in their education that happens in the home. Currently there is not enough open dialogue in the world about redemptive intelligence and what to do after failure happens. Individuals and teams are left largely to themselves to discover how to recover from failure properly, this need not be the fumbling around process going forward. There are simple and straightforward steps that all can adhere to and at the very least start talking about by using the redemptive intelligence term. For a long time, there has not existed common language that can be consistently employed and understood by the masses from various national, socioeconomic, cultural, technological, healthcare, and

scholastic equity and backgrounds. This research has provided the common language needed to engage in successful and meaningful conversations for a variety of people from a variety of backgrounds. All that needs to happen now is a commitment to communicate. Every participant who heeds that call and employs redemptive intelligence will not only provide an opportunity for their people to find answers that they have maybe been seeking their entire lives, but they will see a more prosperous and unified team.

### **Potential Implications**

The potential implications here are not really for the purpose of a healthier and more productive society at large, although that is a potential implication of redemptive intelligence. This is really geared towards comforting the one. The one individual who has just gone through one of the most difficult things of their lives and does not know what to do next. It is for the person who has not known what to do and has been on the path to lower performance for some time and does not know how to change. It is for the individual who keeps repeating the same mistakes and is so frustrated that they are on the verge of giving up for good. So much of life is consumed with failure and because most individuals do not know how to handle failure in healthy ways, they suffer. This in turn makes their family suffer, their employer suffers, and their larger community suffer. Redemption after failure is supposed to be joyful. The entire progressive process of redemption is supposed to lead to joy and be more joyful than it is painful. Those who are not feeling joy in their failure recovery or redemptive efforts have not been taught, or have not acted upon sound principles and a helpful framework. Each person is supposed to have a clear path forward to get from pain to joy. This framework provides that opportunity for individuals. They still need their agency to decide if they will take in and

employ this framework and this redemptive intelligence concept, but leaders and all who have the power to do something only need start small by communicating about redemptive intelligence and then let the natural momentum build from there.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of learning to use both mind and heart has been one of life's greatest pursuits for all of mankind. There are many instances in world history that have pointed to individual and team suffering because a mind had not developed enough intelligence yet to decipher the solution to meet the problem. There have also been countless moments in history where hearts were cold and uncaring to the desires and needs of family, friend, and even enemy. Some of the greatest problems facing the world have come not in the absence of intelligence, but in the absence of heart. While some of the greatest opportunities were missed not because hearts were not willing, but because intelligence was not ready yet. Both a strong heart and a strong mind are needed for advancement and progression. Strong hearts and strong minds are significantly developed during moments of failure and defeat. These moments provide a training ground and an opportunity to practice and learn, but as everyone knows not everyone practices the same and results can vary because of those differences in the training decisions made. On the training grounds of failure, when leaders, teams, and societies lean too far in the direction of heart or too far in the direction of mind, things start to lose balance and there are consequences to pay. A strong and intelligent mind that is constantly evolving and increasing capacity with truth will be able to find solutions and answers within themselves and their teams that lead to progression and success. A strong heart that is constantly increasing in its capacity to love self and others will fill itself and others with

the necessary passion, purpose, and emotional stability needed to tackle even the most insurmountable odds.

Failure tests both the mind and the heart in ways that nothing else does. It cascades the individual downward into pain and suffering that cannot be felt in any other way. In this dark place, many individuals become lost and wander through broken roads and paths that exist in their mind. Families, teams, and communities can become negatively impacted. This experience eventually leaves a mark on the heart and mind of the individual and those around them. That mark can be painful and destructive or it can be pleasing and productive. Every human being finds themselves in this place at some point in their life where they are lost and afraid and do not know where to go next. The researcher found himself in this place many times and wondered why there was not a more well understood path that more productively leads the learner out of pain and into joy. Thankfully with the good support around the researcher, he overcame these painful paths in his own life and found what he desired most, a feeling of redemption. This was a type of feeling that did not just ignore the failure and try to move along hoping it would not pop up again; but addressed it, learned from it, even appreciated it, and in some ways erased it. The researcher started to look at what comes from failure differently and appreciated it for the eventual success, progression and joy that it helped to bring. It was not really the failure itself that brought the joy, it was the reaction to these failures that encouraged joy and enabled progression that could not have happened without the lessons learned from the failed experience. These lessons learned could have been downloaded into the mind, but they could not be understood in the heart without experience. The researcher realized that while redemption from failure is equally available to everyone,



not everyone felt redemption equally. Through this research it became evident why that was. Individuals act with varying levels of redemptive intelligence. Those who enjoy more progression act with higher levels of redemptive intelligence and thus experience greater joy than those who enjoy less progression and act with lower levels of redemptive intelligence.

The framework of redemptive intelligence was established through a study of the current literature and this research with the 10 successful leaders who participated in this study. There are six phases of redemptive intelligence. These phases can happen in order or randomly, but the more productively engaged an individual is with each of these phases during the failure recovery process, the greater their redemptive intelligence is and the more success, progression, and joy they will experience. The six phases of redemptive intelligence are first, bravely acknowledge and process painful emotions with hope. Second, pause and reflect for lessons learned. Third, fix-it with humility and honesty. Fourth, grit through with purpose and perseverance. Fifth, forsake with faith and resolved confidence. Sixth, support with joyful optimism in self and others. Each individual, family, team, institution, and organization that utilizes the term redemptive intelligence more readily will see an increase in human satisfaction and productive progression. The framework helps to give details and specifics to the term redemptive intelligence, but the term itself provides the common language needed to have helpful discussion that leads to learning in both heart and mind. In closing the researcher would like to remind good leaders and teams everywhere that the success stories of history are really redemption stories; and that the solutions to failures and problems currently faced are rarely

complicated and require only that good women and men take quiet steps, simple approaches, and begin with a small decision to do something.

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**Appendix A: Survey Questions**

1. Please share your three most publicly recognized accomplishments.
2. Please share your three most meaningful accomplishments, to you personally.
3. Current professional position and years of service?
4. Prior professional positions that grew you as a leader?
5. What types of teams or groups were you a part of growing up?
6. What level of education have you attained in your life thus far?
7. What is your ethnicity, ancestral, or cultural background?
8. Were you a part of a two parent or single parent household growing up?
9. What languages do you speak?
10. What is your gender?
11. What is your age?
12. Anything else you'd like to add about your experiences and background that might be noteworthy as it relates to your leadership.



### **Appendix B: Interview Questions**

First just a reminder that this interview is being recorded and any information I collect today is being used for research purposes only. Do you have any questions about the project or what will happen with your data?

Thank you for taking the time to help other leaders to better understand processes related to failure and success, and also their potential impact on teams.

As we go through the interview questions if there are stories that come to mind that help illustrate your beliefs, please share them.

1. How do you define success and failure? Have either of these definitions changed for you over time? Please elaborate.

There are believed to be three different types of responses to failure. The first response results in a new, higher level of performance that is better than it was before. The second response results in a return to normal levels of performance. The third response results in a new, lower level of performance that is worse than it was before.

Please consider your complete person as you answer the next three questions. In particular, you might consider your mental, physical, emotional, social, or spiritual reaction to failure.

2. After failure, what are some types of reactions you've seen individually and in teams that have led to improved levels of performance?
3. After failure, what are some types of reactions you've seen individually and in teams that have led to declining levels of performance?
4. After failure, what are some types of reactions you've seen individually and in teams that have led to a return to normal levels of performance?

The following questions will help me to understand better some of your standards and what may have helped to form your process for overcoming failure.

5. Please describe how you approach failure and what you've personally learned to be important elements in a successful process for handling failure?
6. Do you have any tips or tricks for overcoming quickly the negative emotional responses to failure? Please elaborate.
7. Who in your life helped most to shape your outlook on failure and how did they help?
8. Have you ever had someone sit you down to teach you how to handle failure? If yes, please share about that experience.
9. Do you have any significant personal experiences you can point to that impacted your process for handling failure? Please elaborate.
10. Do you feel that you are completing your life's work or that your work could be described as one of your main driving purposes in life? Is it something you are passionate about? Please elaborate.

These next questions will transition into how a leader's failure recovery processes affect their team.

11. In your opinion, do you have a higher "standard" of performance than that of your peers? If yes, how so?
12. How does a leader's reaction to failure impact a team's success? What reaction do you like to see from your team after a failure?

13. Can you describe how you've been able to turn one of your greatest team failures into an overall success, and what has this taught you about how a leader's reaction to failure affects a team's performance?
14. How do you combat the stigma of failure, or the way others perceive you and your team after a failure?
15. If any, how has your process for handling failure affected who you look for when hiring or selecting leaders within your organization?
16. With a team watching, what are the most important things for a leader to remember when responding to failure?
17. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest, how important have your failures in your life been to your personal development as a successful leader? On the same scale, how important have failures been to the success of your team? Please elaborate.
18. Is how you handle yourself and your team after success any different than how you handle things after a failure? Please elaborate.
19. Do you have any additional advice for aspiring leaders about failure recovery and how it relates to future success, for teams and leaders? Please share.

### **Vitae**

Jonathan Eastman has received his Bachelor of Accounting in 2011 and his Master of Business Administration with an emphasis in entrepreneurship in 2014 from the University of Sioux Falls. He also received his Master of Arts in leadership from Lindenwood University in 2019 and is seeking his educational doctorate with emphasis in instructional leadership from Lindenwood University in the fall of 2023. Jonathan has served in various leadership roles as a collegiate football coach from 2011 until 2020 before transitioning to the telecommunications industry where he currently serves as the President of his company and has done so for nearly four years. Jonathan has also served in his church as a Bishop of a congregation and a President of a large geographic Stake in North America. He most importantly a husband and father.