

The average person makes a mistake and automatically thinks it's a failure. But some of the greatest stories of success can be found in the unexpected benefits of mistakes. For example, most people are familiar with the story of Edison and the phonograph. He discovered it while trying to invent something entirely different. But did you know that Kellogg's corn flakes resulted when boiled wheat was left in a baking pan overnight? Or that Ivory soap floats because a batch was left in the mixer too long and had a large volume of air whipped into it? Or that Scott towels were created when a toilet paper machine put too many layers of tissue together? Horace Walpole said that, in science, mistakes always precede the truth. I believe that in leadership, mistakes always precede great leaders. The hard lessons you learn along the journey are always more valuable than the textbook definitions of how you should handle any situation. One of my favorite expressions is, "Been there, done that, got the hat, T-shirt, keychain and a bumper sticker." As a speaker, I get concerned when I hear a speaker discussing customer service and I know for a fact they do not return phone calls. I am equally as concerned when I hear someone presenting a program on leadership and know for a fact they have never held a leadership position. My concern is that unless you have experienced what you are talking about, chances are you never experienced the adversity that accompanies that experience. I am not suggesting that to be a great leader you have to face adversity and challenges. However, I am suggesting that if you are in leadership, you will face adversity and challenges and your greatness will not be in facing them, but in how you handle them.

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I also discovered that adversity and challenges motivate great leaders. The manner in which a person faces adversity tells so much about that person. Does adversity motivate you, or does it make you overreact, sulk or, in many cases, quit? Years ago when my son, Josh, was playing in a high school football game, his team was ahead by only six points in a game with less than two minutes remaining in the fourth quarter. The coach sent Josh, who was the quarterback, into the game with instructions to play it safe and run out the clock. In the huddle, Josh said, "Coach said play it safe, but that's what they're expecting. Let's give them a surprise." With that, he called a pass play. When Josh dropped back and threw the pass, the defending cornerback, who was an all-conference sprinter on the track team, intercepted the ball and headed toward the end zone, expecting to score a touchdown. Josh, who was a decent runner, but not a sprinter on the track team, took off after the cornerback and ran him down from behind, tackling him on the 5-yard line. His effort saved the game. After the clock ran out, the opposing coach approached my son's coach and said, "What's this business about your quarterback not being known for his speed? He ran down my speedster from behind!" Josh's coach responded, "Your man was running for six points. Josh was running for his life." Nothing can motivate a person like adversity.

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One of the best stories I've ever heard of someone who learned to accept life on life's terms and who refused to take failure personally is that of Daniel "Rudy" Ruettinger, a kid who desperately wanted to play football for Notre Dame. You may have seen the film based on his life called *Rudy*. It was a good movie—one of my favorites—but his real story is even more remarkable and compelling. The first of fourteen children in a