



Illustration: Sreejith Ravikumar

Chennai: Failure may be a stepping stone to success, but let us face it, everyone wants to skirt around that stone — for good reason.

Despite an inbuilt resistance to the idea of failure, we have to get out of our comfort zone, and attempt the seemingly impossible, knowing that we may fail spectacularly. Line managers may have a role here, encouraging an open conversation around failure.

Intuit practices what it calls ‘Screw-ups of the month’, a team huddle where members from product engineering discuss what went wrong and deliberate on how to fix it.

Intuit has been promoting this system globally for the last one year.

Somnath Baishya, head human resources– Global Development Centres, Intuit, says organisation has been trying to build such a culture from the top.

“We have been driving a data-driven leadership model,” says Baishya. For instance, meet-ups involving the senior leadership are driven through a dashboard every month where people talk about their failures and how they dealt with it.

“We are trying to move to a culture where we say that having a ‘red’ in the dashboard is not bad as long as you know how to deal with it and go beyond it. The discussions are also driven through data,” says Baishya.

By encouraging employees to open up about failures — also done through one-on-one meetings — the company feels it is trying to make failures more acceptable. “Through these forums, we have created a culture of vulnerability and accountability,” says Baishya, adding that the company’s performance management system has also been tweaked.

An unusual springboard

When companies are building a culture of innovation, mistakes are bound to happen.

Srijata Bhatnagar, who authored a book Setback Leadership featuring stories of 12 leaders, says the biggest setback for the many people she interviewed is that failure set the stage for their biggest growth.

Srijata herself has faced many professional setbacks along the way. She quit as senior product manager from a major media house to turn entrepreneur. The first idea she worked on, when she was nineteen years old, failed to make any impact.

“Even now, one of my ventures is witnessing a lull,” she admits.

“Companies have to encourage employees to come up with ideas that are not safe, meaning they have to help them cultivate a risk-taking attitude,” says Srijata who gives motivational talks.

What is your BNQ score?

Organisations driven by innovation should focus on developing their managers’ BNQ, bad news quotient. Managers with a good BNQ will create systems that will allow bad news to flow in, and also have the ability to deliver bad news fearlessly. Teams should also be enabled to develop their BNQ.

“A team with a high BNQ will be open to discussing failures more openly and quickly imbibe the lessons that are needed to move forward,” says Rupak Agarwal, founder and CEO of EvueMe Selection Robot.

The company follows the ‘AIR’ principle where A is for ‘Be Accurate’; I for ‘Immediately plan for communication’ and R for ‘Take full Responsibility’.

“When you make some bad news sound like not such a bad thing, some day it will backfire. We encourage leaders that while delivering bad news they should just keep it as accurate and objective as possible. Our leadership huddle every Monday starts with me talking about where I committed mistakes and encouraging others to share their mistakes,” says Agarwal.

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