

# Success Seekers and Failure Avoiders

## Escape the Mental Trap

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### Subject

In counseling, and even more frequently in coaching, we encounter people who show a kind of avoidance behavior towards promising paths. Typically, they also deny responsibility for failures.

However, people in the opposite position see failure as an incentive for their own further development and improvement.

One therefore speaks of *failure avoiders* and their opposite, the *success seekers*.

### A Question of Attitude

The question on which factors success and failure depend has long been a concern. It became clear early on that the *attitude* is essential for success.

	Person is the cause.	Environment is the cause.
Cause is <u>stable</u> .	(Ps) abilities / skill / aptitude	(Es) circumstances / task difficulty
Cause is <u>variable</u> .	(Pv) effort / will	(Ev) coincidence / good luck and bad luck

A person's attitude involves making assumptions about the *causes* of his or her successes and failures. These can be in oneself or in the environment, stable or variable.

A *success seeker* regards himself as the cause of his success, so sees it as based on factors such as *abilities* and *will* (Ps, Pv). He interprets failure as *variable*, i. e. depending on his efforts and on chance (Pv, Ev).

A *failure avoider*, on the other hand, sees the causes of his success in the external »fortunate« circumstances and regards success itself as a result of contingency (Es, Ev).

However, he interpretes failure as *stable*, as a result of his own (lacking) abilities, as well as unfavorable circumstances (difficult situation, colleagues) (Ps, Es). Since he cannot directly tackle success because of the random factor, attempts are made to *avoid failure*.

### Case From My Practice

One of my coachees considered success as the result primarily of good luck and of favorable circumstances (Uv, also Us), and failure primarily as outcom of adverse circumstances, but also of bad luck (Us, also Uv). This is a mixed form of the two positions mentioned, in which one's own person no longer plays a causal role.

### The Effect of Failure

While success increases the self-esteem and motivation of the success seeker, failure leads to greater effort. In his opinion, success depends above all on effort and willpower (Pv). He usually sticks to his goals..

The failure avoider, on the other hand, has no learning success due to his attribution of causes to external factors in the event of success, no confirmation of his self-esteem. He can only attribute failure to his incompetence and the »bad others« (such as executives, the rich, the ignorant, etc.), which can lead to resignation and a feeling of helplessness.

## Case From My Practice

My coachee's failures did not cause a direct loss of self-esteem, and he saw no reason to question his abilities. However, he regarded himself as a *victim* in that those responsible in organizations made it impossible for him to reach a position in which he could have used his abilities to the full. He valued his successes, as well as those of all other people, as a coincidence, or as the effect of secret agreements (i. e. quasi nepotism).

## Development Paths for the Success

It is important to escape the mental trap of the failure avoider, because his strategy actually *favors* failure. Of course, in reality, many causes contribute to the success or failure of a person's endeavors. However, in the long run, the feeling of helplessness leads to motivational, cognitive and emotional deficits: the power to bring things under control is lost, as is the ability to see the connection between events and one's own actions. In addition, anxiety and the risk of becoming depressed increase.

In order to develop from a failure avoider to a success seeker, the following points must be learned and internalized:

- a) One is able to bring about one's own success and to change circumstances in such a way that this is favored (*internal locus of control*). If the circumstances are actually not favorable, an increase in efforts to make up for this is often sufficient.
- b) One must first look for the causes of failure in oneself and improve accordingly. Because one can just be unlucky and not all misfortunes can be anticipated, failure very often does not mean that something was done wrongly.

## Case From My Practice

My coachee immediately found his way around the matrix shown above. We worked

out that if success depends primarily on good or bad luck, that does not mean that it is generally improbable. Of course, the respective situation still plays a major role. It is therefore necessary to »play through« different situations, that is, to »just try«. In this way (conforming to the coachee's system) coincidence can bring about success. So failures that occur are irrelevant.

In fact, it has been shown that »enthusiastic fishing in troubled waters« is also successful, so self-efficacy cannot be denied. Also, initiative (including leadership of others) and concentration (on the set goals) are promising skills (Ps), and perseverance and patience are acts of will (Pv) needed for lasting success.

## Summary

Based on the causes determined for success and failure, a statement can usually be made as to whether a person is more of a success seeker or a failure avoider. Of course, both strategies are to be respected, but given that everyone wants success, avoiding failure is simply not effective.

A development towards the success-seeker strategy goes beyond the revision of the attribution of causes. To this end, it is recommended to look in the biography for the reasons for the causal attributions to be revised.

## Discuss With the Author

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