



Marketing Matters

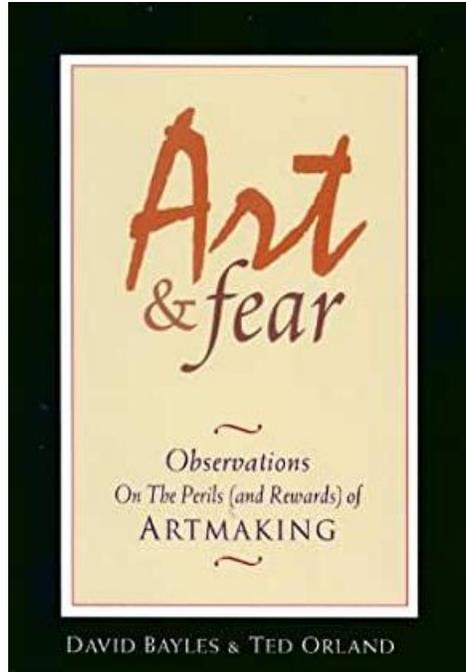
By Richard D. Czerniawski

SUCCESS THROUGH FAILURE

"... doing creative work entails constant setbacks and failure ..."

Eric Barker, BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE

I recall an instructive story told in the book ART & FEAR by David Bayles & Ted Orland, dealing with the creative process. It provides valuable insight into the creative process and what it takes to achieve success.



The story is of a ceramics instructor who divides his class into two groups. He tells the first group that he will be using a grading scale based on crafting the perfect ceramic piece. He wants each student to focus on making just one piece for the semester and making it perfect. The student with the most perfect, or closest to perfection, piece of pottery will receive an "A" grading. All other students will be graded on a curve based upon the quality of the one work they create.

This instructor tells the second group that he wants them to make as many ceramic pieces as possible during the semester. He is not interested in quality but quantity, so they need not worry

about quality. He will award the student with the most ceramic pieces, regardless of quality, a grade of "A." The remainder of the class will be graded on a curve consistent with the number of pieces they craft.

When the semester came to an end, and it came time for grading, a curious outcome emerged. Namely, the group that produced for quantity produced the highest quality of work. How curious, indeed! Or is it?

The conclusion is that quality is driven by experience, which produces failure. In turn, failure provides feedback regarding what and where to make corrections. The new work makes progress which begets yet more input from experience. This process creates a virtuous cycle.

The students in the quantity group undoubtedly learned through their failures. Perhaps, they discovered that their mix of materials was incorrect. Maybe their mixture was too dry. Or, their kiln was too hot. It could have been a mix of these things and/or other factors.

This story provides us, marketers, with a valuable lesson when undertaking creative work and dealing with creative teams such as our ad agency. Here is what I learned works best when working with creative personnel:

1. ***Ensure adequate time for creating ideas.*** We need to provide our agencies with the time to experiment and throw out their bad ideas. Marketers tend to short-change their agencies by starting the process late, taking more than their allotted time for strategy development, and conducting endless creative reviews.
2. ***Take many shots on goal.*** The more shots we take, the better the chance for scoring with a BIG Idea. By the way, taking more shots typically requires more time (see point 1).
3. ***Encourage your agency to do something new, unexpected.*** Don't be afraid to try new things. It could lead to a breakthrough.
4. ***Focus on ideas, not execution.*** Direct your agency to create Campaign Ideas in rough form, not storyboards or print ad comps. The idea is the thing. Execution follows the idea. The Campaign Idea consists of the Creative Concept (what we refer to as the Naked Idea), Core Dramatization, and Key Copy Words. Working with Campaign Ideas will put the focus on what really matters. Moreover, you can compare and contrast ideas so that you may provide more informed feedback.
5. ***Use coaching to direct versus dictate feedback.*** Coaching identifies what we need to see or what we might do to make the work more productive. It is directional in nature. We allow the artist—in our case, the creative personnel—to fashion the direction into enhancing ideas and/or creating new ideas.
6. ***Repeat steps 2 – 5.*** This practice will, as previously mentioned, contribute to creating a virtuous cycle as you iterate your way to success.

Perhaps, this article might have been more appropriately titled Success through Experimentation or Repetition or Iteration. Failure is an essential part of any process. We have to make sure that when we fail, which we will, we fail forward. In other words, we learn from our failures, adjust, and iterate our way to success.

Take your marketing to the next level. Read chapters 9: Brand Communications that Suck, 11: Lack of Ideas—The Mark of a Dull Brand, and 15: Coaching to Win in my most recent book, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing.** Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Peace and best wishes,

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