

This is Zane Safrit, CEO of Conference Calls Unlimited.

I've always been fascinated with leaders. It's been sort of a study-hobby of mine. It's never been a conscious thing. I've **just always** been fascinated by great leaders.

Their lives are great stories, really, complete with great achievements and stunning tragedies. Fiction could never match these stories. Truth is more wonderful than fiction; It's more wonderful and inspiring.

And it's more astonishing, too.

I've found these stories mostly in politics and history. But honestly they're everywhere, in all times and ages and generations.

Speaking of ages, I remember in grade school we'd fill out a little color wheel with titles and numbers categorized within the then existing Dewey Decimal System. My *biography* category was always filled. (But my science category...ahem...remained mostly empty.) That interest hasn't changed so much over the years.

One pattern I've always noticed with great leaders is their inevitable great failures. Their stories of achievement and overcoming obstacles from all sources from personal to institutional, from family to society; And they're amazing, and inspiring and they open your mind to all the possibilities of life.

But as night follows day, there seems to always follow what I call **The Big Syndrome Personality**. That's shown by their amazing lapses in judgment, lapses as big as they are inevitable. Big personalities have big successes...and inevitably they have big failures.

It's never clear which comes first. But it's two parts that make the whole.

Both, big successes and big failures, are shared on the public stage for everyone to see. And inevitably the tongues wag, the magazines brag and the questions arise: How could they...?

But without those failures...I'm not sure how leaders acquire the necessary qualities of humility, compassion, empathy, forgiveness and patience that transform a mere lead to someone who's considered a GREAT leader. And they inspire great passion in their followers to overcome great obstacles.

Arrogance always goeth before the fall.

And I know I'd never be one to suffer humility if **MY** achievements were **THAT** of others.

But...that arrogance only starts the destructive phase of a leader's growth. To achieve greatness, to develop compassion and patience and humility...their mettle needs to be tested with failure.

Those who never strive beyond their station in life rarely appreciate that next phase of life. It's a personally-crafted dark night of the soul that looks to **outsiders** as 'failure'.

But without that experience, **AND** without walking out of their dark-night, great leaders never emerge.

Those leaders who never admit their mistakes, and continue to deny and mislead primarily themselves, are sworn to create ever greater mistakes until this dark searing experience is embraced, accepted and most importantly they emerge.

Were it possible, aspiring great leaders should embrace all their small failures as they occur. Each partnership that doesn't develop, each ad campaign that fails, each employee that chooses to fail, each friend that appears to betray, each risk taken that only fails, are all steps toward that next great achievement. The only failure is not continuing with the next step. The only failure is not getting back up and trying again.

So the next time you see a leader stumble or fall...the next time you see them walk into that dark night of failure, whether it's done willingly or not, the next time you see an end to a moment of success...remember it's but a prelude to the emergence of a greater leader.

And yes, enjoy a few yuks at their expense. Hey, we're all human and as **Americans we love to see the mighty fall.**

But keep it to a minimum, guys and gals.

Remember, their failure is only meaningful for what they've achieved. And this current failure, the one you're relishing, might **just be THE** learning experience, the dark night of the soul, they need to become a GREAT leader.

And remember when it happens to you. As night follows day, you'll have these moments, too.

Ultimately, we're **ALL** doomed to fail until we succeed.

You see we're all fated to be great leaders.

Some of us may appear to still be in the **learning phase**, the failure phase. But that's only to those with narrow visions. And I confess I'm often the one with narrow vision. Frequently, I see myself through those same narrow lenses.

So hurry up and become great.

Fail early, fail often, fail late. But keep failing. Failing often means you're trying, trying yet again. It also means you're destined to succeed.

You have no choice, really. It's an assignment you took on when you were born. It's your job, our jobs, to show everyone that failure is part of leading, failure is part of success. The only true failure is when you fail to try again.

And that means they watch you lead by example, getting up again and again and again.

So, get up, do it again-amen, give 'em a show. And be a great leader. Be one now.

This is Zane Safrit.

Thank you for listening.

You can read my blog posts at zane.typepad.com