



My friend Anton, who is Chief Medical Officer at Mercy Health, and I were prepping for an upcoming team-development event when he shared the name of his presentation for this event: Good leaders are losers. This oxymoronic title provoked the question: Why? Aren't good leaders winners? Isn't the point of leadership based on the goal to create successful employees, teams, and organizations?

What Anton shared was the story of young tennis pros. As soon as they make it to the big time and get the big sponsors, with it comes even more pressure to succeed. "At this point," he said, "they often experience losing for the first time. Many are so shocked and completely derailed by the experience of losing, they often never return to their former glory."

Leaders in business are the same. I've seen it many times as I coach strong individual contributors to become leaders of many. What got them to be considered a leader no longer is needed when they are a leader. Technical or subject-matter-expert skills need to be replaced by coordination, delegation, employee development, conflict management, vision setting, and team building. It's at this crucial point many leaders find they have a hard time losing.

We've all seen the historic references of people, like Lincoln, who rebounded after failure; but those reminders offer little comfort when we're going through our own experience of losing. Losing as growth, losing as a lesson, should be our attitude. We should make hard-earned losing something to call out and celebrate. Losing is tough in itself. It shouldn't be tougher by the added disappointment and ridicule we get from others; but if they can learn from the lessons of losing, adopt new skills, and seek new help from people, this transition can lead to a transformation for the new leader.

So, the next time you lose at something, find the lesson to learn from, the courage to continue on the journey, and the attitude that all battles are ones we have with ourselves.

**AUTHOR: DEAN NEWLUND**

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Dean Newlund, president of MFI, is an organizational development expert and has worked on organizational re-design projects, training program development and delivery, and executive personal coaching. He has coached over 250 business leaders, developed and delivered teambuilding and leadership development programs, facilitated strategic planning meetings and is the past President of ASTD in Phoenix. Dean is a Master Certified Coach candidate. He has authored several articles on leadership and spoken to audiences all over the country. Dean also facilitates business acumen courses for international clients. He lives with his wife Joanne and son Taylor just outside of Phoenix, Arizona.