



Sharing Our Failures

A Listener and Storyteller's Guide

By Ashley Good

Listeners

Listen to stories in a way that makes the teller feel **safe and helps them **learn**.**

Listen knowing that *intelligent failure* shows leadership, innovation, and risk-taking. There is no shame in failure - we all have failed.

Keep in mind that "failure" is always relative; it changes with time, perceptions and perspectives.

Suspend assumptions and keep an open mind. Everyone's perspective is valid, true and useful and exploring differences helps deepen what can be learned.

It takes courage to tell a failure story. It might seem surface-level to you but the speaker always feels they are being more vulnerable than you hear.

It is your job to react to failure stories with appreciation and curiosity for what was learned. Never react negatively.

Push the storyteller to focus on what was learned and why the failure is important by asking "so what?" and "now what?" questions.

Get permission before retelling someone's story.

Storytellers

Tell stories in a way that promotes learning, focuses on **understanding root causes, and supports needed **change** or adaptation.**

We learn in narratives so tell the failure as a story. Include emotions, character motivations, hopes, dreams, and fears.

Don't be afraid to pick a failure story that has meaning to you. Your listeners will appreciate and respect vulnerability. They are unlikely to judge your failure. However, they will judge a success story thinly veiled as a failure.

Never blame. Be open, honest and genuinely self-critical of how you, your team, or your organization could have done a better job.

Look for root causes. It is human tendency to seek out the first and easiest explanation for a failure. Try to get beyond that first attribution error and ask "5 Why's" to dig deeper into why a failure may have occurred.

It is very rare that a meaningful failure was caused by just one person. Bring together all those implicated in the story to share their thoughts and include their perspectives in your story.

Focus on the learning. Make the majority of your story focused on answering the questions "so what?" and "now what?" so the listener knows why your failure matters and what they can learn from it.