How Leaders Promote Intelligent Failure

**Be a role model**

- **Share your failures and learnings.** Focus on your role, never blaming.
- **Talk about your real limitations**, what you’re struggling with, and the things you don’t know.
- **Ask for feedback.** Reward those who share their honest perspectives. Share back what you learned.
- **Ask your staff to voice concerns** and invite input on how things might be improved.
- **Monitor your responses to bad news**, tough questions, and things you don’t agree with. Strive to reward these messengers for giving you the information you need to improve.

**Support and lead your team to fail intelligently**

- **Make blameless debriefs a habit.** Explore what happened and how it happened never who did it.
- **Reward staff for learning** and moving forward more wisely.
- **Make it safe to share an early-stage idea** by avoiding the urge to poke holes and shut it down. Instead ask curious questions to help improve the idea.
- **Do a pre-mortem before kicking off new initiatives.** Frame complex work in terms of what you hope to learn, and as a team uncover the failures that might be expected.
- **Be clear about the goal** of the team’s efforts so that failure is easier to detect. We want to get good at detecting small ‘f’ failures so you never get to a big ‘F’ one.
- **Share stories of past failures and the valuable learning.** Don’t forget to share stories of inaction (the risks you should have taken but didn’t) as much as failures of action.
- **Be clear about what kinds of failures are acceptable** in pursuit of innovation and risk taking and what acts will always be unacceptable.
- **Articulate where innovation is most needed** versus where good enough is good enough.
- **To create the flexibility needed to innovate, work with political forces to hold your team accountable for outcomes, not outputs or dollars spent.**
- **Build agility into your budgets.** Account for the resources required to learn, adapt and change course.
- **Support people to stop certain activities** or cut projects to create room for innovation.
- **Become a barrier buster.** Help your staff identify and address the barriers to innovation.

**When failure strikes**

- **Detect early.** Analyze blamelessly. Prioritize time to focus on what can be learned.
- **Never throw someone else under the bus.**
- **Help others involved reflect on and learn from the experience by asking curious ‘how’ and ‘what’ questions.**
- **Apply the learning by changing mindsets, behaviours and processes accordingly.** Innovate and try again more wisely. Or overcome your sunk cost bias and quit/let go wisely make room for something else.
- **Take responsibility and share your story of failure with the following framing:**
  
  I tried _________. My failure was _________. I learned _________. Now I will _________.
- **Continue to support innovation, experimentation and smart risk taking after the failure.**