

Title: Success and Failure

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As a United States Marine hearing the statement, “Your success and failure has an impact on my success and failure,” context of the statement had defining impact upon my personal and professional career. It was while assigned as a Staff Sergeant, Flag Writer (Mid-Level Manager) working for Major General Martin L. Steele, Director, Strategic Planning Policy (J5), United States Pacific Command (USCINCPAC), Camp Smith, Hawaii. USCINCPAC a major joint military command that interact with over 44 countries with in the Pacific Ocean. The roles include but are not limited to Military to Military and Political to Military relationships between the countries and U.S. J5 a major planning and policy division of USCINCPAC is focus on future and strategic planning.

During this period, it was very seldom heard the General express frustration or anger over any issue. But, one evening I was responsible for establishing a secure call from Hawaii to China on behalf of the General. It was either to USCINCPAC himself or Rep Bill Richardson, nevertheless it was time sensitive and had to be secure. The information needed on the other end was right before the U.S. Representative was to meet with the Chinese Government and it was very important that the representative received the information. The failure to provide the requested information would have negative impact on the meeting schedule with the Chinese Government at that time, not to mention it could have a negative impact on the General and I being relieved of duties (fired).

Calls at this level require split second timing to connect, in order to ensure that the line is secure otherwise it will not maintain the connection. Just as the call was

connected and the conversation began, the connection failed. Working quickly the connection was reestablished within 5 minutes, but once again the connection failed. The General was enraged. At this point, I received the full brunt of his frustration. Realizing my professional opportunities were in jeopardy. It wasn't so much his tone, but the fact of knowing the General was being let down and being aware of how important the call was caused feeling an extreme disappointment. Fortunately, on the third attempt the connection was successfully made.

The feelings from this experience left my confidence level shaken and increase my concern of future career opportunities. Personal and professional stress level had increased greatly. To be reprimanded and knowing that my nervousness and inexperience was the blame was shattering. Plus, to knowing the General could not depend upon my performance had changed was very stressful.

However, later that night the General called me into his office. First, he apologized for losing his temper which in itself was amazing. Never expecting to receive any apology from a leader, at least not a two star general was an eye opener in itself. Second, he explained how important it was that each member of the able to do one's job. "Your success and failure has an impact on my success and failure." Simple and to the point - everything done has an impact on those serving with you. Knowing my job and realizing the importance to the organization and how critical it is to the overall success and failure of the organization. The explanation that it was and is a unique responsibility of all members of a unit/team to understand the importance of the job they do. Sharing the burden of success and failure is essential.

The experience established a cooperative relationship between the superior and subordinated. Using the experience it was essential to my sustaining the development of High Reliability Organization (HRO) in many environments. Success and failure within the HRO leads to the development of trust. Knowing that one can trust others and are trusted by others allows one to focus on individual goals and objective supportive of the organization. The manner in which success and failure is perceived creates a dynamic in a relationship between subordinates and superiors. The superior encourages the subordinate and gains trust in the subordinates abilities; the subordinate gains confidence in his or her abilities knowing that the superior trust him/her. Therefore, the subordinate knows that he/she is a part of the success and/or failure of the organization and the superior. This usually creates a mutual support within the organization. The superior also can provide greater responsibility once he knows the subordinate understands the relationship by demonstrating increased loyalty or improved performance or some other quantities behavior.

Some of the key things learned were the importance of expressing trust within the organization. Allowing one to become vulnerable and letting those around you know how much you depended upon them. Basically, "I can't do this without your help." express it to the team. The acknowledgement helps encourage the team to work with a stronger bond and focus toward mission accomplishment. The most important part was that the relationship change from working for someone became a working with someone no matter what their role in the organization maybe.

Employees at all levels should understand their importance to the goals and missions of the organization. This experience helped me to establish trust and

confidence with subordinates and superiors throughout my career. At every opportunity attempted to express the relationship which we share. It is very important during failure that the relationship is re-enforced. Additionally, sharing the impact of the failure down to the lowest level is helpful in driving the point home. Each individual has a responsibility to know and become proficient at the performance of their jobs; the success and failure of the entire organization depends upon it.

Knowing how valuable one is to the big picture creates an environment where confidence grows. In turn, knowing that the failure of the organization can be affected by one's efforts (or lack thereof) has its own motivating element. Ensuring this is understood must become a part of the ethos and thinking of the members of the unit or organization. The superior's ability to sharing this information at every appropriate opportunity is critical to the development of trust, which is essential in the HRO.