

Re-imagining the Meanings of Success and Failure

**Anne Harbison, Gallup University
Principal of Executive Development and Learning**

This session will challenge us to re-imagine the experience of success and failure as a interpretive process that can transform in meaning and impact throughout the course of our career. Rather than focus on the external measures of performance, the presentation and discussion will delve into the transformative power of what Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman calls “our remembering selves.” Instead of dichotomous experiences of triumph and disappointment, many find that life’s most compelling memories are comprised of complex, rich experience – requiring reflection and even guidance to figure out the deeper meanings and implications for the career journey. Through a process of imaginative reflection and relational learning, we will consider avenues for guiding ourselves, our students, and clients through making sense of work’s deepest challenges and rewards.

This session will be structured around three aspects of learning that I hope serve to ground our dialogue and increase the value of our time together:

Theoretical. To frame our discussion, I will provide an overview of a constructive-developmental theory of transformational learning. Based on work by Robert Kegan and Jack Mezirow, transformational learning theory requires that we examine how we construct our own experience, as well as imagine how those constructions may develop into more expansive ways of interpreting ourselves and our world. This model will challenge us to consider not just what we know, but how we know – as managers and consultants, educators and learners.

Empirical. The transformational learning model comes to life through the stories of 78 executives participating in a study of the “disorienting dilemmas” in their own career development. Initially experienced as disruptive, challenging, and even painful, these “dilemmas” eventually transformed the executives going through them, expanding and deepening the ways in which they envisioned their career progression, leadership potential, and even vocational calling. We will examine the critical factors leading to transformation, what differentiated these executives from others who were derailed by their experience, and the processes of internal reconstruction they courageously undertook.

Experiential. I will ask you to reflect upon a “juicy dilemma” in your own career development – one that provokes self-examination, has an element of mystery, is unresolved, or carries a particular emotional charge. Through a reflective writing exercise and dialogue, we will explore how perspective-taking, compassion, and relational connection can assist the greatest transformation of our career – that of how we experience and make meaning of ourselves.

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Anne Harbison
The Gallup Organization
Principal for Executive Development and Learning

Anne has spent the past six years at Harvard University researching and teaching leadership development and adult learning in collaboration with Robert Kegan and Ron Heifetz. While at Harvard, she served on the staff for the Leadership Project at the Kennedy School of Government, as a researcher for Harvard Divinity School's Center for the Study of Values and Public Life and for MIT's Executive Leadership Consortium. Passionate about merging theory and practice, Anne's research focuses on vocational identity and leadership development among executives in both private and public sector organizations. Her work on life-based curriculum as a pedagogical model for leadership education provides a vision for how meaning-making, personal narrative, and interpretive process shape vocational identity and cognitive capacity.

Anne is currently the Principal for Executive Development and Learning for The Gallup Organization's Corporate University. In this capacity, Anne works with clients around the world seeking to make the greatest positive impact on their employees, customers and communities. Grounded in positive psychology, Gallup merges research with over 10,000 of the world's best managers with a developmental model committed to focusing on the deepest talents and strengths that leaders offer their organizations. Through executive coaching, innovative classroom learning designs, an MBA program, and on-site leadership partnerships, Gallup University models how strengths-based learning drives measurable performance outcomes.

Anne has consulted to a broad range of organizations on issues of leadership development, learning and change, including: The United States Department of Commerce, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, Visteon, Procter & Gamble, The Limited, Baker Construction, The Case Corporation, S.C. Johnson, Franciscan Health Systems, Best Buy and Intel. She is a regular presenter at the Academy of Management, the Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference, the American Society for Training & Development and has served as a key note speaker for many women's leadership and faith-based organizations.

Anne holds a Masters of Theological Studies from the Harvard Divinity School, a Masters of Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government, and is completing her doctoral dissertation in Adult Development and Learning at the Harvard Graduation School of Education.

She lives in Minneapolis and can be reached at anne_harbison@gallup.com.