

Insights from *Little Bets* by Peter Sims

“Chris Rock, the Pixar filmmakers, Frank Gehry, Steve Jobs, and Colonel Casey Haskins are all perfectionists and yet they accept, even welcome, failure as they develop new ideas and strategies.” - Peter Sims

Failure = Imperfection, and that's hard to accept.

“Innate curiosity, which is the basis for so much creativity routinely gets squelched (as an adult). Perfection is rewarded, while making mistakes is often penalized. The term “failure” has taken on a deeply personal meaning, something to be avoided at nearly all costs.” - Peter Sims

A growing body of psychology research reveals that there are two forms of perfectionism: Healthy & Unhealthy.

“Healthy perfectionism is internally driven in the sense that it's motivated by strong personal values for things like quality and excellence. Conversely, unhealthy perfectionism is externally driven. External concerns show up over perceived parental pressures, needing approval, a tendency to ruminate over past performances, or an intense worry about making mistakes. Healthy perfectionists exhibit a low concern for these outside factors.” - Peter Sims

3 Questions to Combat ‘Unhealthy’ Perfectionism

Questions direct our focus and guide our actions. By routinely asking the right questions we'll find the courage to make little bets, embrace small failures, and prevent an unhealthy perfectionism from paralyzing our productivity.

What Can I/we Afford to Lose?

“Seasoned entrepreneurs will tend to determine in advance what they are willing to lose, rather than calculating expected gains. Using a little bets approach facilitates operating according to the affordable loss principle.” - Peter Sims

In 1972, Hewlett Packard determined that they could release 1000 electronic calculators (the first of their kind), despite being told by market analysts that their product wouldn't sell. "Hewlett suggested, 'Why don't we build a thousand and see what happens?' It was an affordable bet. Within five months, HP was selling one thousand calculators a day and could barely keep up with the demand." - Peter Sims

Thinking about what you're willing to lose, setting a limit on your losses, and taking action without the fear of loss is how innovation happens.

How Could I/we Fail Faster?

“My strategy has always been: be wrong as fast as we can. Which basically means, we're gonna screw up, let's just admit that. Let's not be afraid of that. But let's do it as fast as we can so we can get to the answer. You can't get to adulthood before you go through puberty. I won't get it right the first time, but I will get it wrong really soon, really quickly.” - Andrew Stanton, Pixar Director

When Chris Rock comes up with a new joke, he'll test it at a local comedy club to quickly see if it's worth developing further.

The faster you test an idea, the less emotional attachment you'll have to an idea. If you're attached to your ideas, you won't let them fail, and you won't learn a damn thing. Fail fast. Fail frequently.

What If...? (small suggestions)

“You always want to present your ideas in a constructive manner and be respectful of the other animator's feelings,” Pixar animator Victor Navone says. “I usually start my suggestions with ‘what if’ or ‘would it be clearer if’ [the character] did it this way.” As Pete Docter, director of *Monsters Inc.* and *Up*, puts it, “I think everyone [at Pixar] has gotten very good at plussing ideas or changing directions without judging.” - Little Bets

Personal judgment is a catalyst for unhealthy perfectionism. Asking ‘What if?’ generates a sense of playfulness and curiosity. It's hard to be defensive and paralyzed by a fear of failure when you're curious. By asking ‘What if we tried...?’, you show a willingness to experiment and improve solutions, not outright reject them.