

## Learning from Wins, Near Misses, and Failures Worksheet

Wins, near misses, and failures are fertile ground for extracting useful information to strengthen the resilience of your organization and build on existing risk management capabilities. As Paul J. H. Schoemaker writes, “Experience is inevitable; learning is not.” These “case studies” can be used to formulate actions your team can take to learn from understanding.

### Learning From ‘Wins’

In *Think Like a Rocket Scientist*, Ozan Varol writes, “The next time you’re tempted to start basking in the glory of your success, while admitting the scoreboard, stop and pause for a moment. Ask yourself, What went wrong with this success? What role did luck, opportunity, and privilege play? What can I learn from it? If we don’t ask these questions, luck will eventually run its course, and the near misses will catch up with us.”

As tempting as it is to simply celebrate success, it is important to extract why something succeeded and where the process could have been improved. These important takeaways will ensure that future endeavors have a higher probability becoming another success story for your mission. Do everything possible to make positive opportunities a repeatable process.

### Learning From Near Misses

In his book *Think Like a Rocket Scientist*, Ozan Varol reminds us that *near misses* offer fertile ground for learning! The NRMC team agrees. Varol writes that “Near misses are a rich source of data for a simple reason. They happen far more frequently than accidents. They’re also significantly less costly. By examining near misses, you can gather crucial data without incurring the costs of failure.” In her book *Teaming*, HBS Professor Amy C. Edmondson writes that “...organizations that pay more attention to small problems are more likely to avert large or catastrophic failures.”

Both Varol and Edmondson caution leaders against choosing a too-simple explanation for a loss or near miss, such as ‘human error.’ Keep in mind, in a complex environment (whose isn’t?!), numerous factors often combine to produce a near miss or failure.

### Learning From Failures

**“Unlike the high of success, which quickly dissipates, the sting of failure lingers—sometimes for a lifetime.”**  
– *Ozan Varol*

But there’s a way to take the sting out of any workplace failure and extract valuable, mission-advancing lessons. In his book, *Create the Future + The Innovation Handbook: Tactics for Disruptive Thinking*, Jeremy Gutsche urges us to “Interpret failure as a training cost.” When we reorient our thinking and believe that the lessons learned from a failure can lead to mission-advancing innovation and changes, spending time understanding what went wrong is well worth the time.

Gutsche draws our attention to another, bountiful reason to pause and reflect on inevitable failures in the workplace: acceptance of failure is one of the factors that makes work experiential and creates meaningful relationships in an office environment, along with trust, openness, understanding and a space for growth. If failures are swept under the rug or routinely ignored, you’ve deprived your team of a valuable opportunity to learn.

