

When one door closes you can open the next one

Margaret Beaton 29 October 14

I'll call her Jess and through her story show when one door closes you can open the next one.

Jess was making her rise through the corporate ranks look easy. Her company promoted Jess ahead of her peers. Making her sales budget was a breeze for Jess who worked extraordinarily hard, often sacrificing her private life for the job. Overall, life felt good. Abruptly, all this changed.

Along the way Jess had trodden on quite a few superior toes. And one too many high potential direct reports who wouldn't tolerate her ruthless style had moved away from her business unit. When a major re-organisation took place in the course of a company merger, Jess lost out on an executive committee position. In effect, she was demoted. In her view, a lesser performer took the spot which she thought should be naturally hers.



At first Jess sulked. Then she picked herself and went looking for feedback from those who had made the decision. She didn't argue or remonstrate. She listened. And what she heard shocked her. In spite of her stellar results, she wasn't seen as 'executive material'. She was judged to have peaked because her ability to move into enterprise-level leadership was limited by some of her behaviours. She was labelled 'aggressive' and her emotional intelligence was questioned.

Wow, this all felt unexpected. And was it fair? When she reflected on her 360 feedback over the years – and re-read the reports – the telltale signs were there. She had never stopped to take them seriously. After-all, weren't sales results the only KPIs that mattered?

Turning adversity in to opportunity

Jess set out to re-make herself in the eyes of the CEO. She paid for executive coaching out of her own pocket. She asked her life partner and a close friend for feedback. She started reading books and blogs on leadership. Then she dared to ask some of her staff for feedback.

Jess started to realise she could get more done through others than she could ever do on her own. Her boss was effusive. Her bonuses were handsome.

The more she succeeded, the more she questioned whether she should expand her horizons. Jess explored options. She accepted invitations to interview for bigger positions in other companies. She waited for her own company to offer her a promotion, but there wasn't a clear opening ahead of her.

So Jess decided to start her own business, a contract sales force. Playing to her signature competence and drive, JSales became a runaway success. Being her own CEO came quite easily to Jess although she had constantly to remind herself that she needed to work through her team and be a role model for others in every respect.

The lessons Jess learned

Jess learned that losing out was one of the best things that had happened to her. She came to understand that when one door closes you can open the next one. Distilled, here's how she had responded – and come out on top:

1. Jess had the courage and tenacity to find out why she had lost out on the executive committee position. Instead of succumbing to denial and avoiding the hard truths, she opened herself to feedback. Too many high achievers take more credit for success than is their due, and blame others for their failures. She did neither.
2. Jess explored ways of addressing her shortcomings and then she looked for the possible opportunities to make better use her talents and new found leadership skills. She didn't stick in a comfort zone and cruise. She was prepared to let go, take a risk <my 2013 post [If you keep on going the way you are, you will miss the road to your future](#) addresses this point in more detail>.
3. Jess seized the day. Other corporate positions, while flattering, felt like more of the same, just with bigger titles and salaries. She didn't really value either. Jess had defined success her way, she had made her own terms. And, luckily, the timing was right for her, in both her professional and private lives.

Conclusion

Jess' story epitomises an openness to learn, resilience and adaptability. She turned adversity into opportunity. In short, she worked why she had lost, identified and explored new paths and seized the right opportunity for herself when she saw it.

Now she says the biggest lesson in her life came from failure – losing the job she dearly wanted and didn't get. The hurt and surprise didn't stop her. They only caused temporary wounds and delays.

Jess learned and looked forward. She grew and prospered. We all can.

Further reading

If you found this post valuable, you may wish to read these:

- + [Steer your career decisions with no regrets](#)
- + [Break is the important part of breaking through](#)

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