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WISDOM

The ‘Mierda!’ Moment

How to harness the positive energy that can come from failures in order to become more creative



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You often hear people say: “We need to celebrate failure” as a solution to encourage more creativity. But a recent meeting with a glass artist in Barcelona got me thinking about the connection between failure and creativity differently. And it made me realise that most failures do nothing to boost our creativity. Many failures even kill creativity. Some failures nudge us forward. But a certain kind of failure—a rare but very special breed—gives us a huge boost of energy and inspiration that will fuel creativity like few other things. I am talking about ‘The Mierda Moment’, and when you learn how to harness that, you too will get access to a very powerful creativity tool.

I got to know about ‘The Mierda Moment’ from Anna Alsina Bardagí.

Perhaps I should start by saying that ‘Mierda’ is Spanish for ‘Crap!’ In other words, The Mierda Moment is not a very pleasant phrase, but it is the name of a very nice insight.

Let me give you some background.

Anna Alsina Bardagí is a woman who creates beautiful sculptures out of the purest of glass. And she does it through a process that is both intricate and painstakingly slow and long. One piece takes hundreds of hours to make. One mistake and it’s ruined. Her pieces sell for thousands of Euro each, yet she almost gave up on the process due to constant failures in the beginning.

When I met her recently she told me how, in the early years of her art career, her art pieces would break over and over again. Most times the failures would just beat her down. She would get frustrated and annoyed. She would lose energy.

But one specific time when she took out the glass piece only to see it cracked and ruined, she got a burst of energy. She said: “Mierda!” (i.e. “Crap!”) and decided to once and for all figure out WHY the glass kept cracking. She spent days in the library reading scientific journals, digging deep into the physics of glass-making. She contacted world experts in glass to learn from the masters. She started taking detailed notes about what was going on. And finally, she figured it out, and invented a new way to create glass art!

The Mierda Moment is not the same as a ‘Eureka Moment’, which refers to “the common human experience of suddenly understanding a previously incomprehensible problem or concept”. The Mierda Moment is a special kind of Eureka Moment that is triggered by the frustration of failing.

The Mierda Moment is also different from “flow”. Flow, also known as being in the zone, is “the mental state in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energised focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity.” There is nothing like enjoyment when The Mierda Moment hits you. It’s a state of flow like energy driven by extreme frustration.

Anna credits the Mierda Moment with giving her that extra “energy boost” that helped her push through to a new level of understanding. Of giving her the “push” she needed to create on a higher level. She told me: “That one specific failure trigged something in myself that got me to do this extensive research. The Mierda Moment is a trigger. It’s like a drive. It is a fearless drive to break through what is stopping you.”

The Mierda Moment is not just a celebration of failure. Nor is it merely about learning from failures. Learning from failure is just about slowly becoming better by step by step, understanding what does not work. But The Mierda Moment is like this huge push. It is about failure triggering this creative energy that propels you forward.

If we want to be creative then it’s important to be aware of The Mierda Moment so that we can ride that wave that the Mierda Moment creates when it shows itself. After failing many times and only feeling bad, or feeling nothing, we need to be ready to surf the Mierda wave when it shows itself. Or we might miss it.

Because, as Anna taught me, “It’s not enough to never give up. It’s more powerful than this. It is the difference between successful, creative people, and not-successful people. It’s not that creative people don’t give up. It is that they use the force of the failure to push themselves forward. They use the energy of the failure.”

“It is so easy to get pulled down by failure. To think, ‘I failed so I am a failure’; ‘I will never learn this’; ‘I might as well give up’. And then you lose your chance. You miss your opportunity to do something that you love. Sometimes you might even start blaming yourself. Or others.”

Anna shared with me that there are certain aspects that will increase the possibility of The Mierda Moment showing itself.

1. When we work with some creative project that we are really passionate about, the added passion can transform frustration into positive energy.
2. Know that failure is not personal. When you distance yourself as a person from the situation that failed, you are more open to seeing positive opportunities opening up.
3. Never give up. In the words of Anna Alsina Bardagí: “Keep trying. Keep trying. I think that life, our whole lives, is a learning process.”
The more you look at life as one long lesson, the more open you are to learn the lesson when it shows itself.

The world of innovation is full of people who used the positive energy of something negative. From the frustrated child that kicks a malfunctioning vending machine into order, to how Steve Jobs used the frustration of being fired from Apple to build Pixar into a great company, enabling him to come back to Apple with fresh ideas.

Remember the words of Anna Alsina Bardagí, the glass artist who almost gave up after all her art pieces cracked for the longest time: “The lesson here is when something cracks, don’t just get frustrated. Use that energy to crack the problem. The Mierda Moment is the moment in which you harness the energy of your failure to push you forward.”

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Fredrik Hären is The Creativity Explorer. For the last 20+ years he has been exploring human creativity around the world, from Mongolia and the Maldives, from North Korea to South Africa. He has been invited to speak in 70 countries on 6 continents and has delivered more than 2000 keynote presentations. Fredrik is an author of ten books, including “The Idea Book” which was included in “The 100 Best Business Books of All Time.”



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