

STYBEL PEABODY & ASSOCIATES



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REJECTION: You Can't "Overcome" Rejection. You Can Reframe it.

Learn from master rejects like Steve Jobs.

"Rejection is negative, and acceptance is positive." That is a simple, binary statement. In this blog, we will demonstrate that winners embrace rejection.

In 2022, *The Wall Street Journal* published the obituary of Joseph Sugarman, a highly successful business professional. He had homes in Las Vegas and Maui. He owned a Ferrari and small airplanes. He financially invested in BluBlocker sunglasses, and that was a winner. He was an early pioneer in selling Craig electronic calculators.

On the other hand, Mr. Sugarman had his rejections: He invested in anti-aging potions and a \$1,500 mousetrap.

Rejects We Admire

In 2010, onlinecollege.org published a list of esteemed and successful authors. What was their experience with rejection?

The family of Anne Frank: 15 rejections of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

Robert Pirsig: 121 rejections for *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

Margaret Mitchell: 38 rejections of *Gone with the Wind*.

Richard Bach: 18 rejections of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*.

Laurence Peter: 22 rejections for *The Peter Principle*.

Jack Cranfield and Mark Victor Hansen: 134 rejections of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*.

William Golding: 20 rejections of *Lord of the Flies*.

Who Would Reject *Harry Potter*?

Before it was eventually accepted, J.K. Rowling's manuscript for *Harry Potter* was rejected by 12 publishing houses. According to Jack Otway (2021), 500 million copies of the *Harry Potter* series have been sold. The total value of the *Harry Potter* franchise is \$7.7 billion.

The most inspiring perspective about rejection we have heard is Apple co-founder Steve Job's talk to Stanford University graduates. It has been downloaded 39 million times, so we are not alone in our admiration.

He is congratulating a group of intelligent undergraduates upon their graduation from a prestigious institution and the launching of exciting new chapters in their lives. And yet Steve Jobs chooses to focus on rejection.

Jobs discusses two rejections: dropping out of college and getting fired by the board of Directors of Apple, Inc. He admits the pain of both events, yet observes how critical these rejections were to his eventual success.

Reframing Rejection

“Rejection is bad, and acceptance is good” is a binary concept that is easy to understand yet dangerous to believe. If rejection is perceived as only negative, one consequence might be to fear rejection. Is that fear good for your career?

As for Joseph Sugarman, his framework is striking for both its simplicity and practicality: “If you go out and do something and you are successful, you have won. If you fail, you have learned something. You have not lost.”

We think Steve Jobs would have agreed.

References

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