



JIM HARSHAW JR.

Revealing Failure as the Path to Success

Success Through Failure Podcast

How Matt Bradford Found His Purpose After Losing His Legs and Sight to an IED

Action Plan Episode #263

On September 11, 2001, just a freshman in high school, Matthew Bradford watched the terrorist attacks on America's soil and knew at that moment he wanted to join the military after graduating. In September 2005, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps.

On January 18, 2007, he was severely injured after stepping on an Improvised Explosive Device in Haditha Iraq. This moment put Matthew on a detour, and he would learn the true meaning of overcoming and adapting.

Matthew never lets his injuries define who he is or what he can do. Each obstacle is a new challenge. Over the years, he has been inspired to share his story to motivate others through their own life challenges with his message of #JustWalk and #NoLegsNoVisionNoProblem.

Quotes

"The next hour is not guaranteed, so we've got to live each minute to the fullest."

"If you want something, you've got to work for it."

"We might not have all the money in the world, but the one thing we had was love."

How to find the tenacity, mindset, and drive to do something

I told myself when I first got hurt that anything in this world that a normal, able body person can do, then I can do it. And I put my mind to it. I work out at least three to four times a week. To me, that is my medication, my therapy, just to be

the best version of myself. I try to find something more challenging each year. And I don't like sticking to the bare minimum and doing the same thing all the time. So it's just, I just love life. I love to live life, and I love to try new things. I don't ever make my injuries define who I am as a person, and they don't slow me down. I just used them as another motivation. And I'm going to find the strength and mindset to get through that.

Matt takes us back to the day of the accident, where he loses everything

I was deployed to Haditha, Iraq, in the Al Anbar Province in September of 2006. We walked into a hornet's nest. We're on foot patrols, three-four times a day, and we engage the enemy a lot, but every time we (12 Marines) leave, we always come back alive. On January 18, 2007, I did what I always do on every other Patrol. I was walking past the compound wall. It opened up into an area called the Palm Grove. I saw a white bag linked up against the tree, and to me, it was a suspicious item. So I turned and looked to my left and told my team leader and looked behind me to tell the rest of the squad that we got a white bag up here off to my right about 30-40 yards. The minute I turned back around as I finished walking past the compound wall, there was a ditch perpendicular to the road I was on. As I looked down, I saw the command wires going in from inside the pipe underneath the road that I was standing directly over. And then in the matter seconds, it exploded. Life went from light to dark in a matter of seconds. And through it all, I was conscious. I was awake. I heard all the squad leaders calling it f* and everything that is going around me.

I heard those Marines doing everything. They possibly could get me out of the danger zone and get me to better safety, and put a tourniquet on both my legs. My left leg was removed at the blast and, of course, went through both my eyes and blinded me. They were sitting there holding my hand waiting on me because they didn't think that I'd be living much longer, and as they put me in the back of the Humvee, I heard one familiar voice. It was from my senior drill instructor who was a platoon Sergeant, he said, "Bradford, you'll be fine," and then I closed my eyes. I passed out and thought that was it. Three weeks later, I woke up from a coma, and this was when I started realizing what happened to me.

Why quitting is never an option and how did Matt move forward with his life

One night, a corpsman came in and made brownies. She had glasses of milk. I told her I'm not eating, and she's like,

"Yes, you are."

That was the first proper meal that I ate. The next morning, I woke up and the light was switched, it was flipped on. That's when I thought to myself that I'm 20 years old and got a long life ahead of me. Yes, I have no legs, I have no vision, but you know what? They're not going to define who I am as a person. I am strong. I got a heart. I've got goodwill and mentality, and at the end of the day, I'm a marine. Marines don't quit, and they don't give up. Those Marines, I knew that they don't want me to give up, and they're cheering me all along the way.

Once I realized that I started keeping these goals in my head. If I want to be a better person, I need to get from this hospital bed to a wheelchair outside that door because that's where opportunity is.

Patience and persistence and how it can lead you to success

There are two words that I look for and focus on; patience and persistence.

Before my injuries, I was very impatient. If I wanted something, I want to do it right then and now, but with my injuries, I've learned that I have to slow down a little bit. I need to be patient. I got to enjoy the process, enjoy the journey, and just be patient because I know I'll work my butt off my work ethic. If I'm motivated, then it's finally going to come, so just be patient and persistent. It takes a lot for me to quit first. *"I started this, and I'm going to finish it."* It's having that mentality that the pains go away. I did the Bataan Death March in 2009. A 10 miles walk two years after my injuries, if I need to accomplish it, I need to straighten up my legs. I need to get better Prosthetics to get stronger. And through that, I was doing marathons, races, but at the end of the day, it was a better me. I can go on accomplishing something that I quit on.

A lot of people could build and strengthen your character. To me, it's one of the greatest leadership traits. A lot of people read or listen to your Ted Talk, a lot of people who are successful today have failed, but they kept putting one foot forward. Failure is not going to stop them from living their life the way they want to.

What motivates Matt to switch back the light every time the darkness starts to creep in

The switch turns back and forth every day because I'm constantly reminded of January 18, 2007. Every night, I pray that I wake up and open my eyes to see my wife and my kids. Every time I open my eyes and see darkness, I grab my Prosthetics, go in my daughter's room and play Barbies with her because it puts

my mind in the right spot. I'm never going to let my kids and my wife live a good life without me in it, and if it takes me playing Barbies every day with my daughter to put my mind in the right spot, then I'm going to play Barbies.

I did the Spartan Race Marathon. I get on a bike and a ride. I would wear the Kevlar. It's uncomfortable, 11 pounds, and it's hot. The burden of wearing that Kevlar is to pay respect to those who can't wear it anymore, the Marines who served, who were wounded, who lost their lives serving this country. And for the few hours wearing that Kevlar, I'm back in the fight with my brothers and sisters. Yes, and I want to do everything I can to make sure when the Kevlar is on, that the warrior within me is coming out, and that's all the motivation I need in this life. Going back to 2007, when the switch flipped on, it was the Marines who motivated me and encouraged me and the Marines who came into my hospital room day in and day out. That was the reason why I wanted to re-enlist in the Marine Corps. My ultimate goal was that I needed to do what I needed to do. Learn how to walk, figure out the vision, learn how to get on the internet, do whatever to re-enlist, and go out, go around, and help other severely wounded service members.

Why failure is never an end but the beginning of something greater

Along the way, I learned the fact of giving back in serving others. It doesn't matter if it's in the military or if it's civilian life. 2011 when I got back to Iraq, I thought about my life and what's next. I served the Marines to deploy. I can't do that anymore. God has given me this opportunity to go out and share my story, and even though I'm still trying to figure out my story, this is the path that I'm on. I had a lady somehow reach out to me by email. She's a huge Toby Keith fan. I made an Instagram and Facebook post, and she read it. She Googled my story and looked it up and then she sent an email saying,

"Hey Matt, you don't know me, it was a four-year post, if I didn't Google your story and saw how you've overcome your injuries to live a happy life, then I would have committed suicide."

It's not just military, but it's civilians. We all can give it and share it.

Why you should live every day of your life to the fullest

When I first learned how to walk, I was bouncing off the left wall and right wall, tripping over my own feet and getting frustrated. My physical therapist told me, whatever I do, just put one foot in front of the next. I'll never let you fall. That gave me the confidence. Later on in life, I realized each step is not guaranteed.

Tomorrow's not guaranteed. Sometimes the next hour is not guaranteed so we have to live each minute to the fullest, and I never worry about tomorrow or next week, worry about right now.

You have to put one foot in front of the next because I might have two prosthetic legs, but my feet are facing forward. I'm going to keep walking forward because I know there's opportunity, there's gotta be a wagon. It's the best way to overcome failure, to overcome any obstacle or adversity. Put one foot in front of the next and keep walking.

This one thing is responsible for Matt's success

Looking back on my life, my parents were divorced, my mom was paycheck to paycheck. The one thing that she and her side of the family taught me is the work ethic. We might not have all the money in the world, but the one thing we had was love. On my dad's side, he grew up on a farm. He had a work ethic, but he went to the Air Force and then went to school to get a business degree, and then he retired from the government 30 years. He had two completely different lifestyles, but the one thing my dad did is that he never made me work for everything.

What motivates Matt to wake up happy every day

January I went back to Germany, I stood from an ICU bed that I was probably lying in 13 years ago, I realized that in a matter of seconds, one wrong step could put you right back, so you just gotta have faith. You've got to be faithful. You are blessed with everything that has been given in life. I gave my legs, my vision, and I got scars on my body and internally I did it for freedom. I did it for my country and my love for the flag.

When I was in Iraq, we were set on top of the roof. I got a chance to see and witness the prettiest sunsets and sunrises. Now, I couldn't see that because no matter where we are in the world, evil is all around us. We could walk out of this compound and be killed, but God was looking out for us, and he was there with us to give us hope.

I have three beautiful kids and a beautiful wife, and I want to make sure that I'm here to watch them accomplish their goals and whatever they want to be in life. That motivates me to wake up every day happy.

Action Items

If people say yes, I'm going to do this. And then they sit on the couch. That's just the hardest thing with anything in life. It's all mental. Physically people can do everything. Nothing slows or stops anybody from accomplishing whatever they want. It's just eating off the couch. If it's going for a walk, going to the gym, or reading a book on a new hobby. To me, those are the things that have kept me going. I love to read. I love to workout.

We created the whole just walk mentality. And it's just to get people to come out and walk a five K. Have conversation, fellowship, fitness, and do a five K together. It's just that comradery to get up and find ways to be a better version of yourself every day.

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