

Excellence: A Bias for Action

A good friend of mine wrote a book and it was called *Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins*. And I really believe that in a lot of ways. Now, the best example of that I have is that years ago I had the incredible honor, as far as I'm concerned, of being asked for an awards ceremony, sales hall of fame or something like that, to be the introducer for the Walmart founder, Sam Walton. And they gave me 90 seconds or two minutes to say my piece and the mistress of ceremonies was Barbara Walters, who was clearly going to cut me off.

And so I had a minute and a half, two minutes, to tell the life of Sam Walton. And I think, "God, how do I do this?" And so, I called Sam's friend and colleague of 30 odd years, David Glass, who succeeded Sam, incidentally, as CEO. And I said, "David, if you had a minute and a half to give the life and times of Sam, what would you say?" And he said, "Well, there are a lot of lovely things I could say. But," he said, "clearly, unmistakably, at the top of my list I would say, 'Sam is unafraid to fail.'" He said, "Sam would screw something up to a fare-thee-well, he'd try something, it'd blow up in his face, literally. He'd come into the office the next day, he'd be laughing like a hyena, and his comment would always be some form of, 'Well, we got that one out of the way. What do we do next?'"

And I'm inclined to believe Mr. Glass, who doesn't exaggerate in general. But think about that: Sam Walton, Walmart founder, most amazing merchant perhaps in the last century, most amazing businessman, perhaps, in the last century, and his best friend saying his number one secret was that he was unafraid to fail. There's a message there.