

Losing Money to Become a Tycoon: Starting with Games

Chapter 533: Three Lessons from Failure

May 29th, Sunday.

It was time once again for the monthly session on learning from failure.

Relatively speaking, Pei Qian actually looked forward to Qiu Hong's lectures more than He An's.

After all, He An's advice had to be reversed before it could be applied, and there was no telling whether the reverse approach would actually work.

Qiu Hong's lessons, on the other hand, could simply be followed as examples of what to do.

The only problem was that during the last session, Pei Qian hadn't felt he'd gained anything useful.

Instead, Qiu Hong had somehow come to regard him as a kindred spirit.

That was incredibly frustrating.

Qiu Hong had spent half the lecture talking about project management failures, and everything he said was perfectly reasonable.

The problem was that none of it applied to Pei Qian.

All he could do was hope today's lecture would cover some genuinely useful failure cases.

Qiu Hong arrived at the café right on time and warmly shook "Ma Yang's" hand.

"President Ma! So, how have things been this past month? Has your company's project management improved?"

Pei Qian: "..."

Improved?

If it improves any further, I'll be finished.

Pei Qian gave a light cough.

"Your last lecture benefited me greatly. But since time is limited, let's get straight to today's topic."

Qiu Hong nodded.

"Right, right. Let's get straight to it."

The two men sat down, and a waiter served them coffee.

Taking a sip, Qiu Hong began,

"President Ma, today's topic is another extremely important cause of failure. Among game startups, I guarantee that countless teams have failed because of this one factor."

The moment Pei Qian heard that, his spirits immediately lifted.

A failure lesson this universally applicable?

I definitely need to listen carefully.

Qiu Hong deliberately built up some suspense before finally saying,

"That factor is..."

"Random interference from the boss—or other outside forces."

Pei Qian: "?"

Oblivious to "Ma Yang's" bewildered expression, Qiu Hong had already slipped into his usual heartfelt storytelling mode.

"This one..."

"It's a story filled with tears."

"Most people who enter the game industry start with a pretty simple dream."

"They just want to create something fun for players."

"Even if it's just a pay-to-win game that lets whales spend a fortune—as long as those players are having fun while paying, then we haven't worked in vain."

"But society isn't that simple."

"Games aren't something one person can make alone."

"If you're working at a company, you have to deal with office politics."

"You have to pick sides."

"You have to maintain good relationships with the people around you."

"Otherwise, you won't get resources, and no matter how good your project is, it'll never get made."

"When you're an implementation designer, you have to listen to the systems designer."

"When you become a systems designer, you have to listen to the lead designer."

"After you finally work your way up to lead designer, you have to listen to the producer."

"When you become the producer, you have to listen to the investors."

"And even if you eventually become the investor yourself, you still have to listen to the market."

"See?"

"You may have your own ideas."

"But you can't guarantee that the people above you share those ideas."

"That's what outside interference is."

"Think about it."

"You come up with a perfectly good concept."

"The producer changes it once."

"The boss changes it again."

"The investors make another round of changes."

"Then, right before release, the publishing platform demands another round of revisions."

"After all that changing and changing, even you can't recognize what the project has become."

Pei Qian listened quietly, his expression blank.

That actually sounds like a wonderful situation.

I wish someone would interfere with my projects and ruin them for me...

Unfortunately, there was no one above President Pei to interfere with his decisions.

He had the final say over everything.

If anything, he was the one constantly interfering with his employees' work.

But the problem was, even after all his meddling, the games still didn't fail.

If anything, the more he interfered, the more successful they became.

How was that supposed to make any sense?

Could it be...

I'm interfering in the wrong way?

Pei Qian coughed lightly.

"Um... I have a question."

"President Qiu, you said that 'bosses interfering with projects causes them to fail.'"

"Could you give me some concrete examples of how bosses interfere?"

Qiu Hong looked at him in surprise.

"President Ma, that needs an explanation?"

"You can come up with examples just by using your imagination."

"For instance..."

"You know perfectly well what kinds of games are popular right now, but the boss insists on doing the exact opposite."

"You know exactly what players like, but the boss insists on going against the players."

"Or the boss suddenly slaps the table and demands some design that's never existed anywhere on the market..."

Pei Qian fell silent once again.

That sounds exactly like what I've been doing all along...

Then my money-losing strategy shouldn't be the problem.

So why have the results been the complete opposite of what I wanted?

No, this is useless. I've already tried this approach. I need to stop Qiu Hong before he goes any further.

Pei Qian felt he couldn't afford to waste any more of this valuable lesson on a topic that was clearly irrelevant to him, so he quickly interrupted.

"Mm, I completely understand."

"This is definitely something that can easily cause a project to fail."

"But it's not really applicable to my situation."

"Could we move on to another topic?"

Qiu Hong paused.

"Not applicable?"

"President Ma, I think what you mean is that you're unlikely to encounter this kind of problem."

"That's true."

"Your direct superior is President Pei, and President Pei himself is a top-tier game producer."

"So there's basically no chance of your projects failing because your boss keeps interfering."

"But that's okay."

"I already took that into consideration."

"So this was just an appetizer."

"I've prepared plenty of other material."

Pei Qian was delighted.

Great.

For a moment I thought this lesson was going to be another complete waste.

Qiu Hong continued,

"Then the next extremely important cause of failure is..."

"Being unable to find the talent you actually need."

"President Ma, I assume this one should be relevant to you?"

Pei Qian nodded vigorously.

"Absolutely."

"This has been a huge headache for me."

Qiu Hong smiled.

"A boss can't personally handle every single task."

"If you try, you'll end up working yourself to death like a dog, and you'll still do a poor job."

"Sooner or later, you'll need to find capable people to take charge of your different businesses."

"This is different from project management."

"Project management is about making use of talent."

"What we're talking about now is discovering talent."

"And comparatively speaking, discovering talent is the more advanced skill."

"A lot of failed projects failed because the people in charge had poor judgment."

"They were fooled by smooth-talking frauds, entrusted them with important responsibilities, only to discover later that those people had no real ability whatsoever."

Pei Qian nodded enthusiastically.

"So..."

"Where exactly can I find these frauds?"

For a moment, Qiu Hong had no idea how to answer.

"Uh..."

"They're... hidden among the vast sea of people."

Pei Qian asked, "Then, theoretically speaking, there should be quite a lot of them, right?"

Qiu Hong thought about it.

"Who knows?"

"No one's ever conducted any statistical research on something like that."

"But I'd imagine there are a fair number."

"Most entrepreneurs probably run into one or two frauds during the course of starting a business."

Pei Qian fell silent.

So... you're saying I'm just unlucky?

No, this still isn't useful.

I'm terrible at spotting frauds.

Zhang Wang is the perfect example of that.

Pei Qian cleared his throat.

"Well... President Qiu..."

"I don't think this really helps me either..."

Qiu Hong hesitated.

"Uh..."

"That's fine, President Ma."

"I'll switch to another one."

"I may not have many success stories, but I've got plenty of failure stories!"

Pei Qian: "..."

Why do I suddenly feel a strange sense of kinship with him?

After thinking for a moment, Qiu Hong said,

"Then next, let me explain the concept of 'common sense bias.'"

Pei Qian nodded.

The theory sounded rather sophisticated.

Maybe this one will actually be useful.

Qiu Hong explained,

"In game companies, you often hear people say things like..."

'The boss is an idiot. He doesn't understand anything. I'm quitting.'

Or:

'The new game designer we hired is unbelievably stupid. I've already fired him.'

"Conversations like these happen in countless game companies."

"In fact, even the tone people use is remarkably similar."

"So why is it that people in the game industry are always convinced that everyone else doesn't understand anything?"

"A veteran lead designer and a producer who's capable of securing investment are both experienced industry professionals."

"Yet each insists that the other 'doesn't understand anything.'"

"So..."

"Who is it that actually doesn't understand?"

"This is what I call 'common sense bias.'"

"In other words, everyone's idea of 'common sense' is different."

"You and I may both be thinking about exactly the same issue."

"But what I consider common sense and what you consider common sense may be completely different things."

"So naturally, each of us believes the other knows nothing."

"For example, take clone games."

"From the perspective of investors or company bosses, they're proven successes."

"If something has already been proven to make money, why *wouldn't* you make it?"

"But from the perspective of most developers..."

"If the market has already been flooded with that kind of game, what future could it possibly have?"

"Of course, that's just a very simple example."

"In real work, this kind of common sense bias is far more severe."

"It influences every stage of game development, as well as every aspect of running a company."

"And in the end, it causes the project to drift completely away from what it was originally intended to become."

Pei Qian blinked blankly.

Isn't this exactly what I'm going through right now?!

A kindred spirit!

He immediately grabbed Qiu Hong's hand.

"Yes! Yes, yes, yes! Exactly!"

"That's exactly how I feel!"

"This problem has been driving me crazy!"

"So..."

"How do you actually solve this 'common sense bias'?"

Qiu Hong smiled.

"Well..."

"It's easy to explain, but difficult to put into practice."

"The answer is to establish good communication between everyone involved."

"The root cause of common sense bias is that people simply can't understand one another."

"As long as communication is handled well..."

"...as long as both sides can clearly express what they really mean..."

"...and everyone can align their thinking and work toward the same goal..."

"...then the problem of common sense bias can be resolved to a considerable extent."

Pei Qian: "..."

The enthusiasm that had just flared up was instantly extinguished once again.

Why is the solution another thing that's completely impossible for me to do?!

Communicate well? Let everyone understand what I'm really thinking?

I'd love to!

The problem is, the system won't allow it!

I can't let anyone know that I'm deliberately trying to lose money!

What's even worse...

My employees have somehow formed a united front.

The only problem is that they're united in the exact opposite direction from me...

Pei Qian instantly deflated.

Today's lesson had covered three different causes of failure.

One could say he'd learned quite a lot.

And yet...

Not a single one of them was something he could actually use.

Qiu Hong glanced at his watch.

The lesson was just about over.

He quietly let out a long sigh of relief.

Whew...

President Ma's standards really are high.

If I hadn't prepared thoroughly beforehand—and if I didn't have such a huge collection of personal failures to draw from—today's lesson might really have fallen apart.

Why does that thought feel so bittersweet...?

Still...

Mission accomplished.

Looking at President Ma sitting there with his head lowered in deep thought, he assumed the lesson must have been very inspiring.

At that moment, Pei Qian looked up.

"President Qiu."

"I have one last question."

"Suppose..."

"I'm speaking hypothetically..."

"Suppose those three problems all stopped being problems."

"What would happen then?"

Qiu Hong paused for a moment before smiling.

"Then I'd have to congratulate you, President Ma."

"You'd be making money without even trying."

"You could make whatever games you wanted without anyone blindly interfering with your decisions."

"You'd have selected nothing but talented people, each capable of handling their responsibilities independently."

"Your employees wouldn't suffer from common sense bias."

"Everyone would think in the same direction and work toward the same goal."

"If you couldn't succeed, then who possibly could?"

Pei Qian: "..."

Those words cut straight to the heart.

He had come here hoping to learn from failure.

Instead, after finishing the lesson, he somehow felt even more hopeless than before.