FAILURE WITH PURPOSE
LEVERAGING PROTOTYPING AND TESTING FOR SUCCESSFUL EXHIBITS
CONCEPT FAILURE

• Not addressing the right idea
• The topic isn't relevant or clear
• Content or experience is over-used and not exciting (fads)
• Visitors don't understand the exhibit, how to use it, or what it's teaching
• Theme isn't relevant to the audience age/interests
• The physical interactive is fun, but the content isn't clearly delivered
CONCEPT FAILURE...DONE RIGHT

- Define success for the experience
- Test topics with visitors before locking in ideas
- When using a “Tried and True” exhibit, make sure it plays well with other gallery content (ex. grocery store)
- Talk to other museums about their experience
- Document it!
- Embrace past failure and successes as well
- Fail EARLY – push boundaries during testing

DRIVE TOWARD FAILURE EARLY, THEN MAKE ADJUSTMENTS.
SUCCESS?!
It's fine to celebrate success but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure.

Bill Gates
DESIGN FAILURE

- Incorrect measurements of the space, doorways, or other architectural features
- Exhibits aren't accessible to ALL audiences
- Functional requirements of components not considered
- Neglecting to consider maintenance
- Use of too many custom parts that are difficult to order/replace
- The exhibit isn’t intuitive - people don’t know how to use it
- Safety is not considered
- New materials are not tested for function and durability
- Poor label placement
- Overall look and feel of the interactive is not inviting
DESIGN FAILURE...DONE RIGHT

• Define key goals and target audience
• Consider past successes and failures
• Push design limits early
• Understand guidelines for accessibility
• Share designs with key audience
• Listen to feedback and make adjustments
• Create paper prototypes and mock-ups to share
• Interview museum staff
• For Traveling Exhibits, make sure elements break down easily for shipping, delivery, and setup
• Make a plan for replacement of technology over time
• Survey your site!

DRIVE TOWARD FAILURE EARLY, THEN MAKE ADJUSTMENTS.
Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.

Henry Ford
FABRICATION FAILURE

- Materials are not durable enough for a museum setting
- Materials are not properly tested
- Pinch points, head knockers, slippery floors, eye poke hazards, sharp corners, and trip hazards
- Forgot to consider the “good neighbor policy“
- Use of obsolete or soon-to-be-obsolete equipment, AV hardware, etc.
- Not budgeting (time and money) for remediation
- Not building “backup” parts where necessary
- Use of finishes that aren’t easily refreshed
FABRICATION FAILURE...DONE RIGHT

• Create proof-of-concept models
• Build simple prototypes and mock-ups
• Engage in play testing with your target audience
• Observe, collect data, and make adjustments
• Test new materials for durability
• Test new components for functionality
• Communicate clearly about expectations, budget, and progress
• Double-check your space for constraints and dimensions
• Interview museum staff
• Understand what’s new in the market

DON’T JUST CONFIRM SUCCESS – TEST TO FAILURE!
If you want to increase your success rate, double your failure rate.

Thomas J. Watson
FAILURE IS NOT THE ENEMY!

- It’s all about failing strategically
- Plan for failure in each step of the process
- Allow time for adjustments
- Invest resources into prototyping
- Invest time into thorough testing
- Don’t give up!

IF YOU HAVEN’T FAILED, YOU’RE NOT TRYING HARD ENOUGH!
“IF ONE DOES NOT FAIL AT TIMES, THEN ONE HAS NOT CHALLENGED HIMSELF.”

- FERDINAND PORSCHE