



## Failure, Baseball & Entrepreneurship

**One founder shares what a famous quote, a baseball player and entrepreneurship all have in common.**

By Tim Askew | Oct 10, 2012

Alas, alack. I am a long-term fan of the consistently lowly [New York Mets](#). It's been another lackluster season for my beloved team. Except for one thing. That one thing is a 37-year-old failure called [R.A. Dickey](#).

I love R.A. Dickey. He reminds me of me—the best me—old and deeply formed by multiple failures, sadness and hard knocks. A man who has had an unexpected and accidental life. He is an inspiration and is a shining beacon to me for what is achievable, even out of the embers of a fallen, inadequate, and heavily scarred life experience.

R.A. has recently written a book called [Wherever I Wind Up](#). I think all company creators and entrepreneurs should read it. It's an autobiography. It's well-written and not at all your usual self-congratulatory jock tome. (In that, it reminds me of Andre Agassi's compelling book [Open](#) in 2009.)

To briefly sum up Dickey's riveting story, he describes his life as one long recovery from depression, childhood sexual abuse, brokenness and frequent thoughts of suicide. He describes himself as a "picture of mediocrity" until he discovered the vehicle of his salvation, the knuckleball. But even more important is his courage and humility in describing the very personal process of becoming a fully realized and whole man.

After being a high draft choice out of Tennessee, it was discovered that Dickey was missing a key elbow ligament needed to stabilize his pitching arm. He bounced around several major and minor league teams for many years, till, out of desperation, he took up the knuckleball, a pitch that only a handful of men have ever learned to handle effectively.

In a lovely essay in the [NY Times](#), his old teammate and friend, [Doug Glanville](#), describes the knuckleball as "a joystick-controlled UFO" of a pitch, totally unpredictable in its trajectory to the batter, but also unpredictable to the pitcher himself. It is a joyous goofball accident of a pitch.

"A good knuckleball has no spin, at least not the one that acts like the butterfly that just drank enough cocktails to be over the legal drinking limit. And it's slow enough, and frozen enough, so you can see the letters on the ball. But it's no comfort reading those letters, since you have absolutely no idea where they're going, and truth be told, neither does the pitcher. He only has a general sense of the ball's direction, and one of the only reasons success within this type of guesswork ever comes is because "general" is an adjective that also applies to the strike zone."

### **So, what does Dickey have to say to the entrepreneur?**

Dickey is a triumph of autodidactic bootstrapping, as well as practical humility. Like most of us entrepreneurs, he was bad before he became good. Jason Gay, the sports columnist of the [WSJ](#) quotes him, after winning his 20th game last week as saying, "I am by no stretch of the imagination, a self-made man."

But that is not completely true, as endearingly unpretentious as R.A. may be. He has made a journey into freedom, wholeness and authenticity that is also the pursuit of most of the effective entrepreneurs I know. Entrepreneurship can be a vehicle for personal salvation, much as R.A. Dickey's knuckleball has saved his life and career. I personally think of the entrepreneurial company as, much like the knuckleball, an unpredictable butterfly of unexpected twists and turns—but a still infinitely rewarding vehicle of meaning and happiness for those with the courage to ride it.

I believe R.A. is a Christian, but to me he is a true Zen Buddhist master of living in the present. He is a very specific inspiration and existential hero to me, as an entrepreneur.

So my inner entrepreneur will be holding R.A. Dickey close to my bosom when he goes for his 21st victory in Miami tonight. It's a game I will watch. I hope he does well, but, no matter what, he is my favorite failure. We should all be willing to fail so well.

[Bob Dylan](#) once said, "There's no success like failure." As R.A. Dickey goes for his 21st win tonight I think he well understands Dylan's statement. [Samuel Beckett](#) states poetically "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

Thanks Bob. Thanks Samuel. Thanks R.A. Dickey.