

## 陷入困境的CEO 如何峰回路转？

文 | 泰德·普林斯

此前我写过不少文章来谈如何成功创办一家企业的问题，但有时候，甚至是大多数时候，创办企业难免会遭遇失败。作为公司创始人兼CEO，当你游走在失败的边缘时该如何是好呢？

首先，我们要厘清一下“失败”的内涵。失败可以分为好坏两种：“好的”失败是指你竭尽了全力也没能让公司活下来，但从失败中学到了东西；“坏的”失败是指你创办公司的努力没有得到相应回报，也没能从中学到任何东西。

如果你正面临一次“坏的”失败，我实在爱莫能助，但如果你遇到的是一个“好的”失败，那就读读本文吧。其中会谈到一些导致失败的原因，能让你学会应对各种失利情况，最后还会花一些篇幅来讨论如何从“好的”失败中获得转机，可能会给你较大的帮助。

我们先来谈谈那种迫在眉睫的失败，意思是说不是公司开始面临危机或仅仅是某个项目没做成，而是已经到了生死存亡的关头，比如，可能下周就得被迫关门。

本文主要讨论企业的两种生存危机，一是财务危机，二是行为方面的危机。这两种危机都会让公司难以为继，此时，你应该如何应对呢？

进入这种梳理模式时，你的大脑可以集中精力思考一些有针对性的解决方案，而不是被那些毫无意义的忧虑填满。



首先，不能恐慌，虽然这是一种正常的反应。面对如此糟糕的情况，怎么能做到不恐慌呢？很重要的一个选择是：暂时放下手头的这些麻烦，做点其它事换换脑子。当然，这确实说起来容易做起来难。我给你的建议是可以花些时间在你的兴趣爱好上，或是去运动几个小时，喜欢做什么就做什么，比如爬山、健走、跳舞等。

我这个建议看起来有些站着说话不腰疼，但实际并非如此，因为其中自有深意——你必须让自己的大脑休息一段时间，停止思考有关失败的问题。这样一来，在面对必须解决的那些麻烦的时候才不会感觉困惑。当你让自己的大脑去想其它的事，或是从事一些与公司业务无关的体育活动时，大脑会开始自动梳理问题的头绪。在这个过程中，它会清除所有你没必要关注的非紧急事件，从而全身心地投入到那些必须解决的最重要的事情上。



实际上,进入这种梳理模式的时候,你已经走上了解决问题的正轨,即合理思维。这时,你的大脑可以集中精力思考一些有针对性的解决方案,而不是被那些毫无意义的忧虑填满。

进入梳理模式之后,首先要弄清楚的是企业遇到了哪一类问题。前面说过,真正危及企业生存的,只有财务问题和行为问题这么两种,而这两种问题的解决方法截然不同。因此,你首先需要识别自己遭遇问题的类型,然后分门别类地加以解决。但有的时候,财务问题也属于行为问题,那应该如何正确区分呢?

如果企业的管理活动本身没什么问题,而且即使公司快倒闭了,你还能很好地掌控公司,那企业遇到的就是财务问题。也就是说,是出于产品、销售、竞争对手或其它原因,导致公司无法维持基本运转,而且资金很快就要见底。这种情况下,是错误的产品、错误的销

售方式,或是强有力的竞争对手导致了企业面临危机。这个问题确实很棘手,但解决起来要比化解行为问题导致的危机要容易得多。

如果企业存在管理行为方面的问题,情况就完全不同了。这方面的问题包括公司内部的派系之争、合伙人之间的矛盾,以及员工出于对公司管理层的不信任而离职等等。企业主可能反过来会认为员工并没有在工作中投入足够的努力,但这确实属于管理者的行为问题。身为老板却没有处理好这样的情况,责任在老板而不在员工。

### 如何化解财务危机

当企业的资金链即将或是已经断裂的时候该怎么办?

首先,要聘用一位业务能力极强的会计师,而且这个人必须是你欣赏并且信任的。绝不要任用想借助欺骗手段掩盖企业财务问题的会计,当然,大多数会计人员都不是这样的人。除此之外,你聘用的会计师还要对你非常坦诚,否则你就难以了解企业财务状况的真相,这显然无益于问题的解决。不要把宝贵的时间浪费在试图粉饰太平的人的身上,这样感情用事是不可能解决问题的。

其次,必须遣散企业用不着的员工,哪怕对方是你的朋友、家人或者其他你非常喜爱和信任的人,若做不到这一点你就无法解决眼下的难题。但做这事是需要技巧的,不要打电话或是发电子邮件通知员工被解雇的消息,你得单独跟每一个即将被辞退的人谈谈,开诚布公地向他们解释企业的困难。如果你这样做,他们会因你的坦诚而更加尊重和信任你;如果不这样做,他们会记恨于心并在企业最需要帮助的时候出来捣乱。

第三,联系所有债权人,诚实地告知他们企业面临的困境。不要试图掩盖实情,因为不

管怎样他们还是会猜到的。为了自己的信誉着想，你应该告诉他们全部事实，并告诉他们，如果宽限一些时日，他们还有可能拿回部分欠款，如果没有耐心等就很可能什么都得不到。如果你坦率地告诉债权人自己犯了经营方面的错误，他们很可能会给你时间扭转危局，没准儿还会试着帮你。反之，要是你对他们撒谎，告诉他们你会还钱的，他们就不会再相信你并可能落井下石，这对你来说显然将造成更大的伤害。这事你也要亲自去找他们面谈，不要通过电话或电邮说，否则他们可能会认为你在试图隐瞒些什么。

第四，如果你有客户，应该联系他们告之企业现状。最主要应当让他们知道的是，你可能无法再与他们开展业务合作，而且不想隐瞒这一点，这样做有助于你更好地应对目前的困境。不过，当你准备这么做时，更好的方式是找一个可能会以某种形式帮助你的客户。也许对方会考虑买下你的公司或是公司的部分资产，哪怕出价不高也好；也许对方会给你提供一笔贷款帮你走出困境，因为他们不想失去你这个产品来源，他们甚至有可能通过购买你公司其他产品的方式来帮你维持下去。与前面两种情况一样，你需要登门去面对面地解释实情，让他们看到你的诚意，这样他们才会考虑帮助你。如果在电话里说这些事，他们很可能会觉得你不够真诚，在这种情况下，他们可能会继续追债甚至到法院去起诉你。

### 行为危机的应对之道

行为导致的企业生存危机是指由CEO的行为导致公司经营失败或破产的情况，通常存在合作关系破裂、管理团队分裂等情况，或者是企业的核心成员不再为公司创始人暨CEO工作。

对企业创始人暨CEO来说，要化解行为危机其实也不难，基本原则是，即便**不相信自己有任何行为上的过错**，也不妨**让自己相信他们可能是对的**。

行为危机总是更难处理，因为对一个企业的创办人暨CEO来说，要承认自己的行为存在问题很不容易，即使这个问题已经显而易见。对企业创始人暨CEO来说，要化解这个问题其实也不难，基本原则是，即便不相信自己有任何行为上的过错，也不妨让自己相信他们可能是对的；即便你认为他们不对，也可以让他们觉得自己可能是对的。只要做到这一点，很快便可大事化小。具体来说，可以采取以下措施：

第一步是，CEO应当拉开自己与眼下问题的距离，这需要CEO指派一两个人来代理他的工作。这样一来，与CEO起冲突的人就不必直接面对他，而是与代理人沟通工作。

这种解决问题的关键在于CEO要任命一个自己很信任的人，而这个人还要被其他员工所信任。还有很重要的一点是，这个代理人必须获得一个正式任命的头衔，以便让公司里的每个人都知道他现在能够当家作主。通常的做法是CEO任命一个自己信任的人担任首席运营官(COO)，既然这个COO也是其他员工信任的人，那么对CEO心怀不满的员工也会认为自己能从这个获得正式任命的人那里得到支持，而不必还要去找CEO请示。

在这种情况下，公司是由COO做决策，而CEO附议。公司会议都由COO主持，CEO只是参会者之一。此时，包括董事局会议在内的各种场合中，各方能够通过COO展开对话，这有助于和平解决分歧，同时也能为CEO挽回一些面子。

以上这个解决方案，是以公司创始人暨CEO不离开公司为前提的。因为若他想离职，问题就会有另外的解决方法。在公司创始人暨CEO不离职的情况下，还需要做下面这件事。

最重要的是要聘请一位行为和管理方面



的专家，为公司创办人暨CEO提供一些改变行为方式的建议，以便换一种方式来管理公司。CEO很可能不愿意这么做，但如果他确实想保住自己的位置，最终会采纳这个方案的。除了给CEO提建议之外，这位行为管理专家还要跟公司中的其他人谈话，就公司存在的问题征询他们的看法，并告诉他们，CEO会为了让公司走出困境而努力改善自己的行为，这能让反对CEO行为的人感觉舒服很多。

聘请行为管理专家有两个意义：一是切实帮助CEO改变其行为方式；二是具有象征意义。CEO或COO可以因此告诉公司中的其他人，CEO已经认识到自己的行为存在过错，并真心地想解决问题，因此才外聘了一位行为管理专家，有了专家的指导，他将来一定能成为一名更好的企业管理者。如果公司高层能将这样的信息传递出去，很快就会收到成效，企业的危机能迅速得到化解。在很多此类案例

中，问题涉及的各方都会因此放松下来，因为他们看到了CEO解决问题的诚意。

如果CEO决定了采用这个方案，就要持之以恒地听取专家的建议，如果半途而废，员工们会认为CEO缺乏足够的诚意，企业危机便会重燃。通常来说，CEO需要在几个月甚至更长的时间里持续听取行为管理专家的建议，自己的行为方式才会真正地发生改变。我认为，CEO至少应该在一年的时间里每个月与行为管理专家见一次面。

上面这些事做完之后，还有另一件事需要做——CEO在董事局会议或员工大会上公开承认自己曾经有过不正确的管理行为，但已经在采取措施解决这个问题。这样，企业面临的这场行为危机就会得到化解，只要CEO不重蹈覆辙就没有问题。

### “好的”失败是成功之母

在企业发生财务危机或行为危机的时候，若CEO没有按照上述建议行事并导致了企业经营失败，这就属于“坏的”失败。因为这种失败是因为CEO没能及时恰当地应对问题，也没有从失败中学到任何东西。

如果CEO依上述建议而行甚至做的更多，最终还是失败了，这属于“好的”失败。我认为，这并不是真正的失败，而只是公司在创业中遇到的一个非常普通的问题。采取了恰当的应对方式之后虽然并未即时解决困难，但这些做法会成为前车之鉴，让CEO在未来更为恰当地应对企业的生存危机。遭遇逆境是提升领导能力和技巧的好机会，能化解逆境的CEO，不但头脑相当敏捷，而且具有高度的自省能力，这样的人今后必将成为更加优秀的企业领导者。■

（作者系佩斯领导力研究院创始人兼CEO）

# **“A Good Failure is Really a Success: What to do When Facing Failure?”**

**Dr. E. Ted Prince**  
**Founder and CEO**  
**Perth Leadership Institute**  
**[www.perthleadership.org](http://www.perthleadership.org)**

**Top Capital Magazine (Beijing)**  
**June 2015**

I am assuming you are a founder and/or a CEO of a startup company. I have written many articles about how to succeed when you start up a new company. But sometimes, maybe most times, when you do one, it will fail. There will be times when you haven't yet failed but it looks like soon you will do so. So what do you do in that difficult situation?

First of all, I want to clarify what we mean by “failure”. There are good failures and bad failures. Good failures are ones where you tried hard but still couldn't make the company work but you still nonetheless learned from the failure. Bad failures are ones where you also tried hard, couldn't make the company work, and weren't able to learn from the experience.

If you are in a situation of bad failure, or are facing such a situation I don't think this article can help you much. But if it's a good failure, it will help a lot. I am going to discuss more about how to recover from a good failure at the end of the article once we have talked about some of the reasons for the situation when you will be able to appreciate more how to respond to different failure situations.

So let's talk about a situation when you are facing imminent failure. I'm not talking about you can see it coming in the distance. I am talking about an imminent failure, say next week or tomorrow. Therefore it's what is called an existential crisis. We are not talking about you not making your sales projections or the head salesperson leaving. We are talking about a situation where your company will not even exist tomorrow.

In my experience, there are many reasons for failure but we are not going to talk about that since there are so many. We are going to talk about just two types of crisis. We call these existential crises that is crises where the very existence of the company is threatened. One of these is financial. The other is behavioral. In both cases these types of crises have progressed such that the company will not survive much longer, maybe a few days or a few weeks, but no more. So what do you have to do in this case?

First of all, you must not panic, even though that's a normal reaction. How do you not panic when you're in such a terrible situation? It's very important to take a little time off to do something else and not think about the crisis, even though that might be difficult.

My suggestion is that you go do some exercise for a couple of hours. Or do a hobby for some time, preferably but not necessarily physical. For example, if you are a mountain climber, do some climbing. If you are a walker, do some walking. If you like dancing, do some dancing.

This might seem like vacuous advice but it isn't. There's a deep reason. You must stop your brain thinking about the problem for a while so it doesn't get confused with all the many issues you want to resolve. If you allow your brain to think about something else and do some exercise or something physical or mental not linked to your business, your brain will automatically start to declutter. When it does this it will remove all the inessential things that you should not be concerned about so that you can go straight to the most important issues you must solve.

In other words, by going into decluttering mode, you have already started to address the essential problem, namely your own thinking process. So now you can start to use your brain for productive purposes and not the usual unproductive worrying that typically occurs in such situations that stops you coming up with a solution.

Ok now first of all you have to figure out what your problem is. Remember we said there are really only two types of existential problem. One is financial, the other is behavioral. You have to be careful how you classify the problem since each has totally different solutions. But sometimes a financial problem is really a behavioral problem. How can you tell the difference?

If your behaviors are essentially good and you have provided relatively good leadership, even if the company is failing, then you have a financial problem. That is, for whatever reason product, sales, competitors or so on, you couldn't generate enough cash to keep yourself going, then you are running out of money fast. It's not your behavior that's the problem, you just had the wrong product, the wrong sales or competitors that were too strong for you. That's a tough one but it's easier than solving the behavioral problem.

If you have a behavioral problem there will be completely different symptoms. They could be a political rift between people in the company, a problem involving two partners, people leaving because they don't believe in you or they don't believe in your management team. You might think that the people in the company aren't putting in enough effort or work; that's essentially a behavioral problem because you are the boss and if you can't solve that. It's your problem, not theirs.

### An Existential Financial Crisis

So you're going to run out of money tomorrow? Or maybe you have already run out? What do to?

1. First of all you must find a really tough accountant, but one you like and trust. You don't want a financial person because they will want to use financial trickery to try to paper over the problem and make things look better than they actually are. Most accountants are brutally honest and don't like financial trickery. That's what you want. The accountant must also be brutally honest with you. If the one you want is not like that, you should not choose him. You are in way too much trouble to benefit from someone who won't tell you how bad things really are and you don't want to spend valuable time with someone who is going to try to make you feel better. If you get emotional about it you won't be able to solve the problem
2. Secondly you must get rid of everyone who is not absolutely essential. That might mean you too. I mean you must get rid of friends, family members and anyone who you really like and trust. If you can't do that you won't solve the problem. But to do this you must talk to everyone personally and explain what has happened. Do not fire people by email or even by phone. You owe it to them to be very honest that you have failed. If you do that they will actually trust you more and respect you for your honesty. If you don't do that they will hate you very quickly and try to do damage to you at a time when you don't need any more enemies.
3. Third, you should approach all your creditors and tell them honestly what has happened. Don't try to sugar-coat the truth. They will guess anyway and it's better for you and your reputation to tell them the whole truth. Explain to them if they can wait, you might be able to pay them a little of what you owe them but if they are impatient probably they won't get anything. Tell them that you have made some mistakes, but they were honestly made and you hope they will understand. If you do this they will try to help you. Do this in person and not by phone or email. If you do it by phone they might think that you are trying to hide something from them. If you admit to making mistakes they will give you time. If you lie to them and tell them that you will give them their money back they won't trust you anymore and will try to damage you, which will hurt you even more.
4. Next if you have clients you should approach them and tell them what has happened? Your aim is first to tell them that you might not be able support them in the future and you want to be honest with them and tell them this so that together you can prepare for that situation. However if you do this the right way you might find a client that will want to help you in some way. Maybe they will want to buy the company or its assets, even if they only pay you a little money. They might decide to give you a loan to help out since they don't want to lose their source of support for your product. They might even decide to buy another product from you to help keep you going. For all these reasons you shouldn't tell your clients by phone, if that's possible. You should try to go and see them in their office so you can tell them face to face so that they can see your face and decide for themselves if you are being honest with them. If they think you are being honest

they will want to help you. If you do this by phone it's quite possible that they think you are not being truthful and in that case they might try to damage you by asking for their money back or suing you.

## An Existential Behavioral Crisis

What is an existential behavioral crisis? It's when the behaviors of a CEO lead to the breakup or failure of the company. Often it's a partnership breakup, but sometimes it's a management team breakup, or loss of critical people who simply will not work for the founder and CEO.

Existential behavioral crises are always more difficult since it is very difficult for a founder or CEO to admit to a behavioral issue, even when it's obvious to everyone else except you. But there is a basic trick if you are the founder and CEO; even if you don't believe you have any behavioral problems, allow yourself to believe that they might be right, even if you think they are wrong, and let them know that they might be right. If you do that, it will immediately reduce the size of the problem. So here are some of the steps you should take in this case:

1. The first step is to separate the CEO's behaviors from the problem at hand. This means he needs to appoint at least one and sometimes maybe two people to act for him so that the people who have a problem with him don't have to deal directly with him and can work through another party.

The way to do this is to appoint someone trusted by the CEO who will also be trusted by the other people who will not work with the CEO. The important thing is that this trusted adviser must be given a formal title so that everyone knows that he can make decisions for the company.

A common solution is to appoint someone as a trusted adviser and give them the title of Chief Operating Officer (COO), or interim Chairman. Then the dissatisfied people will feel that this person has formal authority and can make binding decisions for the company so that they can get a decision from someone they trust and they don't have to get the decision from the CEO. It then becomes the job of the COO to make decisions that the CEO will go along with.

Any meetings should now be chaired by the COO with the CEO just being one of several participants. This also includes board meetings. Now the parties can talk through the COO which will help calm things down while still saving some face for the CEO.

I am assuming at this stage that the founder and CEO will want to keep his job and has not decided to resign. If he decides to resign this is now a different situation and the problem might be resolved. But if he wants to keep his job, which is usually the case, other things have to be done.

2. The most important thing is for him to get an outside expert in behavior and management to give him advice on how to change his behavior so that in future he can approach things differently. Of course he might not want to do this, but I am assuming that if he wants to keep his job badly enough he will do what I am recommending and help solve the crisis.

Once the behavioral therapist has been appointed, he will advise the CEO on how to change the behaviors that are causing the problem. However the therapist has another very important role. That is to talk to some of the other people to get their views on what is happening and to receive their feedback which will make them feel better. The therapist can also tell them that the CEO is committed to changing his behavior which will also help the situation.

There are two objectives of hiring this behavioral consultant and therapist. The first is to help the CEO change his behavior. The second is so that he or his COO can tell people that the CEO realizes he has made some mistakes and really wants to solve them, so he has hired an outside expert in behavior to work with him so that in future he can be a better manager.

If the CEO sends out this message, there will be an immediate impact on making the behavioral crisis less severe. In many cases all parties to the issue will relax because they feel that the CEO is trying to confront these behavioral issues in an honest way and genuinely wants to improve himself and his relationships with his people.

If the CEO does this it is important that he keeps on seeing the behavioral therapist for several months. If he stops, and the people around him see that he has stopped, they will feel that he is not being honest with them and the crisis will start again, unless it is clear from the CEO's behavior that he has really changed. But usually this kind of change is going to take at least several months or longer so I think that in the normal case, the CEO should see the behavioral therapist at least once a month for a year.

3. Once these steps have been taken there is another step to take. That is for the CEO to have a meeting of his board, and maybe of his employees, and publicly tell people that he has been wrong and that he has taken steps to solve his own problems. If he does this the crisis will go away. It will only come back if he starts the same behaviors.

### A Good Failure is Really a Success

Let's say that the company still fails after an existential financial or behavioral crisis but that the CEO doesn't do what I have recommended above. In that case, I don't think the CEO has really acted with agility and appropriately. In that case, we can call the situation one of real failure. In other words it was a bad failure since the CEO learned nothing.

But let's say that the company failed after the CEO did everything recommended above and maybe even more. That's a good failure. I don't really think of that as being a failure of the CEO. Rather, I think that this is a situation in which the company met problems which are quite normal in startups, took appropriate action and, while that didn't solve the immediate situation it would give us confidence in future situations, this CEO could handle existential crises appropriately and well.

In that case we could say that the CEO had high mental agility, demonstrated that he had a high degree of self-awareness and handled the situation in such a way that he became an even better CEO and leader.

That should be the goal in managing what might appear to be failure, but is really an opportunity to improve one's own leadership abilities and skills in handling difficult situations. That's what everyone wants a good CEO to possess.

*Dr. E. Ted Prince, the Founder and CEO of the Perth Leadership Institute, located in Florida in the US has also been CEO of several other companies, both public and private. He is the author of two books: "The Three Financial Styles of Very Successful Leaders" (McGraw-Hill, 2005) and "Business Personality and Leadership Success", Amazon Kindle 2011 as well as numerous other publications in this area. He is a frequent speaker at industry conferences. He works with large corporations globally on leadership development programs and coaches senior executives and teams in the area of financial leadership. He has held the position of Visiting Professor at the University of Florida in the US in its Graduate Business School and also at the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics in China.*