

The Toughest Lessons Walt Disney Ever Had to Learn

The name Walt Disney is recognized worldwide. He built a brand that's synonymous with happiness, [creativity](#), magic, and the exuberance of childhood. But for Walt Disney, there were many bumps on the road to success; he experienced a lot of setbacks and had to learn some tough lessons along the way.



1. Hard Work is Required

Did you ever wonder why Disney was so good at tapping into his audience's inner child? It's likely because Disney didn't have the opportunity to enjoy [his childhood](#). Disney had to learn at a young age that hard work is required if you want to get ahead.

By the age of nine, Disney was delivering newspapers seven days a week to help support his family. This required him to get up at 3:30 AM every morning and work every evening after school. This grueling schedule was taxing on the young boy and often caused him to fall asleep during classes. Between work and school, Disney rarely had time to play.

Disney's strong work ethic continued into adulthood and throughout his lifetime. Disney is even [quoted as saying](#), "People often ask me if I know the secret of success and if I could tell others how to make their dreams come true. My answer is you do it by working."

2. Your First Attempt(s) May Not Succeed

Disney became [interested in drawing](#) at a young age. As a teenager, he took classes at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and dreamed of supporting himself as an artist.

He landed his [first paying job](#) in October of 1919 at Pesmen-Rubin Commercial Art Studio where he drew advertisements for catalogs and theatre programs. Disney's first job as a paid artist didn't last, however; he was laid off just a few months later in January of 1920.

Disney then started a [joint venture](#) with Ub Iwerks, an artist he met at Pesmen-Rubin. Their company, dubbed "Iwerks-Disney Commercial Artists," was also short-lived, failing within a month.

Disney's next job was at the Kansas City Slide Company, where he learned about animation. While working there, Disney started an animation studio on the side. Laugh-O-Grams Studio was more successful than his previous venture; it lasted for more than a year before going [bankrupt in 1923](#).

After a string of failures, it would have been easy for Walt Disney to give up and try another line of work. But [failure](#) did not deter Disney. Instead, he learned from his mistakes and continued working toward his dream.

3. Loyalty is not Guaranteed

Walt Disney started to experience some moderate success after moving to California in 1923 and starting an animation studio with his brother, Roy. Together with Ub Iwerks, they developed the "[Alice Comedies](#)" which blended live action with animation. The studio also earned a contract with Universal Pictures to produce a series of shorts based on a character named "[Oswald the Lucky Rabbit](#)."

The Oswald pictures were successful but when Walt went to New York in 1928 to negotiate a new contract, he learned that he had [been betrayed](#); the distributor of the films asserted his intellectual property rights to the character, lured away all of Disney's animators (except Ub Iwerks), and shut Disney out.

Despite the fact that these animators had been on Disney's payroll for years, they choose to abandon him. Even the loyal Ub Iwerks would eventually stray; in a stinging blow to Walt, [Ub left Disney](#) to start his own animation studio in 1930.

Walt Disney had to learn the hard way -- through experience -- that you can't always count on people to remain loyal, no matter how long of a history you may share.

4. Not Everyone Will Embrace Your Vision

After the loss of Oswald the Rabbit, Disney and his team finally found enduring [success](#) with the creation of Mickey Mouse in 1928. Disney Studios enjoyed additional success with the [Silly Symphony](#) series of animated short films, seven of which earned Academy Awards.

Forever the innovator, Disney decided that his next undertaking had to be unique: he wanted to create a [feature-length animated film](#) completely in color -- the first of its kind. Disney announced his intended project in 1934. You might think that after more than a decade and a half of success, Disney's new endeavor would be well-received. Oddly enough, it wasn't.

The Hollywood press believed the project would be a colossal failure; in fact, they referred to it as "Disney's Folly" in the papers. Even Disney's wife failed to embrace her husband's vision. She went so far as [predicting](#), "No one's ever gonna pay a dime to see a dwarf picture."

Thankfully, all of the naysayers were wrong. [Snow White premiered](#) in December of 1937 and was quickly heralded by audiences and critics. The film went on to become a worldwide hit, earning more than any other movie had at that point in time.

This was another tough life lesson for Disney. Despite the fact that he had experienced unprecedented success in the years leading up to Snow White, many people failed to understand his vision until it was brought to life.

5. Perseverance is Key

Walt Disney had to contend with many sizable hurdles on the road to success. But despite all the challenges, setbacks, failures, and critics he encountered along the way, Disney managed to keep going. Knowing that persistence was the key to success, Disney [learned from his failures](#), grew stronger after every challenge, and persevered.

When Walt Disney passed away in 1966 at the age of 65, his [net worth](#) was between \$100 - \$150 million, which equals roughly \$750 million - \$1.1 billion today. The company that Disney founded is now a worldwide media conglomerate that's [worth more than \\$200 billion](#). If Walt Disney had quit in the face of challenges, he wouldn't have become successful and the world would never have experienced the joy of Disney entertainment.