

3 PAST UNREAL CONDITIONALS

How Not To Succeed in Business

Roger, a businessman, down on his luck, lament the many causes of his business failure.



“If only I had had more luck, I would have succeeded easily.

Who could have predicted that the pet rock craze wouldn't continue? There should have been such a booming market for lovely beach pebbles imported from the tropics; I could have sold them at premium prices! But the first problem was getting the rocks out of the country; every official I talked to seemed to want a bribe, so I offered everyone one. Can you believe my bad luck, I must have found the only honest official in the country, who promptly arrested me for bribing a public official? Luckily, I was able to bribe another official to get me out of that jam.

Then there were the weather problems in the tropics. How could I have known that there would be hurricanes and tropical storms in September? I lost several trucks in Hurricane Sharlene...wonder what happened to the drivers? But there was no sign of the trucks after the storm had passed. And my insurance company didn't pay up, something about being reckless. Whatever! And who could have imagined that Health Canada would have decided that these rocks needed to be inspected for tropical insects? And then they ordered me to have them professionally fumigated at my expense just because there were a few ants in one container? How unreasonable can you get? The red tape in Canada is truly amazing: it must be the cause of one in five or maybe two in five business failures – there's so much red tape that businesses go bankrupt before they've finished filling out the forms.

After the bottom dropped out of the pet rock market, what was I supposed to do with a warehouse full of beach pebbles in assorted sizes, shapes, and colors? Oh, well, I guess I had better quit griping and start to figure out my next move. Maybe, I can hook up with that producer of linen/wool t-shirts with those fabulous combinations of pink and orange or green and purple. They're sure to be very popular with the teenage market!

If Roger hadn't invested so much money in pet rocks, he **wouldn't have lost** so much money.

If Roger had done more market research before investing, he **would have had** much more information with which to plan his investment.

If Roger had not been so ignorant of Canada's health laws, he **might have avoided** the costs of fumigation.

If Roger had had a head for business, he **would never have done** any of this!

Past Unreal Conditionals

In **past unreal conditional** sentences, the **if-clause** presents the unreal condition. The **result clause** presents the unreal or imagined result of that condition.

If-Clause	Result Clause
past perfect	would } could } + have + past participle might }

Note: We can begin **past unreal conditional** sentences with the if-clause or the result clause. We use a comma between the two clauses when the if-clause comes first.

Examples:

Roger would never have failed if he had any business sense whatsoever.
If Roger had any good business sense, he would never have failed.

Statement

We use **past unreal conditionals** to express unreal or imagined situations in the past.

Examples:

If Roger **had studied** business, he **would have been** more prosperous.
(Roger didn't study business and he wasn't prosperous.)

Roger **would have had** success if he **had been** smart.
(He didn't have success and he wasn't smart.)

Note: When the result is not certain, use **might have** or **could have** in the result clause to express possibility.

Example:

If Roger **had studied business**, he **might have been** more prosperous.

Negative

The verbs can be negative in the **if-clause**, the **result clause** or both clauses.

Examples:

If Roger **had been** smarter, he **would not have been** so unsuccessful.
If Roger **hadn't** been foolish, he **wouldn't** have got into trouble.
Roger **would still be** in business if he **hadn't been** so foolhardy.

Question

The question is formed only in the **result clause**, NOT in the **if-clause**.

Examples:

If you had seen the problems, **what would you have done?**
If Roger had not seen the problems, **would he have changed?**
Could Roger **have made** it if he had not had so many problems?