

Success Through Failure Why Experiencing Failure Can Help Kids Succeed

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By Vernon Parent and Lisa Lewis
4-H Leadermete March 13, 2009

Quotes on the value of failure

- a. "Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new."
-- Albert Einstein
- b. "If I find 10,000 ways something doesn't work I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward." -- Thomas Edison
- c. "We absolutely must leave room for doubt or there is no progress or learning." --Richard Feynman, physicist, Nobel Peace Prize, 1965
- d. "Failure is a learning experience, and they guy who has never failed has never done anything."-- Wilson Greatbatch, inventor of the modern Pacemaker, holds over 300 patents (more than any living inventor)
- e. "If we knew what we were doing, we wouldn't call it research would we?"
-- Albert Einstein
- f. "Nine out of ten things I've done have never worked, and that doesn't bother me." --Wilson Greatbatch
- g. *If you do only what you know and do it very, very well, chances are you won't fail. You'll just stagnate, and your work will get less and less interesting, and that's failure by erosion. True failure is a mark of accomplishment in the sense that something new & different was tried. Ideally, the best way to fail is in private.... I have also sometimes failed in public, and that's very painful. But failing, even in this way, is not useless. It can force you to get yourself together and to produce something new. - Twyla Tharp (dancer/choreographer) on the usefulness of failure: From 4.05.08 Harvard Business Review*
- h. "You must know my grandfather was not born 'Mahatma'. Like us, he also committed mistakes. But he transformed himself by learning from his mistakes. A practice not followed by many."- Ela Gandhi, Granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi. (Mahatma: a person who is held in the highest esteem for wisdom and saintliness)

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Exerts from: The Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination
By J.K. Rowling, Harvard University Commencement Address, June, 2008

Ultimately, we all have to decide for ourselves what constitutes failure, but the world is quite eager to give you a set of criteria if you let it. So I think it fair to say that by any conventional measure, a mere seven years after my graduation day, I had failed on an epic scale. An exceptionally short-lived marriage had imploded, and I was jobless, a lone parent, and as poor as it is possible to be in modern Britain, without being homeless. The fears my parents had had for me, and that I had had for myself, had both come to pass, and by every usual standard, I was the biggest failure I knew.

Now, I am not going to stand here and tell you that failure is fun. That period of my life was a dark one, and I had no idea that there was going to be what the press has since represented as a kind of fairy tale resolution. I had no idea how far the tunnel extended, and for a long time, any light at the end of it was a hope rather than a reality.

So why do I talk about the benefits of failure? Simply because failure meant a stripping away of the inessential. I stopped pretending to myself that I was anything other than what I was, and began to direct all my energy into finishing the only work that mattered to me. Had I really succeeded at anything else, I might never have found the determination to succeed in the one arena I believed I truly belonged. I was set free, because my greatest fear had already been realized, and I was still alive, and I still had a daughter whom I adored, and I had an old typewriter and a big idea. And so rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.

You might never fail on the scale I did, but some failure in life is inevitable. It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all – in which case, you fail by default.

Failure gave me an inner security that I had never attained by passing examinations. Failure taught me things about myself that I could have learned no other way. I discovered that I had a strong will, and more discipline than I had suspected; I also found out that I had friends whose value was truly above rubies.

The knowledge that you have emerged wiser and stronger from setbacks means that you are, ever after, secure in your ability to survive. You will never truly know yourself, or the strength of your relationships, until both have been tested by adversity. Such knowledge is a true gift, for all that it is painfully won, and it has been worth more to me than any qualification I ever earned.

Given a time machine or a Time Turner, I would tell my 21-year-old self that personal happiness lies in knowing that life is not a check-list of acquisition or achievement. Your qualifications, your CV, are not your life, though you will meet many people of my age and older who confuse the two.

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Coping successfully with failure:

1. Process event
 - a. Is it really a failure?
 - b. What made it so/or not so?
 - c. What have you learned?
 - d. Do you want to take action? If so, what will you do?
 - e. What will you need for that action plan?
 - f. What is the best thing to come from this experience?

2. Seek support and/or feedback

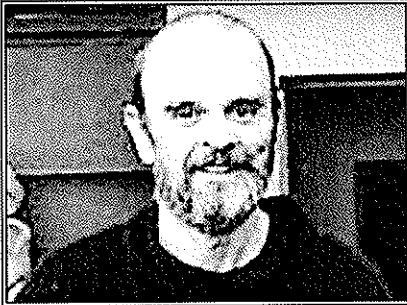
3. Make changes as needed

4. Take action

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Failure Is a Good Thing

by Jon Carroll

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Terry Lorant

Jon Carroll started at the *San Francisco Chronicle* editing the crossword puzzle and writing TV listings. He has been a columnist for the paper since 1982. Carroll has also held editorial positions at *Rolling Stone*, *The Village Voice* and other magazines.

*“Success is boring.**Success is proving that you can do something that you already know you can do... Failure is how we learn.”*

Swinging Forward

From the 'All Things Considered' archives, Nov. 25, 1991.

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Morning Edition, October 9, 2006 · Last week, my granddaughter started kindergarten, and, as is conventional, I wished her success. I was lying. What I actually wish for her is failure. I believe in the power of failure.

Success is boring. Success is proving that you can do something that you already know you can do, or doing something correctly the first time, which can often be a problematical victory. First-time success is usually a fluke. First-time failure, by contrast, is expected; it is the natural order of things.

Failure is how we learn. I have been told of an African phrase describing a good cook as "she who has broken many pots." If you've spent enough time in the kitchen to have broken a lot of pots, probably you know a fair amount about cooking. I once had a late dinner with a group of chefs, and they spent time comparing knife wounds and burn scars. They knew how much credibility their failures gave them.

I earn my living by writing a daily newspaper column. Each week I am aware that one column is going to be the worst column of the week. I don't set out to write it; I try my best every day. Still, every week, one column is inferior to the others, sometimes spectacularly so.

I have learned to cherish that column. A successful column usually means that I am treading on familiar ground, going with the tricks that work, preaching to the choir or dressing up popular sentiments in fancy words. Often in my inferior columns, I am trying to pull off something I've never done before, something I'm not even sure can be done.

My younger daughter is a trapeze artist. She spent three years putting together an act. She did it successfully for years with the Cirque du Soleil. There was no reason for her to change the act -- but she did anyway. She said she was no longer learning anything new and she was bored; and if she was bored, there was no point in subjecting her body to all that stress. So she changed the act. She risked failure and profound public embarrassment in order to feed her soul. And if she can do that 15 feet in the air, we all should be able to do it.

My granddaughter is a perfectionist, probably too much of one. She will feel her failures, and I will want to comfort her. But I will also, I hope, remind her of what she learned, and how she can do whatever it is better next time. I probably won't tell her that failure is a good thing, because that's not a lesson you can learn when you're five. I hope I can tell her, though, that it's not the end of the world. Indeed, with luck, it is the beginning.

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