

## If you want to succeed, welcome failure!

In a speech to Harvard graduates, J.K. Rowling said, “It is impossible to live without failure. Unless you live so cautiously that you avoid life—in which case you fail by default.”

According to Wikipedia, “Failure refers to the state or condition of not meeting a desirable or intended objective and may be viewed as the opposite of success.” Why do we hate failure? Clearly, we want to experience success and we usually have an idea of what success looks like. When things don’t go according to our vision of success, it feels like failure and that can feel catastrophic.

What if the thing we call “failure” is really growth in disguise? What if failure is just a course adjustment for the purpose of leading us to a more genuine, deeper experience of success? Many highly successful people have experienced failure at some point in their lives: they’ve started a business that didn’t make it, gotten fired, lost vast sums of money or had failed relationships.

I’ll give you an example: my Dad is passionate about helping others release past poor choices and limitations to unlock their potential for greatness. As a young adult, he ran a half-way house for criminal offenders transitioning back into society. He was passionate about helping the residents create successful lives for themselves. Management, however, didn’t like his style and they fired him. He was devastated. As a hard-working, caring person, he felt like he had failed miserably.

He thought he was on the right track toward making a difference at the half-way house but getting fired was a course adjustment for him. It liberated him to pursue a dream he’d had since he was 15 years old: starting a greenhouse business. It was a tough time to start a business with very little savings and a young family but he was committed and he prevailed. I can tell you, my Dad is much more suited to be an entrepreneur than a social worker! Over the years, he hired many ex-convicts and people with special needs who thrived working for him. Through his business, he helped many people redefine themselves and achieve success. When people sought his advice for a problem, he would gently say, “You don’t have a problem. You have an opportunity.” He often credits getting fired

with giving him the impetus to start what became a very successful business.

The significance of events in our lives comes not from what happens but what we learn about ourselves from what happens. Tony Robbins said, “Beliefs have the power to create and the power to destroy. Human beings have the awesome ability to take any experience of their lives and create a meaning that disempowers them or one that can literally save their lives.”

When a sense of failure comes, we may find ourselves asking, “What does this say about me?” (For example, “Does it mean I’m a not good enough or that I don’t deserve a good outcome?”) Perhaps it would be helpful to ask, “What does this say to me?” In other words, what is the lesson this event holds for me? What is it telling me about myself? About my passions? About how I want to spend my energy? About my ability to make a difference in this situation? Does this situation suggest the need for a course adjustment? We live in challenging, uncertain times. Things we thought would make us happy when we were younger may not be the same things that will make us happy today. If we let it, “failure” can be an amazing catalyst to propel us to a more meaningful, rewarding life.

In closing, please consider this inspiring perspective from Theodore Roosevelt:

*“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming; but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat.”*