

# Failing Well Is the Key to Success

We are a week into the new year, and undoubtedly, many have already “failed” at keeping some of their resolutions. While it is all too easy to be overly critical of ourselves, losing ourselves in self-deprecating defeat is never the productive route.

So instead of getting bogged down by failure because you were not able to fully cut sugar from your diet or because you failed to visit the gym as often as you had hoped, why not treat your own life like the market, and celebrate failure as a tool for growth?

## You Have to Fail before You Succeed

Any successful entrepreneur will tell you that they did not arrive at victory by avoiding failure. Not only would an attempt to do so be fruitless, since it is an unavoidable part of life, but failure is also an indispensable building block for success. It all depends on what you do with it.

Before the iPhone came into existence, Apple spent a great deal of time and resources on its Apple MessagePad. If you are unfamiliar with this particular product, that is because it was a complete market dud. Only a handful were ever sold and those that did make it into the hands of consumers had extreme glitches.

The MessagePad was ultimately pulled from the market and was even recently placed in [Sweden's Museum of Failure](#). And although this product was not by any means a conventional success, it led to Apple eventually inventing the technology necessary for correcting the initial glitch. In doing so, it paved the way for portable electronics like iPhones and iPads.

By reflecting on the MessagePad's failure, Apple was able to explore what had gone wrong. And by identifying the problem, they knew what path to avoid in the future. Eventually, that initial failure seemed minuscule when compared to the unprecedented success of the iPhone.

And while these stories of market failure are inspirational for hopeful entrepreneurs, sometimes we are not able to see how these lessons can be applied to our own personal life.

## **Failure Is Not Fun**

When I was ten years old, I auditioned for a production of *The Music Man*. Diligently— and theatrically— singing in front of my mirror daily, I poured my heart into rehearsing for this audition. It never occurred to me that not being cast in the play was a possibility.

As it came to my turn to take center stage in a room full of theater teachers and older high school students, I performed my musical number with ease and perfection. But then came the script readthrough. What had started on a high note had ended in me dropping the script, getting flustered, and completely fumbling my lines. I had spent all my time rehearsing the song but had dedicated almost no time to learning my lines.

Needless to say, I was not cast. And it would be eleven years before I would audition for another musical. Instead of using this failure to my advantage by perfecting my craft and being more prepared the next time, I sulked for an entire week and missed out on years of performing.

Maybe I was never meant to be a Broadway star, but because I let failure cripple me and inhibit my willingness to take risks, I will never really know. What I do know is that I missed out on many opportunities for growth all because of how I responded to one minor setback. Unfortunately, I didn't know as a child that failure is an evitable part of life, whether

we choose to accept this as truth or not.

But as we overcome obstacles and slay our proverbial dragons, we correct our failures in a very real way by innovating our own lives. The tasks that once seemed hard or unbearable get easier and we learn to push through the moments of rejection and failure. And each time we do, we get stronger and wiser, and this allows us to create value we may not have even recognized before.

But when we throw in the towel because of the unpleasant feelings associated with failure, we cheat ourselves. We may not have the iPhone today if Apple had decided that the failure of the MessagePad was just too great a burden to bear. Imagine what successes might have manifested themselves in our own lives if we had chosen to learn from failure instead of embracing defeat.

Failure is painful, but it is absolutely necessary for growth. As billionaire investor Ray Dalio says, "Pain plus reflection equals progress." When we accept it as an inevitable part of life, we can tame and domesticate it and turn it into something useful, to us and to others.

## **New Year's Resolution**

So, instead of getting down on yourself when your resolutions fail to come to fruition, maybe try making a new resolution: learn to grow from your failure. My main resolution this year is not to write more or work out more. Instead, my resolution is to celebrate my personal failures because without them, I would not be the person I am today.

Entrepreneur, author, and podcast host Tim Ferriss recently published a book full of advice from those who have mastered their respective trades. For each expert being interviewed, Ferriss always asks, "How has a failure, or apparent failure, set you up for later success? Do you have a "favorite failure"

of yours?” And it is this question that usually elicits the most profound responses.

As any one of Ferriss’ interviewees can attest, we cannot improve our lives until we accept what is not optimally helping us achieve our goals. One of his recent guests was Dalio himself, who explained that his great success was based on learning to think of mistakes as puzzles:

*“If I solved the puzzle, the puzzle being, ‘What would I do differently in the future?,’ I would get a ‘gem.’ That gem would be a principle that would let me do a better job the next time that sort of thing came about, and I wrote those principles down and refined them over a period of time...”*

Dalio eventually distilled these lessons into his highly-acclaimed book [Principles](#).

Treat your own existence as you would a business enterprise you are heavily invested in. Understand that you will fail. Acknowledge that this can be beautiful, productive, and beneficial if you accept it for what it is. Make the conscious decision to keep improving, even when it breaks your heart to do so. Because in the end, you may end up surpassing even your own expectations for success.

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