

How to Successfully Fail

By Michelle Underwood

We all know that to keep moving forward after we fail or while we are in the midst of failing, we must learn from our mistakes. We've heard it over and over again about how to "get back up", and while I agree that it's all about the climb and not always the destination, and that the climb will include multiple trial and errors, it's not easy or fun to fail. Failure is a funny thing. It has a way of changing our mood, our mindset, and our attitude in the structures of our personal and business lives. Many people say to embrace your failures, find the happiness within the failure, and to focus on the positive. Again, I whole heartedly agree with all those acclamations, however, when I am in the midst of failing, the last thing I want to do is be positive. I believe I am a naturally positive person, but I definitely have my moments of despair, and it's usually when I feel as if I have failed somewhere. Whether I have failed in life as a step-mom, a wife, a daughter, or just as myself, or as an owner of multiple businesses, not living up to my expectations and positive goals creates a negative feeling within my inner-core-being.

That being said, I am going to lay out how I have gotten myself out of the moping and slugging around of feeling defeated by my own failures. It probably won't be all cheerful, smiley, and enthusiastic, but I can guarantee it is going to be honest.

First things first. Many times when I'm feeling down and skunked I don't always know exactly where the source of my negative feelings came from.

Step 1. Figure out main source of insignificant feeling(s).

Usually figuring out my main source requires me to annoyingly sift through a bundle of mini sources. Mini sources usually include (but are not limited to) failing to do laundry for the 4th day in a row, burning dinner (again), having a short attitude with my family because I haven't reached any of my 3,000 goals I set myself up for, or just being straight up lazy. I usually get a little more stressed out when I sort through my mini sources of feeling like a failure, but while attempting to find my main source, I willingly decide to deal with those after I discover my main source (who doesn't love procrastination?). My most common main source of my insignificant feelings is either not getting the praise or exuberant response I expect to get (this is a hazardous personal trait I call "pre-visualization"; read more on this in my blog "[The Importance of Continuous Learning](#)") or I don't get everything done on my business to-do list in the time I planned to accomplish it all. These two "failures" really get me upset and frustrated with myself. What I have been trying to remind myself lately about my two huge main sources is that *they are not failures*. They feel like failures, huge failures in my eyes looking at myself, but failing is all about how you look at it. So yeah, maybe in my pessimistic vision they are total failures, but that is why I am trying my best to find a more positive outlook on my failures that will encourage me to not get so worked up about stuff. Especially the big failures, because if I can't handle the big ones, how on earth am I going to handle the little ones?! I won't be able to, and if I can't get a hold of my emotions, reactions, and views of my failures, then I'm in a world of hurt and frustration regarding every moment of my life.

So, find my main source of dissatisfaction, check. I found two, but I tend to be an overachiever.

Step 2. Get a grip on my mini sources.

Yeah, it's time to stop the procrastinating, Michelle. Face this sh*t! Tackling my mini sources is a lot like taking daily vitamins; they're difficult to swallow, there are a lot of different ones to digest, and I never feel like taking them. But they are good for me, therefore, I will try to remember to take them daily. As I previously noted, if I don't tackle my mini sources of insignificant feelings (along with my main sources) I will probably be a miserable, mopey mess for the rest of my life, and the older I get the more I realize how short every day is (yes, sorry, I know, super sappy, but we both know it's 100% true) and I'm kind of getting sick and tired of being abused and controlled by my bad attitude on failing. Tackling the mini sources can be pretty frustrating and a constant task to work on because it seems like every time I think I've gotten over one failure, another failure yells "HELLO, FOOL!" in my face. Which, now that I think about it, if failures could actually speak to me like that, it might motivate me to prove them wrong and see their life as dirty and ridiculous. Little bunny brain trail for you. I guess along that line I have a good point: if we try to see our failures as mini insignificant obstacles, maybe we can create false confidence within ourselves that will eventually create real confidence towards our emotions pertaining to failures! Something to try anyway, right? At this point I am so busy with life and business that I will try almost anything to conquer my self-doubt, fears of failing, and the after-guilt that comes when I do fail. I suppose being positive and forcing myself to see the good in every situation can't hurt me any more than I am already hurting myself with negativity.

So, find my mini sources of dissatisfaction, check. These tend to be pretty personal so I won't be sharing those details with you, but if you make your own list I guarantee that most of the humans on this world have the same ones on their list.

Step 3. Make a decision on whether your insignificant feeling is a true failure or a false failure.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this blog, I have feelings of failure that represent failure assumptions, which are lies I have created in my mind. When I see something as a failure and it's probably not a true one, it is most likely due to my lack of confidence and appreciation for myself. It has been psychologically proven that people who are generally negative and sad have significantly less confidence than people who are generally positive and happy day to day. This is not earth shattering information... however, this insight does lead me to believe that when I'm having a more gloomy day, I end up finding things I "fail" at more often, whereas on a particularly happy and satisfied day, I see my flops as just little road blocks I can easily step over and learn from. So on the days I'm more negative and in a sore mood, I need to consciously remember to ask myself, "am I actually failing right now, or is my negative snowball creating false failure as it rolls down the hill of crankiness and frustration?" It's not easy, but if I remember to take a breathe (I don't always remember to do this, but hey, I'm not perfect) and take a minute before exploding with aggravation, I can usually talk myself down to a decent one-on-one conversation with inner Michelle to figure out what feelings are true and what feelings are exaggerated (or pathetic).

Step 4. Learn from the times you truly fail.

We have been told by entrepreneurs, motivational speakers, and many others that in order to overcome failure disposition we need to learn from our failures. We see it almost every time we read or research anything regarding business, personal growth, and attaining happiness. And we see it so often because it is true. Let's review the opposite of learning from failing, which would be staying put in our specific mindset leaning towards the negative. When we subconsciously decide not to open our minds to the possibilities of a different and possibly new way of thinking regarding a failure situation, we are actually setting ourselves up for a *continual failure increase*. Let me put it this way, if we are too stubborn and lazy to make the decision to grow and learn from our legitimate failures, we are guaranteed to continue to fail in the same negative way we did in the past, and *we will never benefit from failures*. If we want to benefit from our failures, we need to look at it from a fresh perspective. When I feel like a total flop and I don't know where to go from where I am at, I (try to) go over the entire process that led me to my ultimate fail. Where in the line of productivity did I start falling away from my goal? When did I neglect to focus on the final outcome? At what point did I *shift* from success to failure? Sometimes it helps me to write it down, whether on my computer or in a notebook, so I can physically view my progression timeline. This helps me find caution points to review and analyze. This sounds time consuming, but I am either going to use my time being bitter and upset or I am going to use it reviewing and learning. Once I review my progression timeline, I can see where I need to improve, where I need to remember to keep focus, and what I can do differently the next time. It sounds simple and obvious when you read it, but this is all it takes to learn from your mistakes and failures. It doesn't have to be daunting and complicated, it can be as simple as you like. The important thing is that you pick yourself up off the moping couch and make the decision to see where you can change and do things differently the next time. This alone will encourage positive endorphins and boost your mental energy because your body and mind can tell when you try to become the best version of you, and your body and mind love it! That sounds funny, but there are studies showing that simple acts of striving towards improvement stimulate happiness and positive brain flow.

Step 5. Staying positive

Gretchen Rubin says in her book "The Happiness Project" (Page 8),

"...according to a current theory of the brain, the unconscious mind does crucial work in forming judgements, motives, and feelings outside our awareness or conscious control, and one factor that influences the work on the unconscious is the "accessibility" of information, or the ease with which it comes to mind."

This signifies to me that we need to do our best to surround ourselves with positive influences, positive people, and even positive music. The less negativity we allow to be in our lives, the more our subconscious can *create a healthy environment* for our future attitudes and subconscious outlook. Gretchen also mentions an honest discovery about herself, which I find totally relatable (and you might too). She says,

“Happiness doesn’t always make you feel happy. When I thought about why I was sometimes reluctant to push myself, I realized that it was because I was afraid of failure – but in order to have more success, I needed to be willing to accept more failure.”

(Page 79) She then quotes Robert Browning saying,

“Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s heaven for?”.

We need to be able to push ourselves out of our comfort zones to overcome the horrible, self-conscious feelings that failing brings. Pushing ourselves to strive towards bettering ourselves in a positive way, makes us selfishly selfless people. I know that sounds like an oxymoron, but it is possible to be selfish and selfless at the same time. It is selfish because we are focusing on ourselves, and it is selfless because it’s not in vain or arrogance that we are striving for personal growth. It is possible that some people are purely being negatively selfish in this feat, but if that is the case, they are doing it for the wrong reasons. Anyway, we are here either to learn something new about failing or we are here because we realized we have some work to do. I think you can practice all of these steps your entire life and never reach perfection, because no one is perfect, and because it doesn’t matter how much insight and knowledge you have, you will always fail. But that is why we keep trying and continue to do our best.

Conclusion

To finish this blog about failing, I’m going to quote Gretchen from her book “The Happiness Project” again. (Yeah, sorry, but it was a *great* book!)

“...Risking failure gave me the opportunity to score some success.”

(Page 80) I love how she said this! It gives me a fresh way to view failing. Rather than seeing my failures as continual letdowns, I see them as potholes in the road. Every road has bumps and bad spots, but for the most part, the road is smooth and successful. I can hit every pothole and mumble fowl words under my breath until I reach my destination, or I can try to drive around the potholes, hitting some here and there, but taking them as minor obstacles that will help me develop better driving skills. Either way, I am getting to my destination, and I am learning key improvement skills along the way.

Have a lovely day!

Michelle