From Failure to Success

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“Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm” — Winston Churchill
Failure is inevitable in life and will be part of your academic career

• Denial
  • “It seems to be the hardest thing in the world to admit we’ve made a mistake and try to put it right. It requires you to challenge a status quo of your own making.”

• Chasing your losses
  • We’re so anxious not to “draw a line under a decision we regret” that we end up causing still more damage while trying to erase it.

• Hedonic editing
  • We try to convince ourselves that the mistake doesn’t matter, bundling our losses with our gains or finding some way to reinterpret our failures as successes.

Now, lets get personal, lets talk about some (not all) of my disappointments and failures....
1988 – Accepted into EIS but....
Mexico (1989 – 96)

- Decided to go back to Mexico and work for Jaime Sepulveda as Director of the National AIDS Program 1990 – 1996

- Worked closely with Julio Frenk who was Director of the Fundación Mexicana para la Salud

- Asked to develop a research department to inform policy – met Fernando Zacarias* (then Director of AIDS Program at PAHO)

- Began to write grants: got my first grant (Rockefeller foundation) – critical advice from King Holmes

- Got a USAID grant and began to work with CDC - met James Curran

- Got funded by NIH/Fogarty – Met Ken Bridbord

*Emory ID fellowship alumni 1975 (together with Sumner Thompson)
In Mexico......1994

• Asked to work with Dr. Sepulveda to put together the National Plan for the incoming administration on Health and Social Security.

• Thought that we would then be asked by the incoming President (Ernesto Zedillo) to be the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Health.

• Cabinet positions went to others.

• They still implemented our plan! (Progresa – a conditional cash transfer program to combat extreme poverty)
As a result decided to pursue other opportunities and returned to Emory in 1996
Failure is part and parcel of academia

- Two repeat offenders:
  - grants and papers (grant failure hurts more)

- Coping strategies:
  - Mindset: don’t take failure as a blow to your self-esteem.
    - Don’t think: “stupid reviewers, why don’t they understand me”; do think: “how can I write that better so it makes sense to even the most stupid reviewer”.
  - There are other opportunities
  - It's not personal: the critique of your work is about your work and not about you.
  - You are not unique.
  - Learn from what goes well.

Failure is an option, six ways to deal with it. At: [https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/failure-option-six-ways-deal-it#survey-answer](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/failure-option-six-ways-deal-it#survey-answer)
Grants.....well you know how it goes....
You are going to get none of the grants you do not apply for....

• Faculty have little experience with professional rejection until they become faculty:
  • Straight As all through school, honors, excellent SAT, GMAT and/or MCAT scores, completed a publishable dissertation.

• Plan in advance
  • Commit the necessary time to your application
  • Seek feedback before your submit
  • Talk to your Program Office

• When you receive the summary statement
  • Find a “safe space” to read about your failures
  • Look over the comments systematically, and list out areas where reviewers found both strengths and weaknesses. If comments are difficult to decipher, a call to a program officer can help
Dealing with failure

• Understandably most people would rather not talk about their failures.
• Failure is a very good learning experience.
• When you make an error, the quicker you acknowledge it, formulate an action plan to deal with it, and have a path for healing or bouncing back, the more credibility, respect and strength you will gain.

“It’s how you deal with failure that determines how you achieve success.”

David Feherty
“One of the biggest secrets to success is operating inside your strength zone but outside of your comfort zone”
YOUR "PLANS"

THE UNIVERSE'S PLANS FOR YOU

DOGHOUSEDIARIES
What do I attribute my success to?

• Trust and support from others – *Excellent Mentors*
  • Find a mentor(s)

• Connectivity – *Networking and collaborations*
  • Find opportunities to work with others who are interesting/fun and complementary

• Like tough challenges and taking risks - *Opportunity and Creativity*
  • Find your passion

• Not afraid of failure – *Persistence*
  • Find why you failed and grow and learn from your mistakes
"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

Michael Jordan