COURAGE AND RESILIENCE

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Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall. ~Confucius
Are You a Loser?

IF YOU ARE, GREAT. BECAUSE STUDIES SHOW THAT TO BE A SUCCESS, FIRST YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW TO FAIL.

What is the secret to success? Loads of money? Good luck? Great teeth?

Nope. Wealth, good fortune, and a nice smile can’t hurt, but many experts agree that what successful people have in common is this: They were once horrific failures.

Take George Washington, who lost two crucial battles and was nearly fired before leading troops to victory in the Revolutionary War and becoming America’s first President. Then there’s Steve Jobs, who developed a slew of failed products—and even got canned from Apple—before returning to revolutionize the world with the iPod, iPhone, and iPad.

The list of famous failures is seemingly endless: Pop icon Katy Perry was dropped by three different record labels; Nobel Prize winner Albert Einstein was expelled from school; basketball star Jeremy Lin spent his early career sitting idle on the bench. Many of the world’s most successful people were once losers, and though they may have felt humiliated, lost, and hopeless, they eventually figured out how to move forward. That’s the key to using failure to your advantage: the ability to dust yourself off and try again.

And again. And again.

This trait is called resilience, and it’s what can turn losers into winners. In fact, experts say that in terms of future success, resilience can be more important than intelligence or natural talent.

Utterly Humiliated

Seventeen-year-old Miranda, of Williamsburg, Virginia, still cringes when recalling her early experiences with the martial art tae kwon do, which she started practicing at the age of 7. For years, she lost every competition she entered.

“It was devastating,” Miranda remembers. Dejected, she decided to quit, but at her father’s urging, she reluctantly agreed to give it one more try. She worked harder and slowly began to improve, and though she never became the champion she’d dreamed of becoming, she stuck with it long enough to earn her black belt by age 12.

“I could easily have said, ‘I’m a failure, I should never have tried,’” Miranda recalls. “But I’m really proud that I kept at it.”

The experience taught her that she could fail—and feel utterly humiliated and miserable—and still go on to succeed.

Go Ahead, Mess Up

It’s no wonder many experts believe that every kid should experience failure. Yes, you read that right: They WANT you to mess up, because learning to cope with failure will help you overcome larger struggles later in life.

Miranda would agree. Today, she’s finally winning medals—in Irish step dancing. When she first started, she was bad at that too. However, her experience with tae kwon do had built up her emotional strength, so she no longer saw her mistakes as failures, but as a part of the process of achieving success.

Miranda is just one individual in a long line of people to grasp that concept. One of history’s proudest failures was inventor Thomas Edison.

According to legend, the first 1,000 times that Edison tried to create a light bulb, his invention didn’t work, so he kept experimenting until he finally found a way to build one that did.

“I didn’t fail 1,000 times,” Edison later said. “The light bulb was invented with 1,000 steps!”

Good Ol’ Hard Work

So what about you? Are you a successful failure? Say you do poorly on a math test. Do you think, “Oh, my teacher just hates me” or “Oh, I’m just terrible at math”? People who don’t know how to fail well tend to blame others for their mistakes or give up without trying. They are often insecure and might feel as if the whole world is against them. After all, it takes a lot of confidence to admit your own shortcomings.

Part of being successful means having the courage to take a good, hard look at yourself and identify ways to do better next time. Well, that and a bit of patience; sometimes it takes a while to get where you want to go. Just look at basketball’s breakout star Jeremy Lin. For years, he was overlooked by coaches. Once, he was even called “the weakest player on the team,” but when he finally got a chance to hit the court for the New York Knicks, he surprised everyone. He was fantastic, unstoppable, and now he’s one of the most promising young athletes in pro basketball.

How did he do it? Lin spent hundreds of hours with coaches and trainers, arriving at practice hours before his teammates to do extra drills. In other words, he relied on good, old-fashioned hard work and perseverance.

So next time you fail a test, strike out at bat, or sing off-key, cheer up. With the right attitude, you could be onto something truly great.
“Finding a Joy in Overcoming Obstacles”
By Helen Keller

I can remember the time before I learned to speak—how my thoughts used to beat against my fingertips like little birds striving to gain their freedom. Of course, it was not easy at first... One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar. There were so many difficulties along the way, so many discouragements; but I kept on trying, knowing that patience and perseverance would win in the end.

And while I worked, I dreamed dreams, the pleasantest of which was of the time when I should talk like other people, and the thought of the pleasure it would give my mother to hear my voice... So I want to say to those who are trying to learn to speak and those who are teaching them: Be of good cheer. Do not think of today’s failures, but of the success that may come tomorrow. You will succeed if you persevere, and you will find a joy in overcoming obstacles—a delight in climbing rugged paths, which you would perhaps never know if you did not sometimes slip backward. Remember, no effort that we make to attain something beautiful is ever lost. Sometime, somewhere, somehow we shall find that which we seek.

—Helen Keller to the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 8, 1896

Though she could not see or hear, Helen Keller became a highly accomplished writer and speaker.

Do you think it’s important to experience failure? Defend your claim with examples from “Are You a Loser?”, Helen Keller’s speech, and your own life.
Invictus

Out of the night that covers me, 
Black as the Pit from pole to pole, 
I thank whatever gods may be 
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance 
I have not winced nor cried aloud. 
Under the bludgeonings of chance 
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears 
Looms but the Horror of the shade, 
And yet the menace of the years 
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate, 
How charged with punishments the scroll, 
I am the master of my fate, 
I am the captain of my soul.

—William Ernest Henley

William Ernest Henley (1849-1903) wrote “Invictus” while hospitalized after treatment to save his right leg; his left foot had already been amputated because of disease. How does the poem reflect his attitude toward recovery?

Reflection

Explain the meaning of the final two lines of “Invictus.” What other lines in the poem express the same idea?