

How to deal with feeling a failure



*Success is not final, failure is not fatal:
it is the courage to continue that counts.*

Winston Churchill

The topic of failure and what it means has exercised my mind today. I have a feeling I'm going to offer more questions than answers.

We are all unique and it means we have a unique set of capacities and abilities. These are developed to varying degrees. Some of our abilities may take time to emerge. Sometimes we are only at our best in conducive circumstances. Some of us may be waiting for a catalyst and may not even know that we are even waiting for something, we just know that everything is not running as smoothly as it could be.

Yesterday, I mentioned the Church of England publication specialising in the theme of failure. Here is a comment by a worker. If one person says "I feel really sick," I notice the tears in her eyes, almost panic, when she recounts how she is struggling with her work, how far behind she is, how she is avoiding going to lessons – "I've let everyone down, I'm

afraid.” She says. This is out of the mouth of a beautiful bright young woman who had been a high achiever in school and was now struggling at the end of her A levels.

There are no secrets to success.

It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.

Colin Powell

I wonder if the problem is that we are setting goals which are unrealistically high. Are we trying to compete with other people and if so why?

My mentor and preacher, Dr Martin Israel, said that the most important thing you could ever do in this world was to be your true self. I heard that advice about 30 years ago but I still have to remind myself of it. We are all unique. A rose is not supposed to be a potato. If it tries, it will fail. Let us assume for one moment that we are all in this world for different reasons and also assume that we cannot expect to achieve everything you want in one lifetime. I find it much more comfortable to think in terms of many lives. Some lives are lived within a human body and some lived without. In other words, what is the hurry?

A feeling of failure might arise because we did not pay attention to the circumstances surrounding our efforts. For example, we may have underestimated the cost of doing something or the amount of time and energy this would take. It may have been that we fell into the very common trap of trying to do everything on our own, without having a friend, colleague, or confidante to discuss ideas with. To do so is not a symptom of weakness or indeed failure but an acknowledgement that we do not know everything about every subject and therefore to get a sounding board from someone seems to me to be likely to save a lot of time and heartache.

You build on failure. You use it as a stepping stone.

Close the door on the past.

You don't try to forget the mistakes, but you don't dwell on it.

You don't let it have any of your energy, or any of your time, or any of your space.

Johnny Cash

A feeling of failure might also occur because we ignored our inner voice that is always trying to do the best for us. This is particularly true in relationships. The number of times I heard people say to me "if only I had followed my intuition I would not have got into this mess".

it may be that we have to fail or shall we say, not succeed in order to learn certain other lessons, for example the value of consistency or discipline. There are always positives to draw.

Referring to the magazine mentioned above, there is a quote "we are not called to be successful – that is out of control – but we are called to be faithful". I don't quite agree with that but it shows the value of consistency and objectivity. Another article makes the point that there are always positives to draw no matter how dire the situation. It's quite a good therapy to sit down with pen and paper and say "what did I learn from this that I wouldn't have learned otherwise."

"Fear of failure can be restricting, a bit like a prison, but one person I met described the feeling of freedom. They felt as they learned to embody their perceived failure and used the experience to grow to understand themselves further. They saw themselves as a child who was learning to walk, and fell over. They were learning to get up again and not letting it faze them too much.

When all said and done, I think it's strength of character and vision that will determine what we succeed in. It may be that there is something more of the ego than there should be in our self evaluation when contemplating our success and failure in life. If we want to encourage ourselves, think of the number

of traps that we did not fall in to.

For example, we did not become violent and hit someone. We did not invest foolishly and lose all our money. We have not lost our health and strength. We have not damaged our mind with dangerous drugs.

It might be a good to write down all the things you can be thankful for, all the things you've learnt, and I suspect that this will be a long and interesting exercise.

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