

Your Personal Coach

By
Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

It seems like everything I try fails. Last year I started a business. I worked like a dog and think I had a good business plan, but the recession and a lack of capital caused it to fail. Before that, I initiated several projects at my job and they were okay but none was a runaway success. I'm not depressed but I feel like I've lost confidence to try again.

-- Jeremy

It's easy to become discouraged when disappointments mount up, but it is possible to these setbacks, remain optimistic, regroup, and try again. You can rebuild your confidence. Easier said than done? You bet!

You sound like a creative, entrepreneurial person, whether or not your business and projects worked out as you had hoped. Most people who have achieved enormous professional success in life have understood that failures are just stepping-stones to success because we can learn from these experiences and they help us build our strength, commitment, grit, and resolve for the future.

Failure is inevitable in life; it is only our response to failure that reveals and determines our character. You can use these painful losses to grow and try again. When you think about success and failure, did you know that Einstein didn't speak until he was four years old and his speech was so halting that his parents thought he was mentally retarded.

His grades were so poor that his teachers urged him to quit school. He was in good company. Isaac Newton almost failed grade school, too.

Thomas Edison's teacher told him he was "too stupid to learn." He also had 1,100 failed experiments before he invented anything that worked. When asked about all this, Edison said, "I found eleven hundred ways how not to do things."

Beethoven's music teacher told him to get a day job because as a composer he was "hopeless."

In 1833, Abraham Lincoln had a nervous breakdown; in 1838 he was defeated for speaker, lost the re-nomination of his party in 1848, and an election for land officer in 1849. Still, he battled on. Then in 1854 he was defeated for the Senate. Two years later he lost the nomination for vice-president and lost in his second try at the Senate in 1859. But in 1860 he was elected President (finally!) and went down in history as one of our greatest leaders.

Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. An editor told Louisa May Alcott – the author of *Little Women* – that she "would never write anything that people would like."

Walt Disney started his career in the newspaper business until his editor fired him because he "didn't have any good ideas."

Winston Churchill failed the 6th grade.

Every network turned down Oprah Winfrey's show, but she persevered and syndicated it. Today, millions view her show, and Oprah is a very wealthy woman.

I could go on and on about all the successful people – and there are many inspirational stories -- who pushed past crushing defeats in order to realize their dreams.

Take a few minutes to reflect on your life. Even though your business wasn't successful, I'll bet there are other areas of your life in which you have triumphed.

How's your health? Do you have a loving relationship, thriving kids, close friends? Do you mean something to your neighbors? What's the state of your spiritual life? How would your family, friends, and community be different if you weren't around?

When life throws a blow, it's easy to over-generalize and think that we've failed at everything. (That's the inner critic who chants: "Lo-ser, Lo-ser, failing, failing Lo-ser"). Look at the successes in your life.

Of course, let yourself grieve for your loss but also count your blessings and reassess your life in all of its fullness.

The movie "It's a Wonderful Life" – one of the most popular films of all time and classic Christmas fare – has an important message for everyone who feels like they have failed. Remember? The movie shows the protagonist, George Bailey played by Jimmy Stewart, suffering the failure of his business. He questions whether he made the right choices in life; in fact, he questions whether his life has been successful at all.

George concludes that he's a total loser. He contemplates suicide and gets to the edge of a bridge on a cold winter night when he is approached by an angel determined to earn his wings.

Clarence shows George all the ways in which his life has been a rousing success. He has a loving wife, beautiful kids, and good friends. His responsibility for the family business allowed his brother to go off to war where he saved many people and returned a hero. His community rallies to help George and, in true Hollywood fashion, we see a very happy ending.

Now here's an interesting twist: Phillip Van Doren, the author of the short story upon which this movie was based, was turned down by every publisher in the business. Finally, he self-published his story as a 24-page Christmas card which fell into the hands of a Hollywood agent who pitched it to Charles Koerner at RKO Radio Pictures. The rest, as you well know, is history.

Failure and success are the subjects of philosophical reflections for lots of people (and some great motivational quotations) but my favorite is one that my father typed out on an index card and gave me more than twenty years ago. I must have been in the middle of one of my many failures when he did this, and I've never forgotten it. I still keep it in my wallet, tattered and frayed, but it continues to give me inspiration.

Here's the quote that I love written by a man who was born with life-threatening asthma yet built himself up to become a model of physical courage and toughness. This was a political man who, as a matter of principle and just as his own star was rising, backed a losing candidate and lost his political career. On that very same day both his wife and mother died. In spite of all that, here's what Teddy Roosevelt – our 26th President and Nobel Peace Prize winner -- said about success and failure: "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com, call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949

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