



What's Failure Anyways?

The Failure Institute

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, failure is “a situation in which someone or something does not succeed”, based on that, this definition leaves us with three conclusions:

✓ Failure can happen to anyone

✓ Failure can happen to something (not just someone)

and... failure depends strictly on success? *record scratch sound*

First off, we must acknowledge that “failure” (like a ton of other words) is just that – a concept accepted and agreed upon by the social imaginary to describe abstract feelings, situations, and events, based on definitions that constantly change throughout time, social and cultural context.

That being said, we can say that failure is relative. For some, it's a terrible, epic mistake, for others, it's a clean slate and fresh start. Some take failure seriously, while others take a more easygoing approach.

But setting aside the philosophical discussion of human-created concepts, is failure really just the lack of success?

As a 7-year-old global movement specializing in failure, we can assure you that... we don't know. And we're not sure anybody ever will.

According to Scott Galloway, a professor at New York University's Stern School of Business, Success=Resilience/Failure. Which basically means that “the key to success is the ability to mourn and then move on”. Here we see a strong relationship between failure and success, but with an important extra ingredient, Resilience. With resilience, failure can lead to success... and vice-versa.

Failure, just like success, is a very fluid concept. It's relative and requires empathy to understand, it's human, and it has consequences. The consequences of a F*ckup are different for everyone, which is what makes it so hard to define.

However, after listening to hundreds of stories at F*ckup Night events around the world, we started observing some trends and patterns. Here are our insights: Failing is both unavoidable and universal. No one ever learned to read or write perfectly on their first attempt. No matter how big or small, at some point, you've probably failed and sooner or later, you'll fail again. Your parents, brothers, sisters, friends, and also (according to Cambridge Dictionary) your steam iron, have all F'ed Up!

But the most important thing is to find vulnerability in the process of getting over a failure. Brené Brown explained on her book *Rising Strong*, that armoring up against vulnerability is killing us: killing our spirits, our hopes, our potential, creativity, ability to lead, our love, faith and joy.

Nobody's safe.

Ironically enough, even though it's an everyday happening in the world, we're still afraid of it. Failure is awkward. It sucks. It takes us out of our comfort zone and we hope to go through each day without experiencing it. Sometimes we laugh at or feel sorry for people who F'up, while being grateful that it wasn't us.

When failures happen, we rarely question or try to learn from them. We'd rather just forget and move on. We let them pile up and make the same mistakes over and over again.

Hiding failure makes it impossible to have dialogues that encourage insightful feedback and self-awareness, conversations that help us to grow, and (as much as possible) avoid future f'ups.

The Neuroeconomist Paul Zak has proven that sharing stories creates a state of vulnerability. Hearing a story produces cortisol and oxytocin in our brains and that allows us to make a connection and empathize in a vulnerable way with people who are telling these stories. We need Vulnerability to learn from our mistakes, this requires a personal effort to open up, show ourselves, and as we say at FUN laugh at our failures and share them with the world, embrace our faults and lovingly help others to improve.

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