

News Release

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Failure is Training for Success

Tampa, Florida (March, 2011). Napoleon Hill (1883 – 1970) was an American author who was one of the earliest producers of the modern genre of personal-success. Hill said "The majority of men meet with failure because of their lack of persistence in creating new plans to take the place of those which fail" and provided an analogy that can provide a significant impact on how we might view failure: "The strongest oak tree of the forest is not the one that is protected from the storm and hidden from the sun. It's the one that stands in the open where it is compelled to struggle for its existence against the winds and rains and the scorching sun."

How do we view failure? Aren't we told throughout our life that failure is to be avoided at all costs? And yet, because we are human and limited, failure is a part of life. How much energy do we put into trying to avoid failure or to cover it up when we do make a mistake as if it is something shameful that needs to be hidden? So let's reframe our understanding and perception. Have we ever thought that failure is a major component of change that can lead to success. In other words, failure is training for success. Pick up a hot pan when there is a worn section in the potholder, experience the heat or burn, and most will, in the future, always check the potholder before using it! Each failure, in this case failure to check the safety of the potholder, provides a lesson that we will be unlikely to forget. While we might see failure as negative, it is through the most brutal of failures that we see the light of success. Without failure, how do we improve? Each and every failure points out an area of our personal or professional life that can be corrected with movement toward wholeness.

Our perception of failure can lead to a fear of failure that is often much worse than the actual experience of failing itself. Let's reframe that as well and consider that it may not be the actual fear of failure that scares us the most as the fear of success. Think about that. We know that if we fail at something we will just wind up where we were before we decided to try something new. Sure it may hurt and we may feel embarrassed but this is a reality we already know. Change just didn't occur or work out. It may be painful but it is a pain we know. It is a safe, known zone. Sure we may suffer from a bit of a dent in our pride and some disappointment but we have been there before and know that those feelings tend to go away.

If we fail and choose to learn from the failure, however, this means we can choose to change and grow toward success. Just like Hill's oak tree, however, success brings changes and perhaps even some scary experiences. Being successful leaves us exposed, open to criticism and completely out of our comfort zone. Sometimes deep down a part of us believes we don't really deserve to be successful so it is easier and less of a risk to not even try. Change is tough. Take each failure and ask what can be learned from it, what can be changed by it, and how can we grow through it. Then embrace the failure and use it as motivation. If you need help in learning how to overcome the fear of failure and use it as a tool for personal and professional growth, help is available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. Just call your EAP and you will be directed to our experienced team of counselors. It is that simple. We will help you cope, find assistance, and guide you down the path to effectively dealing with whatever might be impacting your life.