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Total Failure, Inc. 00:52

My 9-year-old grandson reads to me, and I read to him on Zoom. He’s reading me a book about [Timmy Failure](#) with a polar bear friend, Total. Their business is the Total Failure Detective Agency. What a hoot! I read *Tom Sawyer* and now *Huckleberry Finn*.

I counseled my various teams over the years, *if we don’t fail several times a week, we’re not pushing the envelope, not doing our jobs*. Tightrope walkers, pharmacists, and airplane manufacturers might disagree. Still, for innovators, learners, and leaders, failure as a virtue is a hard sell, really for almost anyone. My teams, my colleagues in leadership, editorial review boards start by thinking I’m crazy. Sometimes they eventually get it, sometimes not. Leadership usually wants to get As all the time. In one health system I worked for, I reported that we completed medication reconciliation in 40% of admissions. ([Medication reconciliation](#) is the process of creating the most accurate list possible of all *medications* a patient is taking — including drug name, dosage, frequency, and route — and comparing that list against the physician’s orders to provide correct medications). *OMG, that’s awful!* They said. *No*, I said, *that’s great! We’re failing. Let’s succeed*. In 18 months, we completed medication reconciliation 70% of the time. It’s a lot easier to go from 40% to 70% than from 70% to 80%. In research, we don’t publish when the study doesn’t prove the hypothesis. Yet, not proving is as essential, if not more important, than proving. Once, I was on an Editorial Review Board that decided to solicit articles where the researcher didn’t prove the hypothesis and learned something. Over ten years, we solicited exactly 0 such articles. Zero!



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The opposite of success? Not failure. 03:45

A definition of failure to some is the opposite of success. Not necessarily. Especially when it comes to learning and getting healthier. We don’t tell kids they fail when they fall learning to walk. They keep trying. Same with learning to talk. As an adult, I find failure a motivator to try again. As a thinker and a catalyst for change, I’m delighted when I succeed with 30% of what I try – batting .300 is pretty good in baseball. It’s been the rare boss that’s accepted that. They’ve been the best bosses, and we’ve done the best work together in my career.

For health, embrace failure. I did eye exercises twice a day for eight months before my brain rewired, and my crippling double vision cleared 80% of the time. That's 360 failures and one success! It's taken years of trial and error to land on a balance, stretching, and strengthening routine that works for me. I stumble a lot, fall infrequently, and sustain only minor injuries when I do fall. I get frustrated when I see failure, and it seems like I'm stuck in the mud. Fail and try something else; that's the ticket. Remember CJ Rhoads in the episode [Win a Lottery Without a Ticket](#)? She said *the number of things that I had tried that didn't help is massive. I have a massive volume of things that I tried that did not work. You got to go through many things that don't work before you get to the things that do work.*

Failure fosters humility and empathy. My best stories are of failure – my failures. People laugh with me. We can all relate to failure. It's the warp of our lives. Hearing about a failure, we naturally ask, *and then what happened? What did you learn? What eventually worked?* So, failure, persistence, and humor are inseparable cronies. Keep trying and chuckle at the absurdity. That's life, health, music – anything worth doing well. Persist and laugh. Eventually, who knows?

Now a word about our sponsor, ABRIDGE.

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Stay amazing 07:04

Looking at the flip side, I just had a text exchange with my dear friend and amazing colleague, Sarah Krug. She reassured me that I would be amazing at some advocacy work I'm doing. Amazing is not as easy as falling off a log. It's serious work. Amazing includes failure, frequent failure. I've engaged Jan Oldenburg as a coach to help me keep being amazing. Again, great involves thoughtful, strategic, and tactical work. Success is more likely with a good coach. Key ingredients: persistence and laughter.

Unintended consequences 07:43



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Welcome to another irregular installment of *Unintended Consequences*.

As we approach the election in a couple of days, I wonder what unintended consequence will arise from the intensity of voter suppression now occurring. Will suppression motivate more people to vote? Will fewer voters from the suppressing party vote? Will more laws pass next year to prevent suppression? I don't know. I do know that forceful actions cause forceful reactions, and reactions are unpredictable. Go vote. Be well. Onward.

Bonnie Raitt: Unintended Consequences of Love 08:32