Failures provide us with the information we need to learn so that we can succeed.

What You’ll Discover in This Chapter:

• How to overcome your fear of failure
• How to fail less and succeed more
• How to keep failure from ever sapping your energy again

Failure is the label we stick on unsuccessful ventures. It’s practically synonymous with incompetence. The word alone brings up feelings of shame and humiliation.

When we fail, we automatically send ourselves bad messages. We discourage ourselves from trying again, because if we try we risk another failure.

It’s true that when you give up trying, you don’t have to face failure anymore. But you’ll have close to zero chance of achieving Quantum Success. To get there, you’ve got to be willing to fall on your face a few times.

You didn’t start out hating to fail. When you were tiny, failure didn’t weigh you down with emotional sludge. When you failed as a toddler, you had a good cry, then you stood up, dusted yourself off, and kept on going. But somewhere along the way you learned that trying and not succeeding was bad. That it meant trying was bad. That it meant you were bad.

Your failures by themselves aren’t so terrible, for the most part. It’s how you think about them that gives them the power to shut you down.

When you fail, you experience two types of consequences: internal and external. The external consequences are what happen in the world as a result of your failure. The internal consequences are what happen inside you: the emotional impact of your failure. That math exam you botched your sophomore year? The external consequences were a bad grade and maybe a stern lecture from
your parents. The internal consequences were those persistent little
demons that whispered, “You’re no good at math. You’re too stupid
to do this.”

The bad grade came and went; the little voices stayed.

It’s not the external result of your failure that makes it a
negative experience. It’s how you think about it. The external
consequences of a single failure are usually small—often even
insignificant. But depending on how you think about them, you
can make the internal consequences colossal, even life-threaten-
ing. You’ve heard how many suicides there are on college cam-
puses around exam time. And plenty of towns have an infamous
“lovers’ leap,” where scorned romantics go to end it all, convinced
that the loss of one love means they’ll never love again. A single
failure that by itself means hardly anything can seem as though
it means everything.

Failures: They’re a Lot Bigger on the Inside

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Consequences</th>
<th>Internal Consequences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Got stood up on a date</td>
<td>Members of the opposite sex don’t like me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost the karate tournament</td>
<td>I’ll never be any good at martial arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bounced a check</td>
<td>I can’t handle money</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheated on a diet</td>
<td>I have no willpower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost a client</td>
<td>I’m hopeless when it comes to business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed the exam</td>
<td>I’m too stupid to make it through college</td>
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Because our society views failure in a negative way, we learn to
avoid trying new things. Instead of risking failure, we fall back into
the comfort zone of the familiar, the tried and true. In order to avoid humiliation, we let fabulous opportunities pass us by.

But if you’re going to harness the power that lies within your failures, you’ll have to change the way you think about them. Learn to see them for the gifts they are.

**If You Knew This About Failure,**
**It Would Never Sap Your Energy Again**

You have the ability to transform failures from energy siphons into energy sources. How do you do this? By recognizing that failure leads to success. It’s step one in the process.

Failure is not just one possible path, it’s practically the *only* path to success. It’s necessary. It’s required.

You can’t succeed without learning. And in order to learn, you have to risk failure.

Learning doesn’t happen in an atmosphere of fear. Why not? Because fear shuts down the experimentation process. People don’t take risks when they’re afraid. They won’t try something new. And what is learning if not trying new things?

You can’t succeed if you can’t grow.
You can’t grow if you can’t learn.
You can’t learn if you can’t fail.

Of course, there’s a huge difference between appropriate and inappropriate risk. Not all risks are of equal value; not all risks are worth taking. Deciding the value of a risk is a skill like any other. Weigh the rewards of each risk against its potential outcomes, and look at the circumstances in terms of its impact on your inner vision.

Remember that not all the risks you take will pay off. You’ll experience a few failures. But Quantum Success is not about one
failure and then instant success. It’s about failing as many times as you need to in order to get to success.

**Why Treat Failure as a Learning Process?**

In my company, we’ve built an extraordinary culture of learning. In our office and at our on-site trainings, we instill a thirst for learning and feedback. We use no preamble. When we give feedback on a presentation we don’t start with “Last time you did it well and this time you said ‘so’ too often.” We just say, “You said ‘so’ too many times.” We call things done well “gems” and things that need work “opps,” short for “opportunities for improvement.”

After every practice presentation the group gives the person presenting three gems and three opps. We ask which they want first. When I visit camps in the summer, the facilitators ask me for opportunities. I recently visited our camp session at Wake Forest. I was particularly moved by the impact of a session. I thought it was masterful. As students left the main room and only the four facilitators were left, I went up to them to tell them how impressed I was by the session. They smiled at me in silence, then one of them said, “We’re really more opportunities people. What feedback do you have for us on where we can improve?” I truly believe our staff gets the results they do and achieve the skills they have because we develop our thirst for feedback.

For many people, giving feedback takes courage. When someone takes that risk and steps forward to offer feedback, it’s a treasure—and the sign of a good relationship.

You have to risk failure in order to learn anything. Whether you fail or not, risk taking alone is a powerful learning tool. But the actual experience of failing is the fastest way to learn. Failure vastly improves your odds of Quantum Success, particularly in the long run, because it tells you what to do—and what not to do—next.
When you diagnose your failures and figure out where you went wrong, you’re teaching yourself, literally by trial and error, how to go right.

In my own life, my worst failures cleared the way to my greatest successes. When I lost all my money chasing dollars for the Burklyn Business School, I learned to steer clear of anything that wasn’t in line with my values. It was re-applying myself to what I wanted most that led me to create SuperCamp.

Theodore Geisel, known to generations of children as Dr. Seuss, almost gave up after his first book had been rejected by thirty publishers. He was on his way home to burn his manuscript when he happened upon an old friend who convinced him to give it one more shot. His name was Bennett Cerf. This time the publisher accepted his book.

Mistakes have special gifts to offer you. So do multiple failures. Trying over and over to achieve a particular goal is like weight lifting for the soul. Scores of bestselling authors have tales to tell about the fifty or a hundred or three hundred publishers they submitted their novels to, only to be told that they’d be better off selling insurance. But with each rejection letter, they kept submitting. They learned how to keep faith in themselves, how to keep their dreams burning bright, even under mountains of rejection letters. Their victory tasted far sweeter after a hundred rejections than it would have after only ten.

Failing is a great way to learn and grow.
Mobilize Your Failures: Turn Defeat into Victory

Congratulations—You Failed

Treat your failures as gifts. In earlier chapters, I talked about the importance of celebrating and rewarding your successes. If you're failing, it means you're giving yourself the chance to learn. You deserve credit for that.

Whenever you fail, the universe has just handed you a piece of wisdom. Don't let it go to waste. Mine it for all it's worth. Ask yourself:

• What happened?
• What did I learn?
• What will I do differently next time?

Search Your Failures for Second Chances

SuperCamp alumnus Ryan Day discovered in high school that failures themselves often contain the seeds of second chances. “As a high school senior I applied to Stonehill College. My grades were not great and my SAT scores were awful. But I thought those things weren't important and I would get in anyway. I remember my parents and brothers telling me to study hard for the SAT. I thought I knew better and didn't listen to what was great advice... I arrived home from school one day to a letter from Stonehill College: ‘We regret to inform you that you will not be admitted to Stonehill College this semester...’

“I was devastated. How could this happen to me? I realized then that I hadn’t worked very hard at all, and now had to face the consequences of my actions. But as I reread the letter, I found a solution to my dilemma: they suggested I apply again as a transfer student after my first semester at a different college.
This letter was not the end. They were giving me the opportunity to improve my scores and try again.

“After my first semester at St. Bonaventure University, I applied again to Stonehill and was accepted. Four years later I graduated, having turned my failure into success.”

The most beautiful thing about your failures is that they’re yours. No two people fail in quite the same way. Your failures are your own personal laboratory of life. In that lab you can run whatever experiments you choose. The discoveries are yours to make, the wisdom yours to keep.

“Life is a series of outcomes,” says Simone Carruthers, psychologist and business consultant. “Sometimes the outcome is what you want. Great. Figure out what you did right. Sometimes the outcome is what you don’t want. Great. Figure out what you did so you don’t do it again.”

The only time you’ve really failed is when you fail to learn from your mistakes.

Failure Is a Launch Pad to Quantum Success

• You up the odds of Quantum Success by learning from every failure.
• You control the internal consequences of failure by changing the way you think.