



It's OK to be a failure nurse.

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As nurses we often set some pretty high expectations for ourselves.

Sometimes we succeed or supersede those goals and that is great. We celebrate and are celebrated.

However, most of us will at some time (or many times) snag up against those jagged spikes of failure.

We put in a whole lot of effort.... we try our damndest, and still we miss the mark.

“Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly”

Robert F. Kennedy

Failure comes in many forms, from a simple missed venepuncture to a botched assessment grade.

From a missed promotion to a new employment rejection.

Failure to achieve. Failure to pass. Failure to be selected. Failure to thrive. Failure to be noticed. Failure to be loved.

We might be served our failure wrapped in artificial sweeteners.... with euphemisms such as 'not *yet* competent' or 'on the waiting list' or 'almost there'.

But whatever the fail, I am pretty sure we are all familiar with its *true* taste.

Failure is the manure of growth.

Like all manure, it tastes pretty shitty when you are down amongst it.

The word failure comes from the Latin *fallere*, meaning to trip or to cause to fall, as in deceiving or duping. That's a pretty good description, as failure tends to trip us up and to deceive us.

I have had my own share of failures, both large and small. Some I have shaken off, whilst others sit like ready-mix concrete in the pit of my stomach. Weighing down my self-confidence and eroding away at the linings of my core beliefs.

Despite all this, let me share some strategies that I have found helpful in putting failure in its rightful place. And perhaps, even learning to accept failure for what it actually is....

Failure is just something you did that didn't work out the way you wanted it to.

Again, this time in bold: **Failure is just a judgement of something you did. It is not a judgement of who you are.**

You see, failure is just another direction in your life. Failure is NOT a destination.

You are moving towards your goal. Then splat. There is a fail.

Or CRASH there is an *epic* fail.

This does not mean you have fallen back to where you started from. Or slipped back to some dark and bad place.

Sure you have missed your mark. But you have moved forward. Perhaps you are a little off to the side and covered in a little yucky stuff...but you have made progress to a new place. It cannot be any other way.

And you might not see it yet, but from here perhaps a whole new path will become visible.

So here is what you need to do....

Reflect.

Start a gratitude journal (no, I really mean it). Write down 3 or 4 things each day that you are really grateful for.

Or at least reflect on them each morning. Try it tomorrow, while you are in the shower.

Think about how these things interact with your failures. There are many people that will tell you developing an attitude of gratitude is THE fastest way to get you to a space that embraces failure. **Gratitude is the naloxone of failure.**

Share your failure.

Surround yourself with friends. Seek council. Seek laughter.

Don't catastrophise on what other people think about your failure. Don't ruminate on all the *other* times you have failed.

That's pretty easy to say... but it's a tough nut to crack. The perception of losing face with friends and colleagues is an icky part of failure. But remember the Latin? Failure is all about deception and duping. The self-deception of thinking those who matter to you will think any less of you because you have failed is simply that, a construct without substance.

In reality, I think it's pretty true that most of the time people aren't thinking about you at all anyways. They are far too busy worrying about what you think about them.

Take your time.

It takes time for all those spikey wounds to heal. And withdrawing for a while to lick your wounds is absolutely fine.

Be kind to yourself. You tried and failed. Reward the *tried* part, because the very fact you had a crack at it puts you on the positive side of the bell curve. So many people never fail because they are too afraid to risk putting up failure as a possibility.

Surround yourself with greatness. Build strong support networks. Build relationships with the people in your life that inspire or nurture (you know who those people are). Respectfully withdraw from negativity, toxic cynicism and naysayers.

Remember the fail.

Use your experience of failure to develop empathy and sensitivity when dealing with other people experiencing their own epic fails.

And conversely, use that experience to recognise the importance of celebrating others who may have had success at the very moment you failed.

Authentically celebrating another's success is the cardioversion of failure.

Try again.

THE biggest issue with failure is having the fear that it will metastasise into the rest of your life. That you might try again and fail again. That *you* are a failure.

And right there is the deception again, mixing fail and fear.

Zen has a saying, fall down six times get up seven. That's all you need to do.

Eventually, we ALL fail.

We are all eventually going to fail at life. **At the moment you finally run up hard against your own mortality, all those events that you consider huge failures from your life will simply pop like soap bubbles.** Nothing. Not important. What a complete waste of your energies anguishing over it all.

Nursing gives us the unique opportunity to fail spectacularly, yet have that failure completely eclipsed by our daily experience of what is really important in life. If we just take the lesson.



Ian Miller