

HOW TO FACE UNDERPERFORMANCE OR FAILURE

This article is not just for those who have had a failure but for everyone to understand it, prevent it to the extent possible, and come out of it quickly and stronger when it does.

When you face emotional upheaval due to failure, the 1st thing to do is to feel the emotions fully without trying to deny or suppress them. Just witness the pain and feelings in the body and mind without judgment. If it is unbearable, you may use some medicines like Flower Remedies (Rescue Remedy, White Chestnut-for breaking the stronghold of circulating thoughts) to calm down to a level so that logical reasoning can work.

From the state you are in after a failure, you can make things worse by adopting a negative attitude or by adopting a positive attitude. This self-talk about discussing the failure of yourself and others is critical. Whether you have sob and victim stories or looking for learning and any silver lining in it decides how your life will evolve after that. Ask yourself what you want. This awareness of what has happened and the feeling that you can choose will automatically make you choose a positive attitude. You can continue this dialogue by asking how strongly you feel about this choice. It decides how much effort you are likely to put in for the sake of improvement.

Having a wise mentor in the family, a teacher, a senior, or a friend who loves you and with whom you can share your pain and feelings is extremely important. Our thinking is clouded at such moments, and such a mentor can help us keep calm and prevent us from making rash decisions that we might regret later. He can also look at things objectively and suggest remedial measures to improve matters.

Having faith in God, Guru, or any higher power is very important. When the pain of failure is unbearable, which prompts you to quit the activity you are engaged in, like studies, or in the worst case quitting the life itself, it is best to at once surrender to that power for guidance. You may pour out your frustration and anger to them and even blame them for not helping if you feel. As the venom of negativity is thrown out, you start feeling better and become more receptive to positive guidance from them or any other quarter. God's real miracle is in making you wiser, stronger, and capable to deserve what you are engaged in.

If you are not careful, the first casualty due to failure is lower self-esteem and willpower. Hence, the second thing to do is improve through prayers and affirmations. You can also read articles on how to improve these.

Let us first understand what failure is. Whenever we attempt anything new, we have to go through a phase where we fail, learn, and improve. It continues till you become good at it. Moreover, our performance varies in every aspect of life because of factors beyond our control.

In many cases, we face failure because of inadequate efforts. All great people in mythology and real life have faced failures and humiliations in all walks of life and become stronger like forged steel.

Hence, success and failure are transitory experiences meant to provide feedback on what worked and what didn't and why. Thus we must continuously learn from all situations and improve our capacity to do better.

Clinging to success and aversion to failure both create enormous suffering. Feeling superior after success and feeling depressed after a failure are both due to ego and are bad. The ego always makes you compare and feel secure or insecure.

Swami Vivekananda says that rather than losing everything, the loss of hope of getting it back is far more dangerous.

We all face situations in life where the performance in a venture is not up to our satisfaction. The level of dissatisfaction varies depending on the extent of underperformance, stakes involved, and other complex factors. If this thing happens repeatedly, we feel that we are a failure. However, such a feeling is dangerous because we create a solid foundation for continuous failures. We are never failures as persons. Our planning, preparation, and final performance have failed due to several mistakes. If we take this attitude and learn lessons, the performance improves in the next venture.

We may feel good by blaming others for our failures by playing a victim's role. But it is a sure shot recipe for being stuck in failure mode because we didn't analyze the failures and learn lessons. We must take complete responsibility for our failure, howsoever challenging the situation might have been. Do not indulge in self-bashing. Accept everything with love, comfort yourself like a true friend. Apply Serenity Principle and see what best can be done hereafter. The most important thing to do is avoid making major decisions regarding the future when you are in turmoil. Best decisions are always taken with a peaceful mind.

After the feeling has subsided, we try to analyze the situation. Was the underperformance due to lack of adequate preparation or being stressed at the examination time? Was the study plan or paper-solving plan faulty? Was the time management in studies and/or in examination an issue? Was the study material not of good quality? Was the problem-solving practice inadequate? The primary thing is often the negative attitude, which can sabotage everything even after good studies. Unless we solve this issue, nothing else will work. Avoid the company of negative persons, and join the company of positive persons. After a failure, don't ask, "Why?" Ask "What?" and "How?" Develop a solution-oriented mindset rather than a problem-oriented one.

Failure always creates a memory. Then we start fearing failure. To counter this, keep a Diary of Excellence in which all your past good performances in any field are written. And read a few of these every day. We always fight these two. Whatever you choose to focus on, positive or negative, grows in your life. Hence, we must be careful. Observe and learn from successful persons. They have the commitment and obsession to doing better joyfully. Make ruthless sacrifices that you will be proud of later. Always have a dialogue with yourself regarding your attitude, thoughts, and contemplated action. Check whether it is towards self-improvement or self-destruction. Ruthlessly move away from friends who are not in sync with your improvement plans.

Affirm the following:

"I was weak; now I am becoming strong."

"Even if I am beaten, I don't give up."

"If I get knocked down, I get up stronger every time."

"Even though I failed, what is important is that I tried and got precious experience, strength, and wisdom."

When you fail, look up and get up. Giving up is the biggest failure.

Study the articles on attending classes, studying, preparing for exams, planning, and time management again carefully to see where you went wrong.

Avoid competition and comparison with others, and instead, try loving cooperation. Compliment the better performers in mind first and then personally. When we establish such rapport, they help better. Take advice from them in all matters including studies, answer writing in exams, and most importantly, attitude. Then you know where you need to improve. Compliment teachers and TAs for their efforts and wish them happiness. See the model answers for exam papers to understand where and how you lost marks. Be proactive, patient, and persistent in seeking help from all quarters.

Finally, we can always make things far worse or far better. The choice is always ours. Courage is not always what roars. Sometimes, it is just a small voice that says, "I will try again." Attitude is far more important than talent. The Australian Army doesn't recruit a person who has not failed even once. They know that bouncing back after failure is very important for the Army. While interviewing persons for top executive roles in top companies, the candidates are asked to share how they handled a massive failure in their life. Under the most challenging circumstances, attitude is far more important than talent and experience.

A Joyful Alternative:

In this approach, irrespective of where you are in the performance spectrum, you look at only your performance and see how you can do better. In this case, there is no competition, and hence, there is no friction and stress. With this approach, the top and lowest performers are both happy. Both look for doing their best, whatever be the result. The top performer has no

insecurity and is prepared to help lower performers because that gives him joy. He doesn't bother about the marks/awards but wants to improve the joy of doing things at every step in life. The lower performer also looks at his performance objectively and looks for help in joyfully improving his performance all the time. There is a natural spontaneity and joy in everything that we do. We then respond with joy, to the best of our ability in any given situation, without worrying about the result. Then we find joy in helping each other without fear of losing. There is no cheating, jealousy, envy, anger, or hatred, which sap so much energy. We synergize our strengths, empower each other, and grow much stronger as individuals and as a group/organization.

Happiness is not a goal. We have to enjoy the journey towards any goal. Happiness is also a skill that anyone can develop. It is important to note that happiness level is a variable for any person depending on internal and external factors (because we are not yet fully evolved) and different for everyone (depending on their happiness skill). Love and joy bring a passion for working and making it feel effortless. We are most creative when we are joyful because we are relaxed and alert at the same time.

Law of Attraction:

It has been proved that we generally attract circumstances and persons consistent with our dominant thought pattern. Hence, happy persons attract happy persons and events and vice versa. As discussed earlier, if we carry negative emotions about others, others automatically do the same about us. Any form of negativity reduces our efficiency in dealing with events and persons. It leads to frustration, and with a negative mindset, we hold others responsible for our mess. It becomes a vicious cycle. If we understand this dangerous cycle, we can break this and start a new healthy, positive evolution cycle. For this, we need to stop the 'complaint factory' and start a 'gratitude factory.' A grateful person attracts a large number of supporters who help him succeed in his endeavors.

If we are apprehensive of a failure in an exam, interview, a game, a stage performance, our mind and brain get a negative signal (what's the use type), reducing the efficiency of the preparation, as well as the final performance, and more often than not, failure will happen. Whereas, if we remain calm and confident, we can do our best with whatever we have prepared, and the chances of success brighten. It applies to all aspects of life like jobs, relationships, etc.

Seed First Crop Later:

It is the universal law of life without exception. It applies to studies, business, relationships, and joyfulness as well. It says that you have first to plant a seed of whatever you seek (love, respect, happiness) and nurture it to get it back multiplied. You can't be happy all alone without caring for others. You have to think and act, keeping the happiness of others in view. You can't necessarily make others happy. However, this is a prerequisite for your happiness.

Practice Happiness:

In studies, games, business, bodybuilding, music, we need to prepare and practice what we want (exam results, winning matches, profits, good physique, performance). In this, we overcome our weaknesses and develop expertise. The same approach is required for happiness. We need to practice happiness to become good at being happy. It is like acting in a drama or a movie. We want to give our best and make it appear natural for every role. We do a similar thing in preparation for JEE, GRE, CAT, GMAT, or regular semester exams. Hence, we need to think and behave the way a really happy person would do for happiness acting. Over some time, our performance becomes real and natural. The Music maestros do 'Riyaz' or practice lovingly, every day, whether they have a concert scheduled or not. Both practice and performance give them the same happiness. It is, in fact, a lifelong, continuous journey. Today, we are practicing unhappiness (comparison, competition, pessimistic, negative talk all around) and hoping to become happy because of the constant exposure to negative news/discussion in the media, society, family, and colleagues about almost everything around us. If you want to be better at cricket, you can't practice hockey.

Behave Like a Joyful Person:

Observe how a joyful person looks and behaves in different situations, and imitate him as much as you can. Such a person is always relaxed and smiling. Laughter comes easily to him. He may not wear expensive clothes but is smartly dressed. Clothes are clean, he takes a bath, shaves, and smells good. His body posture while standing or sitting is that of a confident person. His voice is not loud or too soft. He doesn't need abusive words to impress others. He always cares and inquires about others instead of bragging about himself.

Three types of happiness last for different periods. The pleasure-based one has the shortest time frame. The passion (for work) based one lasts much longer. However, the one doing something good for others (the larger the group, the better) lasts the longest. Knowing this helps us in selecting our goals.

Smile and Laughter:

Success brings smiles and laughter. However, such events are very few. Our capacity to have a smile on our face almost regularly, and our capacity to laugh frequently, makes us and others happy. This helps us in remaining calm and positive even under adverse conditions. Then, we can do whatever is best under the circumstances. Efficiency and the outcome also improve with this approach. People have used love and laughter therapy to heal themselves from serious ailments, without medicines

Winning and losing:

We usually always like to win and hate to lose. But do these lead to happiness as we expect? Let us examine.

If we play with weak players continuously, we may always win. But we never learn to improve because we win with lesser and lesser efforts. Our actual potential reduces over time due to a lack of practice/challenge. On the contrary, if we play with stronger opponents all the time, we may mostly lose. But with every outing, we improve. We may have lost the first few games very badly, but we start winning more and more points with practice. After more practice, we may begin winning an occasional game. But the moment we win, if we want to improve further, we must start playing with the next level person. Then the same cycle described earlier will repeat. Hence, it appears at first sight that we are almost losing continuously in life, but in reality, we are happier because of the continuous improvement.

In life also, we face the predicament of choosing between tough and soft options at every step. In student life, taking easier courses, easier projects, and shortcuts are such options. After education, we like easy-going jobs with more salaries. However, challenging options enhance, and soft options reduce our capability. These have a tremendous impact on our careers. These are like workbook problems of different degrees of difficulty. Success and happiness always come from our ability to tackle tougher problems.

Goals:

For joyful and effective action, we need to clarify what we are doing and why we are doing it. This is possible only through setting up SMART goals for the long, medium, and short term. For happiness and effectiveness must be in harmony with our mind, body, and spirit (for details, please see the article on Goals). Since time and energy is limited, we must know how to allocate and use them most effectively. The Pareto principle says that 80 % of results come from 20 % of actions. Find out such actions in every time frame. Hence, we need to identify these as top priorities (for details, please see the article on Time management). We also need to do a sincere audit of the goals and achievements in every timeframe and record comments on the differences.

Habits:

Whether we are aware or not, we are slaves of our habits. Habits are designed into our system for efficient action. However, most of our habits have been developed unconsciously, and these are likely to be very detrimental to our happiness. We need to first become aware of our habits in all spheres of life. We need to incrementally challenge ourselves in many ways to break free from bad habits and substitute them with good ones. This is a slow but very important process.

Frequently and consciously exercise your special skill or strength, such as punctuality, truthfulness, mindful listening, to improve your self-esteem.

Self-Talk and Visualization:

The stories we tell ourselves about our past and future affect our happiness. This is called Self-Talk. Most of our mind excursions in the past and future are uncontrolled, negative, and obsessive. This makes us unhappy due to pain from the past and fear and worries for the future. Deliberate, positive self-talk for planned, short durations many times a day rectifies this. This is achieved by deliberately recalling our (or our role models) past best performances. This gives a psychological repeat order for them in the future. For the future as well, we can think of doing our best in selected scenarios. Instead of just thinking, visualizing the good past and future with details is a far more effective tool that has been used by great persons in all spheres of life. These actions boost our confidence and self-image, which is so vital for happiness and success.

Happiness Practice Is A Journey:

It is essential to understand that the transition from the old, negative, unhappy ways to the new, positive, happy ways is not like a switch. It's a gradual process. Moreover, there is a continuous war raging within us between good and bad forces. To begin with, bad forces often win. With practice, goodwill wins more often. With very long practice, we may lose to bad forces only occasionally. Hence, continuous vigil is required. A similar-minded group of friends is a big help in this journey.

Saying that "I don't have time for this in my busy schedule" is like saying, "I don't have time for a pit stop for a car on a long journey." The car will get overheated and have a breakdown. The driver and the car need periodic breaks to check car condition, cool down, and feel refreshed. The same thing happens with the human body and mind in a stressful, hectic life. Moreover, the time you spend on these activities will be more than compensated by the improved efficiency in all matters.