

Character and . . .

Identity

Volume 6 / 2020

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The faculty essays presented here emerge from a semester-long process of reading and writing together in an environment of critique and review. Nevertheless, this invited journal of essays represents the authors' views and not necessarily the views of the Wendt Center for Character Education or the University of Dubuque.

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The *Character and . . .* Journal is published by the Wendt Center for Character Education at the University of Dubuque in Dubuque, Iowa, and uses parenthetical citations in the style of the 8th edition of the *MLA Handbook*.

On Becoming a Better Failure: How Failure Stories Can Shape Our Identities

Lindsey M. Ward

Abstract

Failure sharing promotes an essential normalization of failure as a part of everyone's identity as well as a natural retraining of how we assign blame and reason to our own future failures. Three lessons on failure sharing help us construct identities that include a healthy concept of failure: failure hurts, but normalizing it reduces emotional pain; we learn from others' failures differently than from our own; and minor failures can offer healthy lessons as well as major ones. It is healthy and important to share failure stories for the development of identities that are not dependent solely upon success as a primary indicator of who we are but include failure as a normal, significant, and even good part of human existence.

A few friends gathered in a bar with one question: why don't we ever talk about our failures? The conversation became so intensely fascinating that the friends quickly pulled together a repeat gathering with more friends that turned into a series of events that in turn ballooned into a truly global phenomenon. F*ckup Nights, as they were branded, were born (henceforth in this article to be referred to as

FUNs). In just seven years, FUNs have found their way into 321 cities in 90 countries with almost a million attendees and have witnessed the sharing of over 15,000 stories of failure. Offshoots of this simple endeavor, that is, the effort of making room for failure stories, have produced a book, a research entity, and a long list of failure-related publications (“Stories about Failure—Fuckup Nights Global Movement”). As it turns out, people are pretty hungry for a good failure story, but why?



Can sharing failure stories help?

In this article, I would like to propose a few things about sharing our failure stories with one another. First, failure sharing has a positive impact on who we are, our very identities. Next, failure needs to be understood as a normal, natural, and inevitable part of our lives. And last, we can learn from others’ failures, big or small, in ways that are different than learning from our own failures. It is healthy and important to learn to share failure stories for the development of identities that are prepared for the realities of existence and that embrace failure as a normal, significant, even good part of life. But before we dive into all of that, we need to consider why failure sharing is so crucially important.

Where did failure go?

Modern Western society makes perfection look easy. Magazines show perfect bodies, perfect faces, and perfect hair; and billboards and advertisements suggest that there are many ways to perfection—just call now! Social media, possibly the biggest culprit of displays of perfection, shows us all sorts of perfect. YouTube shows off perfect hobbies; Twitch offers users perfect video game play; Instagram wows with perfect homes, outfits, food, and travel; and Pinterest displays nothing but lists of perfect ideas for just about everything. We look out into that endless perfect world, then look into our own lives, and we are shocked to see that our bodies have lumps, our faces have pores, our hair is flat, our video gaming requires hundreds of attempts, our homes are a mess, our kids throw tantrums, our food does not deserve


framing, we do not really even take trips, and our stuff is not always the latest and greatest. And we are left to cope with the vast distance between what we see and what we experience.

Dr. Jean Twenge, author of *iGen*, notes that the internet, and life in general, is relentlessly positive, full of highlight reels and smiling selfies, with people posting almost exclusively stories of success online. The prevalence of such positive and success-oriented performance art is producing the message that friends, families, celebrities, and influencers just do not fail. When we think of our own life experiences in light of what we see online, we rarely, if ever, measure up, and it leads to feelings of inadequacy and depression (94–101).

Dr. Twenge goes on to assert in her research that “[a]ll screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all nonscreen activities are linked to more happiness.” She found a direct relationship between spending time on things like social media and a much greater chance of being unhappy. She goes on to note that social media promises to connect us to our friends, but the people who use social media the most often report feeling lonely, left out, and unloved (“Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?”).

The potential identity-shaping effect of this phenomenon is measurable. The percentage of teens and young adults who believe their life is unenjoyable, that they cannot do anything right, and even that their life is not useful has increased dramatically in the last seven years or so. The American Freshman Survey indicated a 95% rise in depressive symptoms between 2013 and 2016, over just four years of surveyed incoming college students (Twenge, *iGen* 103-104).

Success-orientation is problematic in the business world as well, though perhaps in very different ways than with individuals. Organizational behavioral theory suggests organizations with exclusive success experiences will often treat those successes as evidence that “existing organization knowledge represents the world well and that further developments of knowledge is unnecessary.” This leads to faulty, overconfident conclusions suggesting their existing knowledge is all they need to continue seeing success (Madsen and Desai 453).



The perpetual focus on success has detrimental effects on our identities.

Whether in business or in individual lives, the perpetual focus on success has detrimental effects on our identities. It either produces underconfident, depressive identities that lack hope in the possibility of productive lives or overconfident, know-it-all identities that think there

is nothing to learn outside of what we already know in order to continue enjoying success. Either way, eliminating failure stories from our experience has fundamentally shifted our understandings of who we are and aspire to be.

While individuals may have been strongly encouraged by current success-focused selfie culture to forget how to share failures with one another, business sectors overwhelmingly have not. Failure sharing in business has been well researched over time, and there seem to be some beneficial trends. The medical field, banking industry, scientific research labs, and even the global orbital launch vehicle industry, just to highlight a few sectors, all have published abundant research over the years about how they learn from, share, understand, and utilize failures. When considered broadly across a wide variety of sectors, business organizations have some important lessons that could be applied to our individual understandings of our identity as it relates to our failures and failure sharing.

In the sections that follow, I would like to propose three things that individuals could learn from business about failure sharing:

- 1) Failure hurts, but if it is “normal,” it hurts less.
- 2) We learn from others’ failures differently than we learn from our own.
- 3) Minor failures are just as important to share as major ones.

Now that we have learned why failure sharing is so important to who we are and believe ourselves to be, we will look at the three lessons we can learn about sharing our failures that might give us some instruction on how to use our failures and the failures of others in our lives.

Failure hurts, but if it is “normal,” it hurts less

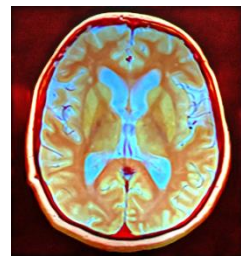
No matter how you frame it, failure hurts. Failure triggers feelings of embarrassment, rejection, and shame, to name just a few uncomfortable emotions. And it hurts worse when it feels out of place or unusual.

Failure emotions diminish our abilities to clearly evaluate.

In a study examining research scientists’ reactions to project failure, scientists interviewed noted feelings of frustration, depression, anxiety, and even physical pain when reflecting on recent projects that failed. They told stories of crying at their desks, taking extended sick leave, and withdrawing from work-related email communication. Some contemplated whether it even made sense to continue their work (Shepherd et al. 1233). Top researchers in their fields were shaken by the deep pain of failure.

Failure-related emotions and experiences can be damaging to our identities. Failure emotions diminish our abilities to clearly evaluate contributing factors to our failures or events of the past; they make us feel detached and isolated from groups and organizations; and they impact future decision-making through anxiety over the possibility of failing again (Shepherd et al. 1233-1234).


Failure is attached to some of the strongest emotional responses that we as humans experience. A feeling of humiliation, which often accompanies failure, for instance, has been measured in brain scans as a significantly more mentally demanding emotion over other emotions like anger, happiness, and even shame (Otten and Jonas). Living in a culture that does not readily accept failure as the norm can accentuate these feelings because they are tied up in a desire for social confirmation. People who feel as though they have lost social confirmation tend to experience a severe kind of pain that is often long-lasting (Alter 224-225).



Brain scans allow scientists to examine emotional responses.

In an experiment set up to test responses to social rejection, Dr. David Hsu of Stony Brook University designed totally transparent tests, letting subjects know in advance that they would be experiencing fabricated rejection from an automated computer system. Even when they knew it was not real, test subjects experienced negative emotions when the computer “rejected” them. A similar study found that people react with negative emotions when rejected by a group that they hate and would never want to be involved in (Kinney)!

FUNs, the failure sharing events mentioned in the introduction, found a possible antidote to such powerful negative reactions to failing and the loss of social confirmation by turning failure stories into events with an audience that was not interested in rejecting the failure of the sharer, but rather embracing it as something accepted, normal, even, dare I say, fun. In doing so, FUNs help audiences and failure sharers alike experience a socially healthy response to failure and rejection, connecting with people over failure and making it normal (Kinney). When embraced as learning experiences, the pain and discomfort of failures have been linked to greater resilience, the desire to improve ourselves (Lang 16-21, 37), and growth in moral character (Ward 3-5).



When failures are viewed as nothing extraordinary, there is a better chance of identifying them and learning from them.

The business sector has also provided a potential solution to helping take the sting out of failures: make failure a normal part of one’s work experience. How? Sharing beliefs of teams and managers about what failures are and how to deal with them can be one way to produce normalizing

results. When everyone is on board and failures are viewed and treated as nothing extraordinary in an organization, they are not nearly as painful, and when they aren’t so painful, there is a better chance of identifying them and learning from them. Normalizing failure in an organization often results in setting up a supportive environment to fail, one that is not based on punishments for failures. This helps to ensure that failures are analyzed and learned from, negative emotions are reduced, and motivation to keep learning is high (Shepherd et al. 1236-1237).

Normalizing failure not only helps organizations learn from their experiences, it can actually redefine what organizations consider success and failure. When failure is heavily stigmatized in the workplace, individuals tend to get creative in how they respond to failures to avoid punishment or discomfort. They either refuse to acknowledge failure, or worse, they find ways to reframe failures as successes.



NASA's space shuttle Atlantis

The global orbital launch vehicle industry presents a tragic example of just how dangerous this can be. In 2002, NASA launched the space shuttle *Atlantis*, its 111th shuttle launch. Just after takeoff, a piece of protective foam insulation broke free from the craft, damaging a part of the solid rocket booster. The loss of foam

did not compromise the launch or the reentry of the vehicle, and NASA determined that the issue was not serious enough to delay future launches with an investigation since the mission had been a success. After all, NASA had a long history with successful shuttle launches, and that history inflated a certain confidence that things like a loss of foam or other debris was not a significant risk.

The space shuttle *Columbia* was launched by NASA just six months and two shuttle launches later in 2003. Just over a minute after launch, the situation that crews had experienced on *Atlantis* repeated itself on *Columbia*. A piece of foam once again fell off and, this time, caused damage to a fuel tank and wing of the shuttle. The rocket was nonetheless able to enter orbit and nearly completed its mission. However, upon reentry into the atmosphere, *Columbia's* foam block damage proved too severe to overcome the forces of reentry. It exploded, killing all seven crew members on board. The resulting investigation of the failed mission produced a six-volume, 4,000-page report on the findings with 29 mandated changes to be made prior to any further NASA launches (Madsen and Desai 451).

The global orbital launch vehicle industry provides a clear picture of what happens when failure is not a normal, accepted part of an

organization's practice. The loss of foam on *Atlantis* was not considered a failure. In fact, the mission was considered a total success, a win. The *Columbia* disaster was a result of a longstanding issue with ignoring or redefining failure, with catastrophic results. In organizations where failure is not accepted, individuals who might have insights into failures instead try to cover them up or redefine failures as successes, losing essential and important information along the way and compromising the integrity of the entire organization. However, organizations that treat failures as normal and not punitively at all levels of the organization have more errors reported and experience fewer serious failures than organizations that do not (Madsen and Desai 471).

In a much lighter vein, one of college football's arguably greatest coaches, Nick Saban, knows a thing or two about defining failure. Even after big wins, he can be seen fuming on the sidelines. He keeps track of errors, both in practice and in games, for all of his players in order to keep them focused on the things that they can control, improve, and learn from. He calls it "the process"



Coach Nick Saban focuses on failures to help his team learn.

("Nick Saban"). Saban's approach, some might think, leans too far from redefining failures into successes all the way to redefining successes as failures! Maybe neither is helpful. But if Coach Saban's "process" had been applied to each of the 112 NASA global orbital vehicle launches prior to the launch of *Columbia*, might we have seen a much different result?¹

How do these lessons in how failure is viewed and treated translate to individuals? One way we normalize failure conversations in our relationships is by establishing shared beliefs about failure. More than ever, we need frequent reminders that everyone fails—it is inevitable, and we need to be talking about that. We need to be willing to talk about what we believe about failures. We need to talk about the pain and emotions involved when we fail. We need to talk about the supports that we seek out to help us through failure. These conversations promote honesty and compassion, and should come up between friends, parents and their kids, mentors and their mentees,

professors and their students, and co-workers and bosses in all sectors of business.

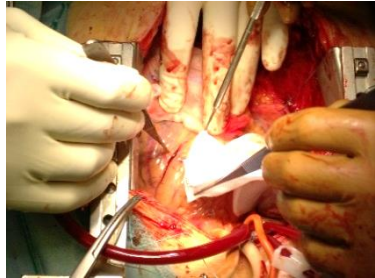
I personally try to share stories of my failures as a parent with other parents often. Having three children in just over two years has been filled with failure. Toddlers, for example, are exhausting and relentless sources of opportunities to fail as a parent: the football-style carry of the screaming kid out of Target without purchasing anything; the permanent marker that leads to a new display on the wall from a budding Picasso; a momentary distraction that results in a potty training poop-trail through the kitchen; one child's backyard tantrum creating an opportunity for a naked romp through the neighborhood for the other.

I would not have to share these experiences with anyone, but I know that being willing to say to a new mom that I do not always love parenting, that we almost never look like the few magical, well-behaved, smiling moments I post on social media, makes it a little more normal for her to feel frustration or less-than-rosy feelings for her experience with her baby. And that might make a difference for her understanding of failure's role in parenting. That support and shared understanding between us is crucial for helping us understand who we are.

As I mentioned earlier, modern culture gives our developing identities a beating with a barrage of constant positivity-viewing. It is tough to place what we know about our own lives into what we see of others' lives. It leaves us with a desperate feeling that we are the only ones who fail. Or we could take the equally damaging road of attempting to redefine our failures as successes to avoid the pain of social rejection. In my parenting examples above, a logical conclusion I might reach if my parenting cannot fail might be that my kids are just unlovable brats. That sort of scapegoating is damaging to not only my identity but also to my (very lovable, not-bratty) kids. This is why normalizing failure is so crucially important in developing our identities as individuals. We all will fail, and we deeply need to know that it is normal. Sharing failure with each other helps with that and even allows us to learn from failure in new ways.

We learn from others' failures differently than we learn from our own

Heart surgeons are not insulated from failure experiences, as frightening as that might be. A ten-year study of a group of heart surgeons documented the process of learning and mastering a new minimally invasive procedure on patients. Even with live patients, new procedures have a learning curve that includes some failures along the way. One would think that in a high risk environment such as heart surgery, if a surgeon made a mistake that resulted in the loss of a patient's life, she would learn quickly and make appropriate corrections to ensure success in the future. It turns out, that is not at all what the researchers found (KC et al.).



People can fail to learn from mistakes even in high risk environments.

The researchers actually found that if a surgeon had early success with the procedure, she was almost twice as likely to have significantly more successful procedures in the future as having no previous experiences with the procedure. And if a surgeon had any failure experiences with the procedure she was three times more likely to have significantly more failed procedures in the future (KC et al. 2442). What exactly is going on here?

When we fail, we have some natural inclinations as a response to that failure. Mostly, we want to save face. We want to maintain the best and most positive self-image we can. After a failure experience, people tend to select factors to blame their failures on, and since we are inclined to protect our own self-image, we most often attribute our failures to external factors like bad luck or difficulty of the task. It tends to ease some of the negative emotions associated with failure mentioned earlier. After a success experience, we are more likely to assign our successes to internal factors such as effort or ability. In psychology, this is called *attribution theory* and it helps us understand the data found in the heart surgeon study (KC et al. 2436).

If a surgeon fails a procedure, attribution theory suggests that the surgeon is likely to associate that failure with things outside of her control. Maybe the patient was too sick, or the equipment failed, or the medical assistant reacted too slowly. If an error can be justified as outside of our control, then we are not at fault, and if we are not at fault, then we are far less likely to make any effort to learn what actually went wrong. We might even double down and stick with the faulty strategy or procedural steps for all future procedures, even if it continues to produce failure (KC et al. 2444-2445). And if you are a heart surgeon or heart surgery patient, then this is very bad news.

However, attribution theory explains something even more profound than the fact that we are not all that likely to learn from our own failures. When we consider other peoples' failures and successes, we attribute factors totally differently than we do our own. Without the negative and painful emotions that conflate our own failure experiences and tend to make us blame other people or things for our failures, when we look at others' failures, we tend to assign them more often to internal factors than external.



Learning about others' failures helped surgeons significantly improve outcomes.

When surgeons in the heart procedure study heard about other surgeons failures, they were 1.5 times more likely to have significant improvements in their own surgical outcomes. Successes of those other surgeons did not matter so much, but their failures most definitely mattered (KC et al. 2443).

Attribution theory does not just explain what we associate our failures and successes with, but it also speaks to the motivation that follows a success or failure experience. If we assign our failures to external or uncontrollable factors such as the weather, other people's actions, or luck, as we often do, there is no real motivation to reflect on the failure and make changes to impact the outcome in the future. The situation seems outside of our control to change so we do not make any changes (Weiner 549).


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Since we view other people's experiences differently than our own, we are more inclined to attribute their failures to internal and controllable factors such as effort, ability, or amount of time spent, and that might motivate us to change our own behaviors. This explains clearly what happened in the study of the heart surgeons, and it gives individuals a working model to better learn from failure.

Colleges and universities have long seen attribution theory at work in students. Students who underperform or who fail to meet expectations of being a college student often link their failure to unchangeable internal things such as their own lack of aptitude or ability. They believe they just are not capable. They also tend to associate their successes with less stable external factors like luck. This combination of attributions makes it challenging for students to stay motivated because it does not seem like there is much they can actually change about their failures and successes (Perry et al. 691).

If student attributions are challenged, research suggests they can be encouraged to alter them toward more useful ones that can help them stay motivated. Interventions in student attribution retraining are fairly simple in design: talk with students about what they think causes their successes and failures. In a review of studies on the topic, colleges presented students with attribution suggestions through a variety of interventions. In one study, students were merely asked to imagine specific reasons for failure and success in specific scenarios. Several colleges showed videos or interviewed upper class students who shared stories of their undesirable first semester grade point average and how they were able to improve over time through internal, controllable choices. In one study, feedback on exams was oriented toward helpful attribution suggestions based on exam outcomes (Perry et al. 694-703).

One of the leading researchers in this field, Dr. Carol Dweck, boiled students' attributional tendencies down to just two general mindsets: *fixed mindset* and *growth mindset*. She found that students with fixed mindsets were terrible at accurately predicting their own abilities and performance, but those with a growth mindset were highly accurate. Those



Those with the growth mindset were open to learning.

with the growth mindset were open to learning and therefore needed accurate information about their current abilities in order to effectively improve. The exciting basis for much of her work is that mindsets can be changed. Similar to the college studies mentioned above, Dweck suggests interventions that help students alter their mindsets from fixed toward growth primarily through sharing. Her interventions display students who started out failing, learned a new mindset, then ultimately succeeded through use of that new mindset (2).

Heart surgeons and college students learn from others' failures, and so do the rest of us. I mentioned some of my own comical parenting failures earlier, but I have to say that when I was a new mom, none of my failures felt funny, light, or shareable in any way. I felt like everything was out of my control and good days were just lucky. I was lucky, in a way, to have a few great mom-friends who were willing to set some of my parenting failure attributions straight through sharing of their own failures. Hearing about others' failures allows us to consider what factors to associate those failures with in different ways than we naturally tend to for our own failures. And importantly, we have the opportunity to choose how to move forward with what we believe and what we do with our own failure experiences, hopefully learning and growing into more compassionate and forgiving people.

Minor failures are just as important to share as major ones

If NASA's catastrophic mishap with the *Columbia* global orbital vehicle taught us anything alongside its first lesson of the importance of making failure a normal part of an organization, it is this: Minor failures are failures worth paying attention to. There is a great deal of space between a single chunk of insulating foam flying off of a rocket in one otherwise uneventful mission and an entire space shuttle exploding in another mission because of a single chunk of insulating foam flying off, but all along that continuum, failure should be called what it is: failure. If we rush to redefine or contort small failures into something that looks more like success, we rob ourselves of the rich potential for learning that can take place as a result of those failures.

Near-failure was a term developed in a study of the commercial banking industry to describe banks that began to experience decline of some

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kind but later recovered. But it is a bit of a misnomer. Similar to how *Atlantis* and several other shuttle launches were not exactly failures but certainly experienced failure, the banks highlighted in the study experienced failure, but it was not catastrophic, as the banks did not close down operations. The study discovered that banks learned a great deal from both the near-failure experiences of other banks as well as the total, bank-closing failures. One of the findings of the study indicated that those smaller failures provided a rich data set for other banks to rely on, in essence, a set of pre-post experiments that emphasized possible solutions to failure situations, a template for navigating failures (Kim and Miner 690).

What is great about near-failures or those smaller, seemingly less significant failures is that they can teach some of the same lessons that the big, awful failures can without nearly the same negative emotional load or consequences. In fact, without the consequences or emotional toll, we can more clearly, calmly, and directly learn from the situation.



Failures impact students' identities.

In the world of higher education, failure stories have an impact on student identity development. Arthur Chickering was one of the originators of an entire body of research on student identity development theories, and he found that people involved in the lives of students, be it faculty, administrative staff, even custodians and food service workers, had an impact on their identities. Chickering states,

By letting students know our own occupational history, and by sharing our feelings about it and the reasons for our moves, we permit students to vicariously test their own occupational plans and aspirations. By letting students know our home and family, the way we spend our time, the organizing needs and satisfactions for our particular life-style, we provide a wider base for clarification of their future existence. (Chickering and Reisser 329)

New York Times writer David Brooks once announced in his class that he would be cancelling office hours due to a personal issue that a friend was coming to help him sort out. It was a minute and momentary failure—one that impacted very few and only for a day. His inbox later that day contained fifteen or so messages from his students noting that they were thinking of him or praying for him, and the entire class dynamic noticeably shifted from that day forward. Cognitive science research has shown a connection between emotions and learning; emotions help guide us toward what to pay attention to, get excited about, or remember. His point was that perhaps we learn best from those we love because we can connect with them and the ideas they represent. Perhaps failure sharing works similarly—that when we hear stories of failure from those we look up to or admire, they mean something more and we can learn more from them.

Failure stories have an impact on student identity development.

Failure stories, even small ones, as Chickering notes, can temper our individual experiences and understandings of the world. Individuals have relatively limited sets of experiences that construct their understanding of who they are. When we have people in our lives, especially people we look up to, who are willing to appropriately disclose some of their own struggles, failures, and trials, even in the smallest of ways, our imagination for alternative paths of development gets broadened, refined, and attributed differently, often to our benefit. Character can grow from the pain of failure.²

Now is probably a good time to pause for a moment in this discussion of failure sharing and put it into some sort of perspective. Thus far, a reader might get the impression that I am advocating for perpetual, fully transparent, megaphone-blast sharing of everything we have ever failed at to anyone who will listen. Failure sharing is good, so all of the failure sharing is better, right? I would like to suggest that failure sharing is much more effective when done with a bit of intention.


In the book *Encouragement*, the authors posit that we can carefully craft our conversations with others in such a way that purposefully brings others encouragement. One way we can do that is to ensure our

comments come from a place of love, or genuine care for those we are speaking with, and point toward a place of fear within them in an attempt to reduce or alleviate that fear (Crabb and Allender). Failure sharing with intention to care for and encourage another should reduce the temptation to overshare, share to be counseled ourselves, or share to just make conversation. It serves as a useful guide for how, when, and to what extent we share failures.

The Failure Institute, the research branch of the FUN enterprise, began researching failures in entrepreneurship in Mexico and quickly realized that they could make an impact on people’s abilities to learn from others’ failures, especially those that might need the advice the most. Research out of the Failure Institute focuses on tech startups in developing nations, women in business, low-income individuals, rural startups, and college student startups. The conclusions of much of their research are not earth-shattering: take time to grieve and recover from a failure, avoid common pitfalls with money, don’t blame yourself for failure so that you are motivated to look for problems and solutions. But this is exactly what groups who might ordinarily be prone to failure need, just like the college students in the studies of attribution retraining needed. The Failure Institute and FUN are broadcasting failure stories and lessons to be learned in order to make a big difference and even encourage individuals (“The Failure Institute”).

Conclusion: Make failure sharing a cause for celebration

Failure happens. It is inevitable. Heart surgeons, rocket scientists, college students, moms and dads, football players, bankers, entrepreneurs, social media influencers—we all do it. Our society encourages us to keep those failures under wraps. Post only the good angles, write about only the success stories, sweep the small failures under the rug. All of this failure hiding is hurting us, teaching us that failure is not normal and that we are the only ones doing it all wrong. Sharing failures with others offers a release from all of that pressure of perfection. It is an act of kindness and




Sharing failures with others offers a release from all of that pressure of perfection.

generosity as much as a moment of honesty and vulnerability—and it displays good character.

Failure sharing is an essential part of understanding our identities. When we share failures with others and receive failure stories from others, there is an undeniable potential for positive impact on who we are. When we share our failures, we

normalize failure, pulling it back into our modern, hyper-positive culture as something that is normal, natural, and okay. We can learn from others' failures in ways that are different than learning from our own by imagining accurate attributions for our own failures, which motivates us to learn from failure. And even small failures matter, often providing rich opportunities for learning. It is important to learn to share failure stories with each other for the healthy development and encouragement of identities that are prepared for the realities of the world we live in. Failure sharing helps us embrace failure as a normal, significant, and even good part of life.



It is important to learn to share failure stories with each other to encourage identities that are prepared for the realities of the world.

Let's celebrate failure together. Let's own it, name it, pick it apart, support one another through it, learn from it, grow through it, and better understand ourselves and others because of it. Our identities, the very make up of who we are, depend on it.

Lindsey M. Ward, Assistant Professor of Young Adult Formation at the University of Dubuque, invests in students' lives through courses that help them discover and live into their purpose and calling in a complex and complicated world, lessons she also hopes to instill in her three young children. She holds an EdD from Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin.

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Photo credit “A-Day Game football scrimmage for University of Alabama with coach Nick Saban analyzing every move” p. 18: Carol M. Highsmith, Wikimedia Commons/public domain

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Photo credit p. 24: Mary K. Bryant

Notes

¹ For more on sports and character, see Joseph Sabin’s article, “Shifting Our Mindset: Sports, Character, and Identity” on pp. 30-51 of this issue.

² For further discussions relating discomfort and pain to character growth, see the previous issue of this journal, *Character and . . . Discomfort*.

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