

*“When it was dark,  
you always carried the sun  
in your hand for me.”*

~Sean O’Casey, Three More Plays:  
The Silver Tassie, Purple Dust, Red Roses for Me

## Lesson #9: Finding Hope After Failure



**Topic: Using detective skills to find the clues to why we’ve failed so we can solve the mystery and succeed going forward.**

### **When Failure Happens to Us**

We learned that we must approach life knowing that obstacles will arise. Obstacles are challenges we can overcome. Once we overcome them, we have more wisdom, tools, and the capacity to be. Now, we are going to look at our understanding of failure and how we can use our hope tool to learn from our failures.

- 1) How do you feel when you do poorly in class, on a test or perhaps a work project? Do you feel disappointed and discouraged? Do you feel hopeful and motivated? What do you say to yourself in your head about your abilities? What do you say to yourself about why you didn’t do well?
- 2) When you do poorly on one test or project, do you try harder the next time or put in the same effort? Other than your effort, do you change *how* you prepare or study?

### **Finding Hope After a Failure**

When we do badly on a test or an assignment, what does it say about us?

The answer might surprise you—absolutely nothing. It says absolutely nothing about us. The reason we fail at things has very little to do with ***who we are or how smart we are***. ***Instead, it has to do with how we go about it*** (studying and working.)

So, when we fail or do poorly, it isn’t because there’s something wrong with us, it’s because there is something wrong with our method of preparing and studying. However, to improve our method, we first must overcome a tricky reality—we’re likely to feel discouraged and even helpless.

There are many reactions to failing or doing poorly. We feel disappointed, discouraged, annoyed, and even helpless. We worry we’re not smart enough or good enough to succeed, and we feel like giving up. In other words, we lose hope.

But here's the interesting thing—although these feelings can be quite strong they're also incorrect, at least when it comes to school or work. Sure, some of us might need to put in more effort or do things differently than others, but every one of us can do well—we just need to figure out how.

To succeed and do better, we first must get over the bad feelings that are giving us incorrect messages and taking away our hope. These strong, but incorrect feelings are coming from our brain, but which part of our brain?

We use our Upstairs brain to regain our hope. The best way to do that is to make our Upstairs brain feel more in control of the situation—and we can help our Upstairs brain feel more in control by acting. As a rule, when we act we feel more in control. But what action should we take?

Remember, the reason we failed was not because we aren't smart enough or good enough, but because we need to change our system of studying—*how* we go about preparing and learning at home. Let's look at some of the reasons someone might do poorly on a test or work assignment:

- A. We didn't give ourselves enough time to study or prepare, or we didn't keep up with homework and reading which meant we had too much to learn in the time we had left.
- B. We gave ourselves enough time, but we got distracted and didn't use the time well.
- C. Our method of studying/preparation wasn't effective enough (e.g., we read the chapter in our math book, but didn't do practice problems or we didn't ask questions on project expectations).
- D. We didn't understand the material well enough.
- E. We got nervous and worried and had trouble concentrating during the exam/project.

## Getting Our Hope Back by Changing How We Study/Prepare

Once we've identified the reasons we might have done poorly, we must figure out what we do about them. How we can approach things differently going forward? Let's go through these reasons one by one and see what solutions we can come up with that might help us do better in the future.

### A. Not allotting enough time for study/preparation:

What would you change going forward if you didn't give yourself enough time to study?

Here are some time management tips: Allot more time than you have previously to complete homework, study/exam or assignment prep, set a clear start time (the day or hour), make a schedule of when to study and check to make sure you don't have conflicting obligations (like a family event on a weekend), add a cushion of time for unexpected developments.

#### B. Getting distracted:

1. Think about possible distractions.

Some examples are screens (phones, gaming systems, TVs, tablets and laptops), friends (friends dropping by or friend came to study and you ended up talking instead), TV, sleep, family members, noise, lack of privacy, lack of room/space to study, being hungry or tired, daydreaming, games.

2. Think about possible solutions to each of the distractions listed.

Examples may be to turn off screens when you're studying/working, find a quiet space, make an agreement with yourself to only watch TV after studying for X hours, grab a small snack or nap if you're tired, but make sure to set the alarm clock to wake up, discuss with friends/family members to study/prepare first and talk only after you have completed those tasks.

#### C. Finding more effective study methods:

Elicit and list study methods for preparing for exams, writing papers, or doing projects such as: Rereading text, highlighting text, summarizing text, memorizing facts or spelling, doing practice questions/problems, talking about topic with friend/family, explaining topic to someone else, flashcards, internet research, and others.

We all use different methods and every person needs to figure out which methods work best for them. Try different methods to find the one that is most effective for you—the one that helps you learn best. For example, some of us work best alone and others work best with a friend or co-worker.

We also must consider that a method that works best for one topic, might not work best for another. For example, we might do best memorizing history facts alone, but figuring out math problems with a friend. We should be prepared to try different methods until we find the one that is most effective for us.

#### D. Not understanding/grasping material well:

In most situations, there is often more than one person who doesn't fully understand the material, even if nobody asks questions. The problem is it can feel awkward to ask questions, especially if we think we're the only person who didn't understand something. And then when we see no one else asks questions, we feel as though we're the only ones who didn't understand the material. Of course, that can make us feel even less confident and hopeful about succeeding. So, to overcome that feeling and get our hope back, we must act by asking for help afterward. The question is, who should we ask?

Possibilities include asking a friend/co-worker who understands the subject or material, approaching a supervisor or teacher when they are available to ask for help, or searching for YouTube videos that explain the topic.

#### E. Getting anxious/nervous and having trouble concentrating:

It is common to get nervous before exams or an important meeting, or to get distracted with a troubling thought. The problem is worrisome and troubling thoughts make it hard to concentrate and focus. The first thing we need to do is clear our mind, so we can focus on the task at hand. This would be a great time to utilize one or more self-regulating techniques.



#### Ryan's History Problem

Ryan wasn't good at history. There were just too many people and events to remember and too many dates to learn. He did his homework every week and he studied as hard as he could for tests, but he just kept doing poorly. So, when the teacher announced there would be another test the next week, he felt quite hopeless about his chances of doing well.

His friends Ivan and Shawn realized there was something wrong when Ryan was quiet at lunch.

"I hate history tests," Ryan admitted. "They make me feel stupid."

"You just have to try harder," Shawn responded.

"I have tried harder," Ryan insisted. "And I still do badly."

"Then don't study harder," Ivan suggested, "study differently."

"What do you mean?" Ryan asked, confused.

"How do you study for history tests?" Ivan asked.

"I read the chapter in the book," Ryan said, "twice, sometimes three times."

"That's not what I do," Ivan said.

Ivan was good in history, so Ryan was curious. "What do you do?" he asked Ivan.

"First, I read the chapter. Then, I tell my mom the story of what happened in it."

"You remember things that well from reading the chapter only once?" Ryan asked.

"No, I sit with the book open, read a bit and then tell her about the events. But I try to make it like a real story. Remembering facts is difficult. Remembering stories is much easier. And telling stories helps me remember the facts in the story I told."

Ryan decided that he would try studying Ivan's way and something interesting happened the moment he made that decision. He began to feel hopeful again.

## Hope Exercise

1. Why did Ryan dread the upcoming history test at the start of the story?
  - a. **He believed he was bad in history and felt hopeless about being able to improve.**
  - b. He had something else scheduled that day.
  - c. He thought the teacher made it impossible to pass.
  - d. He never studied.
  
2. Why did Ivan's suggestion make him feel more hopeful?
  - a. It proved he wasn't good at history, so he decided he would focus on other subjects.
  - b. **Figuring out what he could do differently made him feel more hopeful.**
  - c. He knew it would 100% work!
  
3. If Ryan doesn't improve after trying Ivan's way of studying, he should:
  - a. give up.
  - b. never talk to Ivan again.
  - c. **try a new approach or a combination of approaches until he finds what works best for him.**
  
4. When we fail or do poorly, it must mean there is something wrong with us.
  - a. True
  - b. **False**
  
5. When we fail, it is common for us to feel disappointed, helpless or annoyed and lose our hope. Which of the following ways can we restore our hope and act:

- a. Remembering the reason we failed was not because we are not good enough or smart enough.
- b. Finding how we can approach the situation differently.
- c. Identifying the reason or reasons we might have done poorly.
- d. Figuring out solutions that will help us do better in the future.
- e. **All the above.**

 **Helpful Resource**

When you are not doing as well as you would like on a topic or project, the following checklist will help you figure out what to change about how you prepare. You might have to do this exercise more than once to get the result you want.

**A. Do I need to change how much time I put into studying and preparing?**

I usually spend \_\_\_\_ hours to complete \_\_\_\_\_ assigned tasks.

Instead, I should spend \_\_\_\_ hours.

I usually spend \_\_\_\_ hours to prepare for an important test, meeting, or presentation.

Instead I should spend \_\_\_\_ hours.

I usually start working on a project \_\_\_\_\_ before it is due.

Instead, I should start \_\_\_\_ before it is due.

**I usually start working on assignments:**

A. Immediately.

B. When I feel like it.

C. Days before the due date.

D. In the morning of the day it's due.

Instead I should do my work: \_\_\_\_\_

**B. The distractions I need to avoid are:**

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**C. The other methods of preparing I can try if my method isn't working well enough are:**

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**D. The people I can ask for help** if I don't understand the assigned task are:

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**E. If I get nervous or worried about a test or project and have trouble concentrating** I can:

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