October 12, 2016

**Failures and Defeats**

**Introduction**

We often have a tendency to highlight our successes and avoid identifying and reflecting on our failures and defeats. This is probably human nature. Yet failures and defeats are part of life and can be powerful developmental forces. At the same time, they can also have adverse effects on our identity, efficacy, and agency.

The promises that a process of defining and analyzing personal failures and defeats can be a very positive experience.

Questions:

* Is failure defined as the result of failing? How, if at all, is failure different from defeat?
* Can failure have a good side? What makes failure good?
* Is that an oxymoron to aspire to be a failure?
* What is the relevance of all of this to Duke students and alumni?

**Definitions:[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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| **Noun** | **Verb** |
| **Failure:**  Unsuccessful. He was a failure. The crops failed.  Synonyms include downfall, lemon, user, wreck, and defeat. | **Fail:**  To fail. He failed the exam. She failed to observe the traffic light change. |
| **Defeat:**  A setback. Being bested. Losing.  Synonyms include loss, setback, rebuffed, beaten, and failure. | **Defeat:**  To overcome adversity and prevail. She defeated him. They defeated the enemy. |

Comments

* *Failure* as a noun is important, especially when it’s about a person. It is deeper and in n some ways, an identity marker. In contrast, failure as a verb seems to be a bit more situational and somewhat similar with the meaning of defeat.
* *Defea*t as a noun is more situational than failure, especially if no one expects perfection. Athletic teams are good example in that defeats are expected and they do not necessarily preclude success. In contrast, as a verb, defeat has a very positive connotation.

**Failures and Defeats: Analysis**

There is value in identifying and reflecting on failures and defeats in life because they can be significant learning and developmental experiences.

* Categorize losses and setbacks as failures and defeats.
* Reflect on the causes. To what extent were they because of the situation and to what extent were they because of you?
* Reflect on the lessons learned. What were the effects on and/or what did you learn about your values? What did you learn about your attributes?
* Review the lists of failures and defeats and see if there any commonalities within and between the less that may be general conclusions.
* Review the lists of failures and defeats and see if your evaluation of them changed over time. Were there instances when at the time, you defined the incident as a failure and you now define it as defeat (or vice versa)?
* To what extent does your classification of failures and defeats reflect your mindset regarding the definition of intelligence and whether or not intelligence grows based on effort and experiences?[[2]](#footnote-2)
* What were the positive outcomes of your failures? What, if any, were the effects on your humility, your perspective, and your resilience? What did you learn about the love and support of others?
* What aspects of your failures and defeats caused personal pain? What were the underlying values behind this?

1. Source: Dictionary.com [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Carol Dweck [↑](#footnote-ref-2)