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Chapel Talk

January 8, 2021

Reapproaching Failure

In 1990, John Carmack and John Romero, two of my personal heroes, created a small game titled "Dangerous Dave In Copyright Infringement." This game was a one-to-one remake of Super Mario Bros. 3, but rather than running on Nintendo's hardware, it was running on a home computer. To those unfamiliar with the power of computers in 1990, this was a technological breakthrough. Even though video-game consoles had been doing it for years, a mechanic known as "side-scrolling" was thought to be impossible for home-computers, at least until these two came along.

After all their hard work and sleepless nights developing this groundbreaking technology, Carmack and Romero approached Nintendo with this game as an example of what they were capable of doing. They proposed an offer to Nintendo, in which they would *legally* port their games to home computers. This deal would allow Nintendo to corner the market with technology no one else had, and would all but guarantee Carmack and

Romero futures in the industry. Nintendo refused their offer. They had failed.

However, in this failure, there was a seed of potential. Rather than porting games, they harnessed this technology to create their own, entitled "Commander Keen." While most of you probably haven't heard of it, it was immensely successful. Using the funds, the two of them continued to push the limits of home-computers, and eventually created two of the most influential and important video games in history, "Doom" and "Quake." Without that initial failure, these two games would never have been made, and Carmack and Romero would be forgotten.

Of course, this is only one of countless stories of the importance of failure. Despite our dreams of perfection, the truth is mistakes are unavoidable. While many of us like to run from our shortcomings, when we stop and rethink how we approach it, we can realize failure is just as important as success, if not more so.

Now don't get me wrong: I'm not saying we should all give up on our dreams and strive to fail in everything we do, quite the opposite. Succeeding at the activities we find valuable can be incredibly rewarding and fun; however, failing at those very same activities can be just as, if not more, worth-while. Sure, we've all heard the classic "learn from your

mistakes," but tell me how often we actually sit down and review a disheartening event as opposed to turning our back on it and hoping it doesn't come back to bite us.

I will be the first to admit I have a bit of a procrastination issue. Just a few months ago, I was rushing to finish my application the day before a college deadline. I had far too much to do in far too little time. I needed to finish an essay, a few short answers, and fill out an annoying amount of basic information about myself. Luckily, around lunchtime that day, a friend messaged me a screenshot of an email he had received from the same college I was applying to. I couldn't believe my eyes, so I hurriedly checked my own Gmail to discover that the deadline had been extended by two entire weeks! Now I had plenty of time to work through the application, splitting it into each section so as to avoid the stress of procrastination. Needless to say, two weeks later, I found myself racing the clock with an essay, a few short answers, and an annoying amount of basic information I still needed to finish.

Instead of learning from my initial mistake, I refused to acknowledge it, hoping that some miracle would lift the burden of applying to college entirely. In other words, I didn't take advantage of my failure. When we treat our mistakes like that, we truly don't gain anything at all, except more

stress and anxiety, and so a failure in that sense is a complete waste. If we approach our mistakes in a different manner, we can take advantage of them and still harvest immense worth.

The first step in this process is simple but admittedly difficult. Realizing and admitting that you've messed up takes strength. There is a misconception that admitting your mistakes makes you appear weak, and instead, you should double down and defend yourself. Maybe create some explanation or excuse to clear yourself of all blame and simply make it a matter of bad luck. Often, we do this without even thinking about it. But clearing yourself of responsibility is not rising above the problem, it's running from it.

In this process, it's important to remember that everybody makes mistakes. It seems obvious and we've all heard it a million times, but it's incredibly easy to fall into the hole of comparing yourself to someone else, and when you do, you tend to only ever see their highs and your lows, which is never a fair comparison. In a similar sense, remember that very few people actually remember, or even care about your small everyday mess-ups. Whenever you're lying in bed at 2 am thinking about how you stuttered while answering that one question in class, know that literally,

nobody else remembers. Obviously, social-anxiety isn't that simple, but hopefully, that knowledge is still a small comfort.

Luckily, learning from your mistakes is not a lone effort. Good friends can be hard to find, but having them around is absolutely priceless. Even though it may sometimes hurt, it's important to have friends who aren't afraid to call you out when you mess up. It's terrifying to appear vulnerable in front of other people, but when you drop the facade of perfection and are willing to talk about your shortcomings and problems, I've found that good friends will also open up, and you will all be better off for it.

Once you acknowledge your failures, it's important to identify what you can still do about them. This is a case-by-case basis, which sometimes is as simple as redoing a small project with no real consequences to maybe offering a sincere apology for something that can't be undone. To be completely honest, I don't have much clear cut advice here because every mistake is unique. It really just comes down to reviewing what went wrong and why. Using that information, you should be able to piece together how best to fix the situation and hopefully prevent a similar scenario in the future.

I will say that we often hyperbolize the stakes of our mishaps. Don't get me wrong, there are definitely plenty of scenarios where a lot is on the

line, whether it be material resources or relationships. However, more often than we realize, the only real consequence is a bit of time wasted. This might be blasphemy to some of you, but getting a low-grade on an assignment isn't the end of the world by a long shot. Grades are important, but when they come at the cost of your mental wellbeing or sleep deprivation, it's alright to lose a few points. We often get caught believing that whatever we're doing at the moment is going to decide the fate of the rest of our lives. Not only is this an exaggerated lie, but placing that much pressure on yourself isn't helping anything, and is only going to be more damaging in the long run. To clarify, I'm not at all saying our mistakes don't carry real consequences; rather, I am saying that we often add extra unnecessary burdens onto ourselves. Our expectations of ourselves tend to be drastically higher than the expectations of others. When you are trying something new, no one is expecting you to be perfect at it, people are expecting you to make mistakes, and that's totally okay. So in that sense, be a bit nicer to yourself.

Once I was personally able to shift my view of failure from one of disappointment to one of opportunity, my life improved drastically. Instead of being paralyzed by the fear of messing up anytime I tried something new, I looked forward to seeing how I could improve. This outlook opened

up so many opportunities and ignited interests I never knew about. For

example, programming appeared immensely complicated and terrifying at

first, but I still chose to take intro to programming and fell in love with code.

Rather than worrying about how people would judge me if I messed up or

did something wrong, I realized that the only one who would actually be

judging me is myself. After realizing that messing up isn't always something

to be ashamed of, so much anxiety was lifted off of my shoulders. When

you are free to mess up and make mistakes, you are free to be yourself.

And being yourself is far more important than being perfect.

     Thank you.