

When Failure Cuts

A CONVERSATION ON HOW FAILURE CAN BE ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT FOR HIGH ACHIEVING AND INTELLIGENT INDIVIDUALS.




Disclaimer

The author of this slide deck and presentation does not represent to be a health care professional. Any statements or artifacts presented should not be construed as medical advice. Although efforts were made to collect and share reliable information this talk is not intended to represent a comprehensive body of knowledge and may not reflect information that is relevant to you.

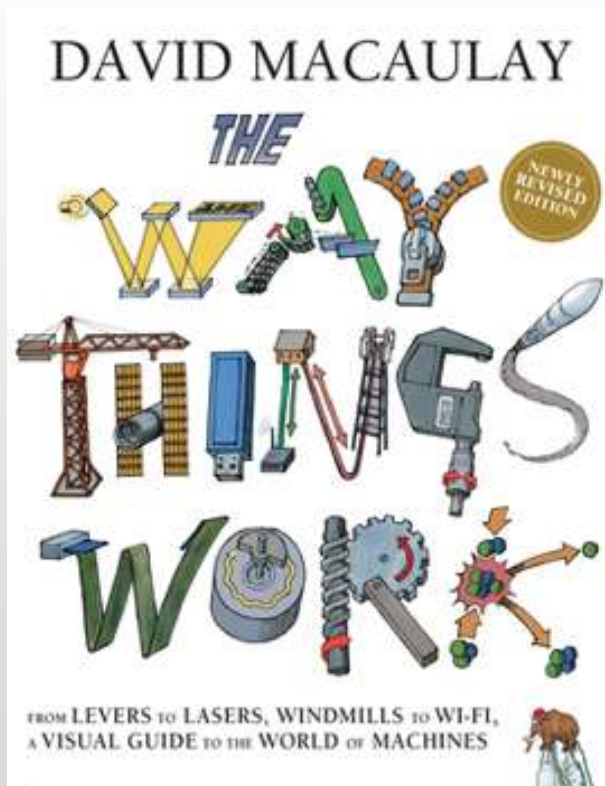
If you have questions or are curious about topics in this discussion you should speak to a licensed healthcare professional.

(I'm just some dude, don't listen to me.)

Hi, I'm Dan.

- Unemployed since May
 - Second time in my career, the last only lasted three weeks.
- Lots of letters behind my name:
 - CISA, CISSP, PMP, Prosci, GIAC-SSAP, SHRM-CP, etc.
 - MS, ABD-EdD, MS #2 in 2025
- High IQ, side saddled w/ ADHD  and anxiety mixed in.
- Dealt with D³ these past few months.
 - Doubt
 - Defeat
 - Depression

The Hacker Mindset



- Understanding the why, and the how, behind our world and the creations within it.
- A belief that everything can be explained, any problem can be solved, and any obstacle overcome.
- A relentless curiosity, identifying confines and constraints, what makes things the way they are?

The Questions

- Why am I out of work?
- What can I do differently?
- What caused this to happen?
- How long will this last?
- What if this is just it?

Why is D³ such a devastating crush!?!?
(Doubt, Defeat, Depression)

Am I the only one who feels this way?

THINK SILENTLY FOR A MOMENT...

Am I the only one who feels this way?

SO, LIKE ANY GOOD NERD, WHAT DOES PEER REVIEW RESEARCH TELL US?

Research Tip

You should always purchase academic journal articles directly or use college and university libraries.

Remember that sites like sci-hub.se may be legal in Sweden, but they are prohibited elsewhere.

Physical Health

High intelligence: A risk factor for psychological and physiological overexcitabilities. (Karpinski, 2018)

High intelligence is touted as being predictive of positive outcomes including educational success and income level. However, little is known about the difficulties experienced among this population. Specifically, those with a high intellectual capacity (hyper brain) possess overexcitabilities in various domains that may predispose them to certain psychological disorders as well as physiological conditions involving elevated sensory, and altered immune and inflammatory responses (hyper body). The present study surveyed members of American Mensa, Ltd. ($n=3715$) in order to explore psychoneuroimmunological (PNI) processes among those at or above the 98th percentile of intelligence. Participants were asked to self-report prevalence of both diagnosed and/or suspected mood and anxiety disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and physiological diseases that include environmental and food allergies, asthma, and autoimmune disease. High statistical significance and a remarkably high relative risk ratio of diagnoses for all examined conditions were confirmed among the Mensa group 2015 data when compared to the national average statistics. This implicates high IQ as being a potential risk factor for affective disorders, ADHD, ASD, and for increased incidence of disease related to immune dysregulation. Preliminary findings strongly support a hyper brain/hyper body association which may have substantial individual and societal implications and warrants further investigation to best identify and serve this at-risk population.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intell.2017.09.001>

Bright, but allergic and neurotic? A critical investigation of the “overexcitable genius” hypothesis. (Fries, 2022)

Results and Discussion: Compared to the general population, our sample exhibited considerably elevated prevalences in autism spectrum disorders (risk ratio/ $RR = 2.25$), chronic fatigue syndrome ($RR = 5.69$), depression ($RR = 4.38$), generalized anxiety ($RR = 3.82$), and irritable bowel syndrome ($RR = 3.76$). Contrary to previous accounts, neither asthma, allergies, nor autoimmune diseases were elevated. We show that this subsample of intellectually gifted persons faces specific health challenges compared to the general population. The reasons for this remain speculative, as we find little evidence for previously proposed immunological explanations. However, it is possible that the effects are caused by sample selectiveness (i.e., membership in a high-IQ society) rather than high IQ itself.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1051910>

But Why? ...

As the field of PNI grows and develops, many discrete pathways connecting psychology and immunity are being discovered (Ader, 2001). For highly intelligent individuals with overexcitabilities, even normal stimuli such as a clothing tag or a common but unnatural sound can become physically painful. Continuous seemingly minor insults such as these may mimic a low level, chronic stress which can eventually launch an inappropriate immune response. As with other environmental threats, like an infection or toxin, the body believes it is in danger. When the sympathetic nervous system becomes chronically activated, it finds itself in a continuous fight, flight, or freeze state, which triggers a series of changes in the brain and the body that can dysregulate immune function (Glaser et al., 1992;

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Mental Health

Psychology Today: The Burdens of Intelligence

Marty Nemko, September 2016

- Intelligent people are more aware of a situation's complexities and so are more likely to worry and/or be pessimistic. As Charles Darwin wrote, "Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge." In short, ignorance is bliss.
- Intelligent people are at risk of appearing "full of themselves." But the alternative is to hide their intelligence. No-win.
- They're expected to *always* be intelligent. But even smart people aren't always "on" and then, like anyone else, they're more mistake-prone. But they and others are particularly hard on them because of the disparity between their usual functioning and their error.

- Intelligent people are expected to make a big difference in the world. Lest they choose a less ambitious career, they're often denigrated as "not living up to their potential." For example, one of the more intelligent people I knew in high school chose to forgo college in favor of driving an ice cream truck because it constantly gives people pleasure and he enjoyed driving and talking to kids. Also, it avoided his having to go to college, which he perceived as a poor use of his time and money. He read voraciously but only what he was motivated to read. Everyone blamed him for "not living up to his potential."
- Intelligent people are aware of their high ability. So they tend to rely too much on their own judgment. No matter how intelligent a person is, obtaining outside input often leads to better decisions. So they may end up making worse decisions than do somewhat less intelligent people who are aware of their limitations.
- Most intelligent people's career and self-esteem are tied to their intelligence. Aging's inevitable cognitive decline tends to especially hurt smart people, practically and psychologically.

Rationality and Intelligence

K. Stanovich, M. Toplak, R. West

We get surprised when someone whom we consider to be smart acts stupidly. When someone we consider to be not so smart acts stupidly, we tend not to be so surprised. But why should we be so surprised in the first case? A typical dictionary definition of the adjectival form of the word “smart” is “characterized by sharp quick thought; bright” or “having or showing quick intelligence or ready mental capacity.” Thus, being smart seems a lot like being intelligent, according to the dictionary. Dictionaries also tell us that a stupid person is “slow to learn or understand; lacking or marked by lack of intelligence.” Thus, if a smart person is intelligent and “stupid” means a lack of intelligence, then the “smart person being stupid” phrase seems to make no sense.

<https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11252.001.0001>

13 Reasons Why a High IQ Can Make You Less Happy

Psychology Today: Leon Seltzer, 2021

1. The very intelligent know they're intelligent, so they're prone to setting lofty expectations for themselves that too often they can't meet. Thus, they're frequently disappointed (at times depressed) by their level of accomplishment falling substantially below their ideals. And, just as important, they may fail to meet the expectations *others* have of them.

2. High-IQ individuals are more apt to have anxiety issues. They tend to think more about the negative things that happen to them, ruminating and replaying scenarios to learn what went awry. They may attend to or obsess about matters that others would view as petty or inconsequential.

3. Very smart people don't necessarily make better decisions. They're likely to inject personal biases into their transactions, which can seriously undermine their objectivity. Having a high IQ doesn't eliminate them from being afflicted by as many wrongheaded assumptions or blind spots as others.

Where We May Struggle

HBR: 5 Ways Smart People Sabotage Their Success

Alice Boyes, November 13, 2018

1. Smart people sometimes devalue other skills, like relationship building, and over-concentrate on intellect. Very smart people sometimes see their success as inevitable because of their intellect, and don't see other skills as important. For example, an individual who finds workplace diplomacy difficult might write this off as an irritation rather than as a core skill required for their role. Similarly, they might see it as critical for a secretary to be personable, but not an executive. Therefore they don't invest time and effort in developing these skills.

These views don't come out of nowhere. Most people have a natural bias towards wanting to capitalize on their strengths and, conversely, would prefer to avoid thinking about areas in which they're not naturally as strong. Bright kids typically receive a lot of reinforcement throughout their early lives that their intelligence is valuable. They grow up being told they're smart, and during their schooling, experience that success comes more easily to them than to others. It's easy to understand why, as a result, they would continue to focus on their intellect as adults.

3. Smart people often attach a lot of their self-esteem to being smart, which can decrease their resilience and lead to avoidance. If a lot of your self-esteem rests on your intelligence, it can be very difficult to be in situations that reveal chinks in your armor. That might be working with people who are even more skilled or intelligent, or receiving critical feedback, or taking a risk and failing. Any situation that triggers feeling not- smart is experienced as highly threatening. The smart person may even seek to avoid those situations, which ultimately holds the person back.

HBR: What High Achievers Need from Their Mentors

by Ruth Gotian and Andy Lopata, August 19, 2024

High achievers, while accustomed to success, still face failures and setbacks. Their resilience can be tested if they encounter rejection infrequently, making their confidence armor a bit thin. It may take them a bit more time and effort to brush off the rejection, and they need someone with greater perspective to help them see outside the immediate situation and realize that failure is not the end of the world.

Cultivate a Growth Mindset

Successful individuals thrive on achievement and live for the challenge of exploring the unknown. Maintaining a growth mindset is crucial for their continued development. High achievers need mentors who encourage them to embrace continuous learning and improvement. They should be introduced to new fields, technologies, or methodologies that can enhance their existing skills and push them out of their comfort zone. For instance, a seasoned executive might benefit from insights into emerging digital trends or innovative leadership practices.

Is intelligence related to perfectionism?

J Lavrijsen, B Soenens, M Vansteenkiste, K Verschueren
(2020)

Cognitive ability is related to a higher pursuit of personal standards, yet does not constitute a risk factor for excessive concerns about mistakes.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12606>

**How Can We
Face It?**

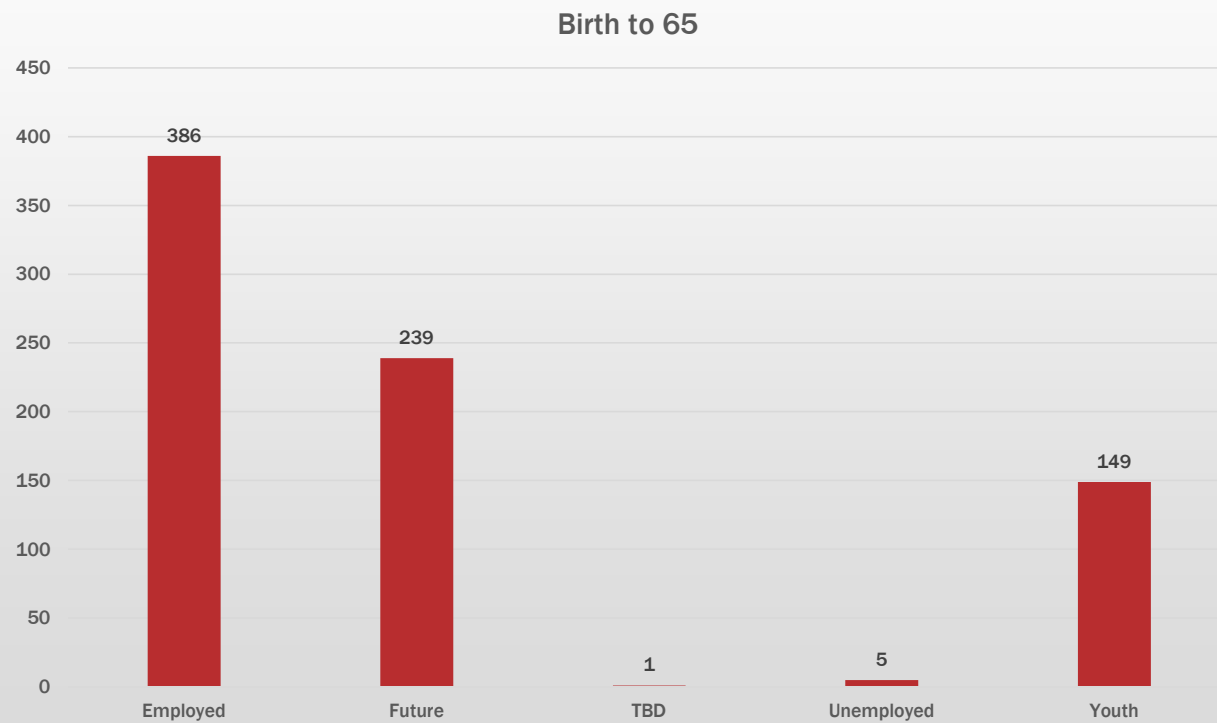
Dealing with the monkey...




Dealing with the monkey...



Apply Research to Our Failures



Celebrate Failures



flight belt

lightweight wings

arm loops

grips for wing movement

stirrup pedals

Flying Machine

Great Inventor. Great Failure. DaVinci was famous for many things, but he never successfully invented a flying machine.

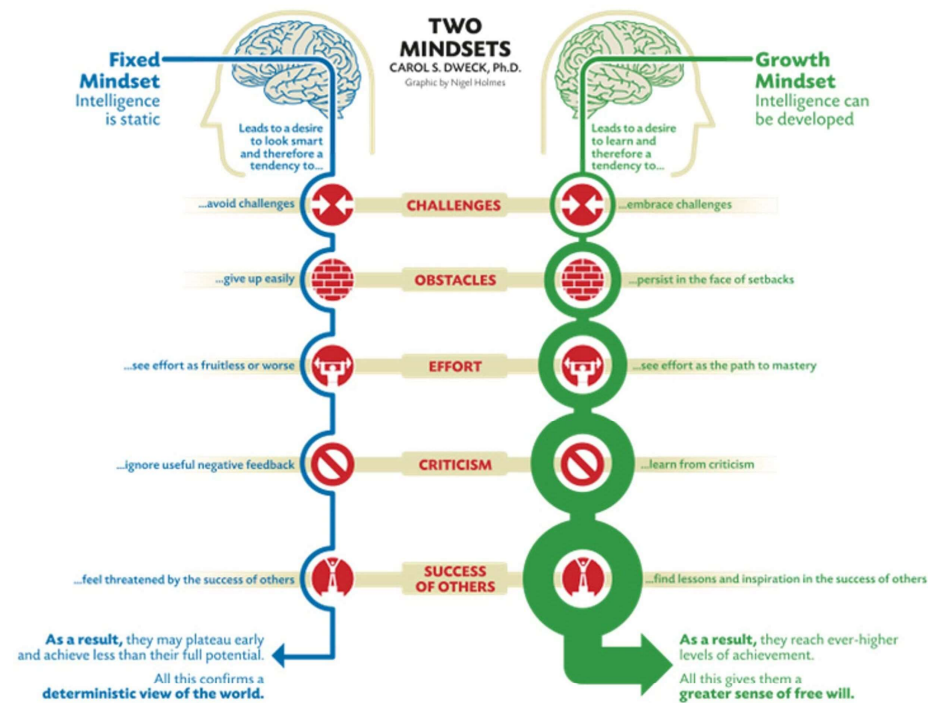
SO WHAT IS THIS
FAIL FEST?

It's a business conference that celebrates failure. But Why?

Without failure, innovation cannot exist. In fact, failure is necessary, and something to be celebrated. At Fail Fest, you'll hear successful speakers talk about how their failures shaped their path to success.

LEARN MORE ABOUT FAIL FEST

Adopt a Growth Mindset



Conclusion

➤ [Eur Psychiatry](#). 2022 Nov 18;66(1):e3. doi: 10.1192/j.eurpsy.2022.2343.

High intelligence is not associated with a greater propensity for mental health disorders

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PMID: 36396607 PMCID: PMC9879926 DOI: 10.1192/j.eurpsy.2022.2343

Abstract

Background: Studies reporting that highly intelligent individuals have more mental health disorders often have sampling bias, no or inadequate control groups, or insufficient sample size. We addressed these caveats by examining the difference in the prevalence of mental health disorders between individuals with high and average general intelligence (*g*-factor) in the UK Biobank.

