

Failure is Your Friend

By Richard Cage, San Antonio Academy 7th Grader

Gurgle, gurgle. Muscles straining, confidence and hope plummeting, my skis spread too far apart, my sweaty, wet hands slipped off the rope, and my body catapulted into the salty water of Port Aransas. My family circled our boat around and came up to me with optimistic faces. “You almost got it, Son,” my dad cheered me on. “Next try, you’ll get it! Each time you fall and get back up, you get better!” He’d already exclaimed those same words about nine times. My heart pounded, and I spat saltwater out of my nose and mouth. With my muscles aching, I felt like a nail being hammered back into a wall, no matter how many times it came back up. In my family, waterskiing is a long tradition. My sister had it down, my mother did, my dad did, my grandma did, and even my great-grandma did. But not me. At least, not yet. As far as I was concerned, I felt like a failure to my family.

“Please, can I just get back into the boat?” I begged my dad. “Maybe you should have a run this morning, or Mommy should.”

Dad shook his head.

“Just keep your skis straight, and you’ve got it,” he calmly informed me, like he had so many times before. There was nothing I could do about it. I groaned and swam back out to the rope. My muscles screamed at me, *STOP!* I turned them down, and before I counted to three, the boat engine squealed and surged forward. *Tuck your legs, like a ball,* I told myself. I got up and onto the surface of the water. Salt stinging my eyes, I repeated to myself, *don’t mess up. Don’t mess up.* My legs widened. *No, Richard, stop! Not again!* The salty sea reached out with its evil hands and sucked me

back into its treacherous waters. The hammer had pounded me into the wall again. I felt like a punching bag. I couldn't get up, but I knew what I had to do. Gritting my teeth, I told my dad I *would* get it right. I swam out to the rope. I grabbed it with my wet hands. I tipped my skis up with the rope in between them. The boat engine roared. This time, I only told myself one thing. *I will get this right.* Not I hope, not probably, but *I will.* I rose up out of my tucked ball, saltwater clawing at my exhausted body. *You got this,* I told myself. My legs widened, but I kept my focus. Mustering up all my strength, I pulled the skis together. I wouldn't let the hammer get me this time. And just like that, after a few short seconds, and a lot of short thoughts, I was doing it. I was water skiing! My family cheered for me. Then, out of exhaustion, excitement, and other mixed emotions, I let my tired body sink into the soft sea.

That night at the dinner table, my dad, proud, told me, "Son, you have conquered failure."

I grunted, "I hate failure."

He replied, "We all do. But failure doesn't make us. Our response to it does. Son, failure is your friend."

That same night, while lying in bed, I pondered what my father had said. His words, bouncing around my head like a bullet ricocheting in a metal box, repeated themselves again, again, and again. The next day, I skied again. I fell a few times, but with each fall I overcame failure. Day after day for a week, I would ski during daytime, and during nighttime, I would think about skiing, failure, and getting up. Finally, on the last Saturday night at the beach before I returned home, ends met.

I realized that each time I failed, I got better. Each time I got up, I got stronger. The failure I endured that week had taught me better than any other teacher. All those failures was what made my success.

Yoda, a character in the *Star Wars* saga, once stated, "The greatest teacher, failure is." Although his words are backwards, his brain is certainly not. Every time you fail, you are that much closer to succeeding. Without failure, there is not success. Yoda also reminded us, "You want to know the difference between a master and a beginner? The master has failed more times than the beginner has ever tried." Yoda means that the master is the master because he got back up after he failed and learned from his mistakes. Ask anybody you look up to, "Have you ever failed?" The answer will always be yes. Everybody fails. But not everybody gets up, learns from their mistakes, and continues until they succeed. What helped them succeed? Failure. Failure is your friend.

Many famous people have failed. For example, Thomas Edison failed *ten thousand* times before he invented the lightbulb. But each time, he got back up, realized what went wrong, and fixed it. This is the process for success. Dwight D. Eisenhower was rejected for command positions *three* times before he was accepted. Steven Spielberg, the creator of *Star Wars*, was rejected *twice* by the Southern California School of Cinematic Arts. Michael Jordan, one of the greatest basketball players in history, didn't make his high school basketball team! Even the famous book series, *Harry Potter*, written by J.K. Rowling, was turned down *twelve* times. Now it is one of the bestselling book *and* movie series in the whole world. All these people only did two things after failure - they got up, and they learned from their mistakes.

At my camp, you can run for a crew leader. I decided to run the same year that I had learned my water skiing lesson. I lost by quite a bit. I felt crushed. The hammer had gotten me again. But I got back up and ran the next year. It was hard getting up in front of my camp and telling them why I should lead, but I was determined to win. The hammer pummeled me. Once again, I felt like a failure. I didn't want to get up, but I knew what I had to do. I ran a third year. By just a few votes, I lost again. I felt like I was a cockroach that's just been flushed down a toilet. Besides failing three times before, I ran my fourth year of camp and won. I experienced a feeling like never before. I had failed *three* times for *three* years, but each time I got up, learned from my mistakes, and tried again. Eventually I succeeded. Instead of feeling like a bug or a nail, I felt like a bird, soaring through the sky.

At some point in life, all of us will fail; it is inevitable. But failing doesn't make us a failure. No matter how many times we don't succeed, as long as we get up and learn, we will never be a failure. The gift of failure is showing us how not to do things, which brings us that much closer to doing it right. I learned how to ski from failure. Failure taught me how to lead. Failure taught me how to learn. Failure taught me how to do almost everything I do in life. So, that hammer might very well find us. We *will* be put down again and again. We *will* feel crushed. But that doesn't make us. It's our response. It's getting back up, learning, and succeeding that does. Failure is a drag. Nobody likes it, but it is just another stepping stone to success. So, no matter what happens to us, think of failure as a blessing in disguise or a tip on how to succeed. Failure makes success. Failure is your friend.