

# **Failure is Always an Option**

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When President John F. Kennedy launched the ambitious lunar landing campaign in 1962, he set in motion a nation that was determined to fulfill this promise. The "Space Race" was on with the competing Soviet Union and the first nation to land a man on the moon would be bestowed with an unworldly amount of prestige that would be hard to match.

This zealous undertaking put a nation in an accelerated movement of supporting and creating the necessary resources and technology to make this vision happen. During this campaign, the inner workings of the NASA program (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) created a robust group of astronauts, technicians, engineers and support staff. These individuals were going to make the United States the first to land on the moon no matter what the cost. A historic phrase that emerged from the Mercury and Apollo space programs was "*Failure is Not an Option!*" In other words, we would rather die than let the Russians get to the moon before us.

The expression "*Failure is Not an Option*" went on to become the rallying cry for many different organizations in the decades that followed. Some super-secret military missions used this credo to solidify their loyalty to the mission. In layman's terms, "this is a risky mission but it is imperative that we succeed." Some business models have used this bold and enthusiastic statement as their credo for success. Even many sports teams training and competing for championship trophies have rallied behind this motto to "psych" themselves into a winning spirit.

While it might seem quite idealistic to believe this statement, a more natural and healthy model teaches us that "*Failure is Always an Option.*" Having failure as an option is actually quite common and can be seen in working models in our everyday lives. We live, work and breathe daily with failure models without ever realizing it. Failure is built into many systems, from man-made technology to nature-based environments. For one to be healthy, failure is a very necessary option.

For instance, in one's home environment, failure is a built-in safety mechanism in many of the normal house-hold mechanics. The home's electrical wiring system is constructed with a box that holds "circuit breakers." If the voltage running through the electrical line were to spike, a circuit breaker would switch "off" to prevent the line from being melted by a surge in power. A circuit breaker is a built in failure system designed to prevent far worse things from happening.

High voltage electrical wiring grids that deliver electricity to your home all have built in failure systems. When one of these mechanisms is "tripped" for a variety of reasons, a "blackout" or "brownout" ensues. This grid failure is a safety system put in place to prevent a larger problem from occurring.

**Your computer has a failure system built into it as well. From time to time a computer will "freeze up." Some computers will do this more than others. You will have to shut the computer down and "reboot" the computer to bring it back on line. "Rebooting" is a safety procedure that allows the system to fail without causing a more serious problem. Your water heater also has a built in failure system installed in it. Every water heater by law is required to have a pressure release valve. This valve will only activate and open up to release excess water pressure in the event of an emergency (like a water pipe freezing over or clogging up). Without this pressure release valve your water heater could explode and cause a catastrophic problem.**

**Your car has many failure systems in place that help to ensure your safety. One of these systems is called "crumple zones." If your car happened to be involved in an accident, certain areas of the car are designed to fail or "implode" inward to absorb the energy of the impact. This could be bumpers, side panels or hoods of the car. A stiff and rigid car that does not flex or "crumple" during a car accident is much more dangerous to be riding in. Another safety device is the fuse. Many electronic devices come with fuses. This can be seen in the everyday automobile as well. If there is a "short" in the wiring or a surge in the voltage, a fuse will "blow" as a failure mechanism to prevent greater damage to the car's electrical system.**

**Social institutions have built-in failure mechanisms too. One of these social failure systems is the institution of bankruptcy. Starting a new business is often a risky endeavor. Up to fifty-percent of new businesses in the United States fail in the first year. Bankruptcy provides a relief valve for those who are willing to take the risk and try a new business. Without this failure system in place many would not venture out to begin the new business. Knowing that there is a way "out" gives many the peace of mind to take the chance.**

**It is common to witness failure in the natural environment. For instance, an iceberg can only withstand the pressure of icy temperatures, gale force winds and fluctuations in the tides for so long before it breaks away from its "mother ice" to float off on its own. A granite cliff will eventually fail and fall to the ground if water, wind and temperature fluctuations continue to erode it away. A beaver damn will ultimately be swept away by the force of the water that it is attempting to block. If enough snow gathers on a tree branch the limb will ultimately fail and break, saving the whole tree from toppling over. An avalanche is a natural failure system that occurs when an abundance of snow builds up on a mountain slope. Failure is a natural part of the environment in which we live.**

**We also have many failure systems built into our health if we were to pay attention to them. When you are "run down" it is common for many people to develop a cold. Your immune system is in a weakened state and developing a cold is a way to rest and renew your body. This simple health failure is the first line of systemic warning signs indicating that your health is under siege. If you fail to heed this warning it is common for a deeper and more long-lasting illness to develop. Medicating oneself on a continual basis with drugs and over-the-counter cold relief formulas is like applying a strong adhesive duct tape to the circuit breaker of your home's electrical wiring system. You are not allowing the natural failure systems to take place as you set yourself up for a bigger failure. Your immune system will**

remain in a weakened state. Drugs do not build immunity; drugs only suppress symptoms.

On a larger scale, when one is pressuring himself he is setting himself up for a larger health issue. For instance, in the United States alone, the six hour period from 4 am. until 10 am. on Monday morning occurs the greatest incidence of heart attacks. Do you not believe that the pressure of having to go to a job that you do not enjoy and that is not providing you with the satisfaction you are desiring has anything to do with the heart exploding? Why would your own heart "attack" you anyways? In this case most people do not give themselves a relief valve or option so they forge ahead with dire consequences. As they begin to worry about going to work many people often feel trapped with no way out. As a consequence, the heart will suffer. Unexpressed emotions will often cause physical health issues.

The old adage of the "*Christian Work Ethic*" leaves no room for failure. People who stop and rest are considered lazy or morally disturbed. One is expected to work as hard as possible until he drops dead. We pressure ourselves until we have a stroke or heart attack. This health crisis is the body's way of relieving pressure. A surprise to many, in the United States alone, women now have more heart disease than men. Imagine how women have wanted equality through the *women's movement*. They wanted power, influence, careers and affluence. They also believed that they had to become like men to get it. Hence, women too have pressured themselves to death and have lost many of their natural feminine qualities. Women now have taken on that long-standing male belief that in order to get ahead one must continue to pressure oneself until he drops from fatigue or death. Women as well as men now leave little room for failure.

In the world of marriage there is also a failure option. This is called divorce. The divorce rate in the United States is around fifty-percent. Rather than suffer any more in a relationship that is not working, many choose the failure option to provide relief. They feel better when the pressure is off. Many others who choose to grit it out for social, religious or family reasons often develop long-term illnesses and die. This is the only way they know to save face, not be labeled as a failure and get relief from the pressure of the situation. They would rather die than fail at marriage.

In the world of exercise, we often see injuries develop because people do not know how to fail. They push their bodies to the breaking point. Fatigue in a muscle is the first sign of the failure system in place. If you ignore this symptom, the muscle spindle or golgi tendon organ will activate to warn you that the muscles have gone beyond where they can safely go. By ignoring these warning signs you might develop "micro tears" in the connective tissue of the tendon. Finally, if you continue to ignore all of these messages, you might end up with a complete muscle tear or even rip a muscle from its anchor to the bone. The warning signs were in place. Your unwillingness to listen to the body's own circuit breakers has sent your body into chaos. If you continue to follow the corporate fitness model of "*Just Do It!*" you might be heading down the road of complete system failure.

Many people practicing yoga experience the same reluctance to allow failure to be an option. They judge themselves as unworthy if they cannot perfect a pose right away. They often are unwilling to master the basics before they attempt more challenging poses. Hence, if they do not bruise their ego they often create an injury

**to their body. Frustration and self-condemnation become the standard responses when one is struggling to master something that he is not ready for and he is not allowing himself the failure option. He might walk away from a yoga class feeling inferior or inadequate because his "circuit breakers" remain frozen tight. He never backs off and is always pressuring himself into the next pose.**

**Failure is a time of reorganization. When the circuit breaker is tripped in your home's wiring system you must mechanically reset the system. When you are sick, lying in bed is a time of rest and renewal. Your body is reorganizing itself as the immune system has time to catch up. A vacation or long weekend is a "time out" that reorganizes oneself and removes a primary source of pressure for many—their work life. Canceling a meeting or putting the "out to lunch" sign in the window are important times to step back and reorganize.**

**Allowing yourself the opportunity to have failure as an option is a very normal and natural alternative. This system is built into nature and into many mechanical systems. Having a way out will give one the sense of not feeling trapped. Failure is always an option if you allow it to be so.**

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