

How to Successfully Fail

Have you ever failed? Do you have a functional definition of what it means to fail, to be failing, and what it is to be a failure? How do you identify with the variables associated with these three simple yet life-altering “F” words? Are you comfortable, indifferent or petrified with the idea of failing? Have you ever thought to consider the impact of failure in your life, relative to the states of progression contributing to the dynamics of your success? If someone told you we exist through the absence of failure, how would this resonate with you? Well, this story is a quasi-cliff notes version of a developing book about a person who learned the significance of how to successfully fail – this is a story about me.

Throughout my life, those were the questions that required unequivocal acceptance of my vulnerabilities, and absolute resolve to manage the consequences. Life was now about my willingness to put everything on the line to achieve my purpose. Failing would be the only way for me to succeed, therefore I needed to manifest the art of how to successfully fail. In retrospect, the process requires a relentless mindset of unconditional commitment to consistency; consistency is the most efficiently effective way to get accomplish done. For example, as a baby, nothing was going to stop me from walking; however, it was necessary for me to first develop the strength and balance to crawl, then the determination to stand, finally, the courage to put it all together and take my first step. It mattered not how harshly punished my knees, elbows, hands, head, and face would be – no person, place or thing was going to stop me from – walking – one day. Every single molecule of blood, sweat, and tears released from my body was earned with each failing attempt, and foundationally proportional to the developmental process of success in my life today. There are several accounts of situations in which my efforts have failed; however, there has never been a situation where these same efforts have resulted in failure.

From elementary school to college, my transcripts display a multiplicity of **F** grades, and **W**'s – none of which were earned. What was the reason for this academic affliction? Was it a lack of effort, support, or intestinal fortitude? During my earlier years of education, in my elementary school era, being considered a gifted student, was a classification the administrators refused to assign me. Albeit, it was not something they could ignore. Although my grades were not reflective of my aptitude, my actions however, demonstrated a level of awareness far above what was considered to be average. Academically, elementary school presented a minimal challenge, and consequently, boredom began to set in. The school administration refused to nourish my academic appetite with empty promises of advancement, regardless of the contingents they placed upon my performance on specified placement exams. Although my scores were perfect, they continually refused to place me into courses that could challenge me. My mother, the school secretary, later confirmed this was due to the unfortunate circumstances of racial discrimination. The lack of having a comprehensive educational support system in place is what led me to stop applying myself fully in the traditional forms of scholastic activity. Now my academic desires were becoming disconnected from classroom instruction and redirected primarily toward sports. My mind required some form of active cognitive stimulation, and participating in sports began to satisfy this hunger.

Athletics became more than just something for me to participate in; my life became centered on them (Football, Basketball, and Track & Field)! Although these were not the only sports you would find me involved in, they were the ones that appeared to be my ticket into college. However, during my senior year of high school, injuries adversely impacted my dream-goal of participating in Division I sports, and would ultimately indefinitely delay any future involvement. It was August, football pre-season, where after our workouts you would find me in the gym playing

basketball. This particular day after dunking the basketball, my foot landed and rolled off of someone else's foot; consequently, breaking my ankle and tearing some of the ligaments and surrounding tendons immediately ending my senior year of football. Although basketball season went without any serious injury, we did not have the most productive season.

At last it was time for Track & Field, where the general consensus amongst the athletic staff had identified me as a prime candidate for an athletic scholarship. This year was to be our teams most promising, winning season. As this time last year, there was a cast on my ankle that prevented me from being able to participate in the previous season. It was Spring Break of my junior year and my brother arranged for me to spend the break with him at U.C. Berkeley (Cal). He arranged for this to count as one of my college tours in hopes of having me attend Cal also. Visiting my brother at Cal was beyond inspiring, it allowed me to play basketball with some of the greatest players to ever play for Cal. My team was on defense, someone made a bounce pass just behind me, and my foot simultaneously made contact with the top of the basketball as the ball made contact with the court, and just like that – my ankle rolled off the ball, snapped and broke! This time however, it was my senior year, my body was healthy, and the moment was mine to seize – it was time to run!

We opened our track & field season at a city-wide invitational that presented us with an opportunity to run against schools outside of our district. After placing first in all 3 of my events thus far, my fourth and final event of the day was next, the 330m low hurdles. The gun sounded and we were off (from what people told me there was no one within 15 meters of me) but after negotiating my last hurdle, the rotation of my stride was compromised causing me to hyperextend the knee of my lead leg. It took everything in me to complete the race, the voice inside of me said, “keep going, **Run, Walk, Crawl** if you must but **keep going, and finish!** It came down to the wire

between one of my teammates and myself, we finished together but first place went to me while collapsing to the ground in pain. After being fully evaluated, those words found my ears again, “Your season is over.” A year later the opportunity for me to play basketball and run at the collegiate level presented itself to me. However, after playing in my first basketball game, it happened again! This time it was the worst ankle injury yet. After grabbing a rebound and having landed on another person’s foot – again; it sounded like 3 frozen carrots snapping, my ankle was completely blown out!

After my collegiate endeavors concluded that season, those questions resurfaced, it seemed that my life was comprised of failing at one thing after another. Was it my destiny to be a failure? No matter how many injuries, nothing was going to stop me from pursuing my dream-goal of participating in at least one collegiate event. Up until that time in my life, my definition of failure had yet to be fully developed. As time progressed, it became clear that failure only exists in the absence of failing. In other words, according to my belief, becoming a failure can only manifest itself if the action taken was one of no action. The fact that my efforts thus far had failed to earn me an athletic scholarship did not qualify me as a failure. To be classified as a failure would require me to have never failed, because failing is a prerequisite for success.

This dynamic is something that was consistently burned into the soul of my character during my military-government career as an active duty Marine, as a Federal Law Enforcement Officer, and as a Private Government Contractor. While on a TOP SECRET assignment, during my military career, my life would be forever changed, as an unspecified enemy got a hold of me and beat me to death. My body laid lifeless, soaked in a pool of my blood from severe head trauma. Approximately twelve hours later my life was restored, leaving me with significant brain damage – Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). From the scene, it appeared as though they took me by my feet

and slung me repeatedly into various objects. To this day, my mind is unable to recall the events specific to the incident from having developed amnesia as well. My blood was everywhere, on the walls, the floor, and every piece of furniture in the room. My face was unrecognizable – even to me. As tough as it was, I needed to be stricken with the pain of my existence to realize the value of my efforts in endeavoring to rise freely through these moments of agony.

During my last government assignment, while deployed overseas as a diplomatic bodyguard, there would be one final career-ending injury, again to my ankle. While running, my ankle would roll on another person's foot and again, leaving me with broken bones and torn ligaments and tendons. This time, 5 reconstructive ankle surgeries in 6 years would not be enough to allow me to meet the minimum standards to return to work. However, in light of my disabilities, there was still a flame inside of me that refused to die.

My desire to complete my education and pursue a vision that has been cradled in the essence of my being is now reclaiming its birthright. Nothing about my life has ever been traditional. Having failed at everything in my path has allowed me to quantify just how far my will to fail will take me. Failing at things nourishes my spirit because it qualifies my efforts and places me one level closer to earning success. Here at Columbia University, my professors have embraced my desire to succeed. They appreciate the relentless spirit within me that defines my character. No matter how challenging the course, no matter how high or low of a score, they know I am coming back for more. Nothing is going to stop me from learning everything I possibly can from every one of them – nothing. Concerning everything stated above, it is my sincerest desire to continue my academic endeavors here at Columbia. Since being allowed to attend classes here as a visiting student, it has permitted me to appreciate the academic climate for what it is. And what it is, is extremely challenging. For me to succeed here, I currently spend \$800 - 1000 dollars per week on

private tutoring at a minimum of 15 hours of tutoring per week. I would rather pay for tutoring than pay for an apartment. I also meet consistently with my professors during their office hours and one-on-one when time permits. The professors here continually demonstrate their willingness to assist and accommodate me according to my disabilities both in and outside of the classroom. As a non-traditional student, this is the type of system that is most beneficial to fostering success in students from all walks of life. Through struggle we build strength, through strength we build success, and we only become successful if we have the strength to survive the struggle. Finally, it is my conviction to earn a degree from a university committed to exposing my vulnerabilities for the benefit of mankind, and Columbia University is successfully exposing my vulnerabilities, developing the character of my resilience, enhancing the essence of my consistency, and applying a level of pressure that caters to those who are willing to endure it, Columbia University will birth the diamond within, if one is willing, and **I am willing**.

-If who you are isn't enough, then you have no idea who you are-

“JTR48”

Most Appreciatively,

Javon T Ross