REFRAME CAREER SETBACKS WITH
ANGELA PEREIRA SAAFIGUEROA

" Evolve *with* anxiety and fear as opposed to resisting and fighting it. **"**

Photo Credit: Emily Dunn

Owner, Therapist, and Clinical Supervisor at Heart of Amber Therapy LLC, Angela Pereira Saafigueroa expertly teaches the art of radical compassion. With an extensive, decade-long career in providing quality mental health treatment, she guides us through the discomfort of facing our hurdles—and the transformation that follows.

How can women find the courage to take career risks after facing disappointment?

Taking our risks and being vulnerable at the same time seems unrealistic; we think they can't coexist. But they truly, truly can. For too many people, it often feels safer to stay within a clear black and white mentality because it seems less overwhelming than acknowledging the reality of multiple valid lenses or perspectives.

With vulnerability, uncertainty can actually be our best friend. When we allow vulnerability to be a part of this journey with us, we're allowing ourselves to validate the tough choices we're making, and then we can feel more comfortable in the gray that we talked about. We can allow ourselves to be sensitive and emotional beings as we are and still be willing to take that leap of faith.

How do you recommend shifting from an emotional to a more rational perspective when processing failure?

We've been conditioned to believe that even in corporate settings, we have to pull it together—but that has not been effective. If history has taught us anything, this is not a practical way to even be in a corporate setting.

My first advice would be to acknowledge and validate the emotion you feel. Recognize what it's trying to tell you while ensuring that its intensity is appropriate to the actual situation. This might involve stepping away from a triggering email or taking a brief break from work. Recalibrate and regulate before reengaging. It's important not to dismiss the emotion in favor of pure rationality, because that invalidates you. The goal should always be to integrate the emotional and rational parts of the mind.

Our rational mind can put together, *I'm not going to be successful at everything. I'm going to fail at some point, at something.* Our emotional mind doesn't agree. It perceives failure as long-term pain and suffering that we can't bear or survive. It may also perceive failure as, *if I fail at this, people I care about will leave me. I'm going to disappoint them if I don't do well.* Anxiety and fear tend to be frequent visitors when failure shows up. If we can view anxiety and fear as a way to protect us, we can lean into those difficult emotions with some compassion and say, I see you're trying to protect me from something I don't need protection from. I can still feel, regulate, experience, and sit here with you. We can survive and grow from it.

Evolve with anxiety and fear as opposed to resisting and fighting it.

What role do leaders and organizations play in fostering an environment where vulnerability is accepted?

I recently read <u>Dare to Lead</u> by Brené Brown. She's a pioneer in the study of vulnerability, and I would highly recommend her book to anyone working toward a leadership role. She argues that vulnerability is a strength because it requires leaders to show up even when success isn't guaranteed.

We may think that a leader and their employees have to be successful in everything, and if they're not, it's their downfall. Brown states that owning your mistakes not only builds trust but also creates an environment where employees feel safe to be creative, take risks, and engage more deeply. Vulnerability humanizes the workplace and fosters more connection. Lead with empathy. Practice active listening even when you don't have all the answers or solutions.

How can leaders foster spaces that encourage employees to practice self-compassion and build resilience?

Being kind to ourselves first lets people know how we want to be treated. Self-compassion encompasses three different elements:

- **Common humanity.** Acknowledge your experiences and emotions are universal.
- **Self-kindness.** Offer yourself grace based on how you're feeling.
- **Mindfulness.** Be aware of the discomfort that comes with whatever is happening. Just because we fall short in how we think and talk about ourselves doesn't always mean we have to fully believe what we're feeling. A way to be more practical with self-compassion is to identify the beliefs we have about ourselves and how they're serving us.

Leaders should practice self-compassion themselves and model it for their workers. Use language that recognizes others' efforts. You can say something like, "I really struggled with this project, so I think it's great we were able to complete it." or "It sounds like this assignment was really difficult, and you still pushed through."

Celebrate your team's successes, but also acknowledge its areas of growth. Just because an employee has a weakness doesn't mean they're incapable. They just need to practice and get more opportunities to improve.

When it comes to resilience, there are times you also need to sit with your "failure" and not rush. Reflect on what went wrong, learn from it, then proceed.