

**Warning:** If you are planning to take Jamie Lash's Speed Reading course, please refrain from reading this article first (let's your results be skewed).

## Failing Forward

A ceramics professor announced different grading systems to his two pottery classes. He surprised the students in his first class by telling them that they only had to turn in ONE pot during the whole semester. Their entire course grade would be based on the quality of that one pot. In his second class, he informed the students that their grade would be based on *quantity* rather than *quality*. If they turned in fifty pots, they would receive an "A"; forty pots for a "B", etc.

Not surprisingly, his two classes took very different approaches. The students in his first class spent the whole semester trying to make the perfect pot. The second class churned out pots in record numbers.

At the end of the semester, the professor began assigning final grades. First, he assigned course grades to the single-pot class. As he began counting the pots from the second class, he suddenly stopped...dumbfounded. He didn't find what he expected to find. He was afraid he would receive garbage from his second class, but their pots were much better than the first class!

What would explain this? The professor pondered, and then realized that, compared to his first class, the students from the second class made far more mistakes in their effort to make fifty pots, but they had obviously learned valuable lessons from their mistakes. They became far better potters. Here is the professor's grand conclusion: "The people in my first class did not become great potters, because they hadn't failed enough."

If you want to be successful, you've got to be willing to get out there and take your lumps. You've got to fail enough that you learn how to be a success. Are you willing to do that? If you are not willing to fail, you actually prevent yourself from achieving the kind of success you are capable of.

I braced myself to take my lumps when I chose to videotape the "Double My Reading Speed" course for the first time. Did I know what I was doing? No, not really. But I thought, "That's okay. I'll figure it out as I go."

At the time of this writing, we just videotaped for the fifth time. I still make lots of mistakes, but I don't get all upset, because many of my biggest breakthroughs have come from my mistakes. "Fifty pots" has become one of my mottos in life. I say to myself, "This is only my fifth pot! By the time we videotape the course for the fiftieth time, I bet it will be pretty good!"

What are you wanting to do with your life? What do you want to be excellent in?  
Have you failed enough to become successful?

We all yearn to see our dreams come true, but many people defeat themselves by their failure to take action. Their dreams are very important to them, and they cannot bear to think of failing. Because of this fear, they do nothing. They just carry the dream around in their hearts and do nothing. But “doing nothing” is a sure way to NOT get where they want to go.

In his book, Failing Forward, John Maxwell opens with a startling thought:

“If you don’t fail much, it probably means you are only doing the things you already know how to do. You’re not breaking new ground; you’re just playing it safe.

**“If you really want to achieve your dreams--I mean really achieve them,** not just daydream or talk about them--you’ve got to get out there and fail. **Fail early, fail often, but always fail forward.** Turn your mistakes into stepping-stones for success.

“Did you know that entrepreneurs **almost never** get their first business off the ground? Or their second? Or their third? According to Tulane University business professor Lisa Amos, the average for entrepreneurs is 3.8 failures before they finally make it in business.”

After reading this statistic, I thought about all the small businesses that fail. These entrepreneurs put so much into it...investing not just their time and money, but their heart and soul. When their venture falters or fails, many get discouraged and quit...never considering the fact that the very same thing happened to those who now have successful businesses! They failed too. Over and over again. But they didn’t quit. And it’s not just that they bounced back and tried again. They learned something and then tried again. They changed their approach and then tried again. They kept at it until they figured it out.

We should learn as much as we possibly can from our failures. Consultant Brian Tracy recommends that we ask ourselves two questions after each failure:

The first question is, **“What did I do right?”** Tracy points out that even if an event is an absolute fiasco, we can usually find some things we did right. And if we take time to examine the situation and to celebrate what we did right, we will probably feel more encouraged, and we are more likely to repeat these good behaviors in the future.

Tracy's second question is not what you might expect it to be. He does *not* go from **“What did I do right?”** to **“What did I do wrong?”** Focusing on everything we did wrong may cause us to wallow in our misery. Instead, his second question is, **“What would I do differently?”**

This second question calls upon our imagination to see things a new way. It redirects our focus from “what was” to “what could be.” As we envision a better way of doing things, new hope is kindled. If we arm ourselves with some great new ideas, we no longer feel like shooting ourselves in the head. Instead, we just might be chomping at the bit, looking forward to our next opportunity.

**“What did I do right?”** and **“What would I do differently?”** Both questions are positive and constructive. Instead of being torn down by our failures, we end up benefitting from them. By asking and answering these two questions, we not only bounce back quicker, we bounce back better than ever.

If you have a big vision for what you want to do with your life, you should expect to run into big problems and big obstacles. If, on the other hand, you expect everything to be easy, you might be quite surprised at how difficult your journey is. After getting hit hard in the stomach a couple times, you might become discouraged. You might decide to quit. But if you start out with a more realistic view, not expecting smooth sailing but expecting problems, your realism will help you persevere when the trials hit.

Don't just endure your trials. Rejoice in them! Your problems can propel you forward. Your problems are opportunities in disguise!

If you wallow in discouragement after a setback, you just might waste weeks, months, and even years...no longer pursuing your dream. Worse yet, you may end up settling for something smaller, something safer, something less exciting, something less wonderful.

You've been given gifts with which to benefit mankind. Your contribution is important. Go for it.

