

Ep #14: Fear of Failure



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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Ep #14: Fear of Failure

Failure is your greatest teacher because if you embrace failure, instead of making it a life sentence for yourself, or instead of covering yourself in shame, blame, and overwhelm, and being super angry over the failure, that kind of stuff will keep you stuck. That kind of stuff will keep you from moving forward.

But if you learn to embrace failure as a friend, as a teacher, as something that's there to actually take you to the next level, you will have a completely different relationship with failure.

Welcome to *Mental Health Remix*, a show for ambitious humans who are ready to feel, think, and be different. If you want to stop struggling with perfectionism, build better relationships, and connect with yourself and your potential, this is the place for you...

Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox...

Hey, hey everyone. Welcome to episode number 14. Alright, today we are talking about the fear of failure, and I think any perfectionist out there can totally relate to this. But even if you're not a perfectionist and you're just an anxious but high-achieving individual, you'll probably find this episode helpful. So this one's for you.

So I got to tell you, there is this thing around perfectionism where perfectionists don't think they're perfectionists. It's like, my favorite thing ever. Mostly because this exact phrase has come out of my own mouth multiple times where I'm like, I'm not a perfectionist, I just want things done correctly.

And now it's so funny because I've done so much of my own healing work whenever that phrase starts coming out of my mouth, it is a red flag to me. I'm like, yo, what is going on with you? Why are you saying that?

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And so for anyone out there who's a perfectionist, who doesn't see anything wrong with that, my friends, there is. Because as a perfectionist, we have a little bit of a blind spot in that we just want things the way we want them because we truly can see that it's the best course of action and it's the best outcome.

And so we can be incredibly hard on ourselves and we can be incredibly hard on others because we just want things to be done "the right way." But in the midst of trying to create something the right way, we are usually consumed with anxiety and stress because we are so focused on avoiding failure or avoiding something not turning out quite the way that we want it to.

And so I think this is a huge learning edge for anyone who runs on high anxiety or tends to be a little bit more perfectionistic is that we really have to learn to embrace this idea of failure is a teacher. Failure is not a destination. Failure is not a life sentence. And failure most certainly is not the end of the world.

But we have to stop and reframe this in our minds because it will not happen automatically. Automatically, the places that anxious perfectionists go are I just want it done right because then I know I will have avoided all potential issues.

So if this is you, if this sounds familiar, you want to make sure that when you start to get into this head space, that you take a step back and start asking yourself some questions. Because by getting so stressed out and so anxious over the destination, you are truly not going to be enjoying the journey on the way there because you're going to be so stressed out and overwhelmed.

So some of the things I've learned to ask myself when I get into perfection mode and I say things like, "Oh, I just want this done the right way," I step back and I examine sort of where my head space is at and I ask myself the following questions.

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Why is this thing important? What meaning do I have attached to this? And what is the most realistic action plan to go from here? And mind you, my friends, the key word in that is realistic. Not perfect. And then I proceed from there.

So if any of this resonates with you, I would definitely take a step back in your own mind if you're working on a project right now and you're getting so overwhelmed and stressed out, it's a cue to you that you need to take a step back and figure out what is going on for you emotionally and where do you need to get your head right, and how do you need to execute moving forward so that things turn out well. Not perfect.

So as we talked about in one of the earlier episodes, when we really just straight on address perfectionism, I talked in that episode about how perfectionism can largely be a coping strategy for people that tend to run high on anxiety. It's like all this anxious energy can sometimes get channeled into doing things or producing things and can result in sort of a perfectionistic mindset.

And a lot of times, again, this creeps up on us and we don't even know it's happening. But it's important to get a hold on this because it can actually make your anxiety worse. Not better. And so when we talked about in that previous episode, anything with a survival mechanism is going to supersede anything else in your life.

So if you are telling yourself a story that this project means everything to you and if it's not exactly perfect, you are indeed a failure, you're going to have a really hard time because it is going to kick up all of your survival mechanisms because you're telling your biology, you're telling your brain, you're telling your body a story of life or death.

And truly, most situations don't call for life and death unless you're being chased by a bear or you're running out of food or water, or a natural disaster has happened. Those are actually life or death situations. But

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putting on a dinner and making sure that dinner turns out perfectly, that's not really life or death.

It's something you would like to have happen, but you're going to cause unnecessary stress and so we want to stay ahead of this. Because once your survival mechanisms kick on and you start treating putting on a dinner the same way you would as having to get away from a bear, you're not going to really like your life very much.

And you may not be that enjoyable to be around at the party because you're so stressed out about everything being so perfect. Now again, from that perfectionism episode, perfectionism comes in a lot of shapes and sizes, okay my friends?

And I was in denial about perfectionism for a really long time because I don't fit the typical grid of what we stereotypically think a perfectionist looks like. And so your biggest antidote, if you're a perfectionist when it comes to doing things is to fail. Honestly, to fail and learn to like it.

Sounds horrible, sounds terrible, worst case scenario. I know. But if you get comfortable in this failure space, it is going to do several things for you. It is going to make you an incredibly resilient human. And let me tell you, if you are a business owner, an entrepreneur, or an ambitious human, you got to be resilient, my friends.

You are going to get knocked down so many times and I don't mean that in a doom and gloom way. That is the reality to becoming successful and to becoming great, as we've talked about in other episodes. Like you have to get really comfortable with screwing up and figuring out a new course of action and implementing it quickly.

So failure is your greatest teacher because if you embrace failure, instead of making it a life sentence for yourself, or instead of covering yourself in shame, blame, and overwhelm, and being super angry over the failure, that

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kind of stuff will keep you stuck. That kind of stuff will keep you from moving forward.

But if you learn to embrace failure as a friend, as a teacher, as something that's there to actually take you to the next level, you will have a completely different relationship with failure. And the fear part is going to be gone. You can't be afraid of something if you're embracing its outcome. Do you see how that works?

We get afraid of things because we don't understand the outcome and we're afraid of the consequences that might come from that. But when you choose to reframe what failure actually is for you, that it's a learning opportunity, it's a chance for you to refine, for you to sharpen, for you to grow, for you to be better... what's there to fear?

So this is a little bit of a tool for you because a lot of the ways that we cope with the fear of failure has to do with the stories that we're telling ourselves and reframing the meaning we've made out of failure. And so I would almost - if failure is a triggering word for you, I'd almost eradicate it from your vocabulary.

I would change it to being well, that didn't work out, what's plan B? Or what can I learn from this? Or what should I be doing instead? Because sometimes - and it completely depends on the situation. Sometimes, failure doesn't mean you quit. Sometimes failure means you got to crank up the heat and persevere.

You got to keep going and you got to keep trying because sometimes you just don't get it on the first try. Sometimes you have to fall 14 times before you get up on the 15th and you make it. So you have to learn to have some level of discernment on how do I respond to failure, is this actually failure, and what do I want to do about it.

So these are all tools for you to how to shape your mind and change your thinking around how you relate to this idea of failure. And my friends, again,

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this is a critical skill. If you're an ambitious human or you have aspirations to be a leader or a CEO, or some kind of high-power position, you've got to get really humble about this.

Because failure does not mean you're worthless. Failure means you're in the ring, you're trying, and you're succeeding because you're actually in the ring trying. Most people are so afraid of failure they don't even get up and try.

So I commend you, if you've got knocked down 14 times, I applaud you. You are someone I completely respect. I don't respect people as much that don't even try because if you're not trying, that means that you're letting fear get the best out of you.

And so here's where this can get a little bit twisted. Because I like to talk about some of the deeper elements as to why things are coming up for us, if you have an anxiety disorder, managing this idea of failure is going to be a little bit more complicated.

And if you have a history of trauma or relational pain, failure is going to be a little bit more tricky to get yourself around. Because what happens in the psyche is whatever traumatic experience we have had, if something in our present feels the same, it's actually going to light it up.

And I hear this from people all the time because they're like, I don't understand, I'm just trying to level up in my business and yet all I feel is not good enough, and I don't get it. Because nothing tangibly that's happening to me right now would suggest that I'm not good enough, but yet every time something doesn't work out, I feel rejected, or every time something fails, I feel stupid, or I feel not good enough and I can't figure out why.

And a lot of times when we peel back those layers, sometimes there is some childhood trauma where maybe they felt like they failed at getting the love and safety from their parents, or they were in an unsafe situation. So

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you have to remember, as children, and this is universally true, children, their brain development is not all there yet.

And anything in the formative years is very egocentric. We blame ourselves for everything because that is the state our brain is in. We learn differently later as we get older and our brain develops more, we have more abilities to reason or to see bigger truths about situations.

But this is why early childhood experiences that are traumatic are so impactful because they are happening during a very critical time in development and it's happening during a time when we're very egocentric, so we take everything personally.

And so it takes working through the deeper stuff in therapy to kind of heal that good enough wound so that you can move on with your life in more empowered ways and to not take things so personally. And so I know for a lot of you out there, it seems really strange that something that happened to me in childhood would be impacting me in scaling my business, or would be impacting me in going for that promotion at work.

But my dear sweet friends, as I've talked about from the beginning of this podcast, there is nothing about you that is separate. Everything that happened to you in your past is going to go with you in your present and it's going to kind of inform the decisions that you make that create your future.

And so this is why I always say there's absolutely no shame and blame in getting help. We've all gone through stuff. Going through life, perfection doesn't exist. Perfection isn't real. If you're going to live this life, there are going to be things and experiences that happen that you don't like.

But it is up to us to take ownership of our lives and who we want to be in order to pave the path forward. You have a lot of power here and I want to encourage you so much that if you have a dream and your emotions are getting in the way of achieving that dream, please talk to a therapist.

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Please find someone who is trained in trauma or someone who's an expert in anxiety.

Get your emotions under control so that you can really pursue the things that you love. I can't tell you how many people tell me that once they clear out some of the anxiety or get the anxiety more managed, or they're able to heal from traumatic experiences, it's like they have so much more brain space to even just think about life in a different way and to plan and to strategize and to really achieve their dreams.

So there's no shame in getting help. It's fucking awesome that you're getting help because it means that you are committed to being the best version of yourself.

Okay, so my friends, I'm going to recap for you just some of the tools that I talked about because there were several tools that I laid out in this episode and I'm sure some of you are a little bit frantic on like, oh my gosh, what did she say?

So I'm going to kind of outline them here, but I'm not going to say them quite the same way so if you want to - I would encourage you to re-listen to the podcast if there was something that really stood out to you. Alright my friends, so here are some tools to get you going on this.

As we talked about at the beginning of the episode, you want to get your mind in check when you find yourself going down the slippery slope of failure and perfectionism. So you want to address three questions. Why is this thing important to me? What emotional meaning do I have attached to this? And what is the most realistic action plan from here? And again, the key word is realistic. Not perfect. And proceed from there.

Number two, keep track of your reactions and notice your patterns. This is going to point you in the right direction of what area of your life is really getting in your way of succeeding, and it's going to help you figure out how to move forward because there's power in understanding your patterns.

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Because then you can get ahead of it or it gives you insight into using the right coping tools in the moment or before it happens so that you can be the most empowered. So you don't just fall into these patterns automatically. We've talked about this in other episodes.

To disrupt patterns, you have to disrupt the autopilot. And in order to do that, you're going to that, you're going to have to track some of your patterns to figure that out.

And number three, I would empower yourself daily with an affirmation around failure such as this; failure is my teacher and I embrace my ability to figure this out. If you have to tell yourself that every single day until it sinks in, please do. That is a very neutral affirmation and it's a healthy reminder around how to not let failure get the best of you.

And as always, my friends, if strong emotions or triggers come up for you when you're listening to any of these podcasts, please seek out mental healthcare in your local state of residence. There is no shame in getting support or help. It's the way to pave forward.

And lastly, if you liked today's episode, if you wouldn't mind leaving me a rating and review on Apple Podcasts, I would love it. And thank you so much to how many of you who have already done this. Alright my friends, I am rooting for you and I will see you next week.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to nicolesymcox.com.