



Fail Well

Patients frequently come into my office excited about an early improvement in their pain. Some patients even feel pain-free within weeks, after suffering years of misery. The pure positive energy emanating from them is palpable and inspiring.

I'm always inspired by their story, but often some of my first words are, "I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but you are going to experience more pain again and maybe as severe as it was. These pain circuits are permanent. But don't despair!" The key is that by using the tools you'll be learning to pull yourself back out of your pain state. With practice, you'll dive into The Abyss less often and remain in for shorter periods of time. In the big picture, pain will assume a more normal role in your life and no longer be the center of it.

Why Me?

Many of us hold on to the idea that we can create a world for ourselves that has minimal pain and suffering. When adversity hits, we become upset because we feel it is unfair and shouldn't be happening.

One of the ways we attempt to deal with adversity is to control and limit our stress. It is a viable strategy and it makes more sense than seeking out or creating problems. However, the result is that your world will become progressively smaller over time. You cannot control most of your stressors, and you certainly can't outrun your mind. Paradoxically, your stress will increase as you try and avoid stress.



It is more rational to accept that what we term adversity is simply – life. We will all die and most of us will experience major illnesses. We will all have close family members that will suffer from pain, too. There are infinite wrongs, small and large, that happen to us personally, as well as on a global scale. So why would you be an exception?

Firing up Your Nervous System

The problem from a physiological perspective is that when we become frustrated, our nervous system fires up even more stress hormones, which magnifies the physical response. These symptoms may include insomnia, obsessive thought patterns, body image issues, ringing in the ears, and burning sensations throughout your body, amongst over 30 other symptoms.

“Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional”

To be successful in any endeavor requires taking risks and experiencing the accompanying anxiety. If you are not willing to deal with those feelings, then it is probably not worth taking the risk. There’s a reason we say, “If you can’t take the heat then get out of the kitchen.”

When you “fail,” you are welcome to take some time to wallow in your feelings. It is critical not to suppress negative thoughts and emotions, but is also important to recognize what you are doing to yourself. After that, you have to forgive yourself, get back up, and move on. A more helpful saying is, “It doesn’t matter how many times you fall; it is the number of times you get up.”

Resilience

When a bamboo grove is buffeted by a storm with high winds, the grove bends and then stands back up when it is calm.

It is not helpful for you to fight a sustained battle against something or someone that you cannot solve. When you are down, you are down, and it’s important to be okay with it, rather than being hard on yourself. No one is asking you to be happy when your circumstances are bad. But you also do not have to keep beating yourself up



The essence of the DOC (Direct Your Own Care) project is connecting and engaging your thinking through awareness. It is a process of learning how to fail and then using tools to get back up quickly.

Life keeps coming at you. Let go and live.