

RETHINKING FAILURE



TGR FOUNDATION



HIGH
SCHOOL

OVERVIEW:

Failure can be a painful experience, particularly for teens, who are forming their sense of selves, exploring their own budding potential and developing critical interpersonal relationships. When people experience failure, they often report feelings of embarrassment, shame and depression, but teens can perceive failure as a judgment – final, condemning and irreversible. But failure, usually viewed as the opposite of success, is actually an essential step along the pathway to accomplishing goals and achieving personal and professional growth. Through quotes, anecdotes and dialogue this Digital Lesson Bundle (DLB) challenges students to rethink their attitudes toward and assumptions about failure. Students will examine the meaning of failure, explore why failure is an important part of the learning process, and discover how to develop a growth mindset to turn failure into a catalyst for future success.

THIS LESSON FOCUSES ON:

21ST CENTURY SKILLS

- Collaboration**
- Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Creativity**

SUGGESTED TIME

3 class sessions (60 minutes each) (Note: This lesson may be completed on non-consecutive days, if necessary.)

GRADE LEVELS

9-12

CONTENT AREAS

- College Access
- English Language Arts
- Social Emotional Learning
- College and Career Readiness

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Define** failure.
- Analyze** the role of failure in historic successful ventures.
- Apply** a growth mindset approach to reframe a personal experience with failure.

MATERIALS

Day 1 Materials:

- Rethinking Failure Educator Guide and PowerPoint
- Computer with projector
- Photos, printed out and numbered as follows:
 1. J.K. Rowling
 2. Sonia Sotomayor
 3. Coco Chanel
 4. Michael Jordan
 5. Lin-Manuel Miranda
 6. Oprah Winfrey
 7. Ang Lee
 8. Mahatma Gandhi
 9. Ellen DeGeneres
- Connections and Questions T-Chart student capture sheet (1 per small group)
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Tape
- Paper and pencil

Day 2 Materials:

- Rethinking Failure Educator Guide and PowerPoint
- Computer with projector
- Video: Jia Jiang 2015 Ted Talk
- Make it Concrete student capture sheet (1 per student)
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Tape
- Paper and pencil

Day 3 Materials:

- Rethinking Failure Educator Guide and PowerPoint
- Computer with projector
- Video: Carol Dweck 2014 TED Talk
- Fixed vs. Growth Mindset Phrases (cut strips and place in envelope) (1 per small group)
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Tape
- Paper and pencil

LESSON PREP OR FOLLOW-UP:

Print out photos of J.K. Rowling, Sonia Sotomayor, Coco Chanel, Michael Jordan, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Oprah Winfrey, Ang Lee, Mahatma Gandhi and Ellen DeGeneres. Display in numerical order around the room for a Gallery Walk.

On Day 2 of this lesson, students will interview school personnel to learn more about failure from people they know. To maximize the success of the school-based interviews, identify colleagues in advance who are willing to participate in student-led interviews about success and failure. Explain that students will work from an approved list of interview questions and establish dates/times when students will interview them.

Consider implementing one or more of the Optional Extension activities listed at the end of the lesson.

PROCEDURE

DAY 1

ENGAGE (Slide 1)

Overview: Students explore the topic of failure and analyze what it looks and feels like to them. Students share their thinking. Anticipating that students are likely to have described the “ugly” side of failure, propose that there are two sides to failure and explain that this lesson explores both sides to help them rethink failure.

Slide 1

1. Introduce the topic of failure and ask students to quickly draw what failure looks and feels like to them, including the social implications of failure. Encourage students to add words and color to their images.
2. Have student volunteers use their images to share their perspectives on failure.
3. Engage students in a consensus-building conversation about failure – what it means, what it feels like, what it looks like, how it affects us and why we fear it.
4. Instruct students to keep their images. They will refer to them again at the end of the lesson.

EXPLORE, (Slides 2-13)

Overview: Through quotes, discussion and a reflection on brief bios of individuals who are famously successful, students analyze the meaning of failure. They build understanding that failure is an inevitable part of life and a critical component of success. At the end of Day 1, students reflect on their learning and share one new insight about failure.

Slide 2: Gallery Walk

Teacher Preparation Note: Post photos of individuals who are famously successful in different fields, numbered 1-9.

1. J.K. Rowling
2. Sonia Sotomayor
3. Coco Chanel
4. Michael Jordan
5. Lin-Manuel Miranda
6. Oprah Winfrey
7. Ang Lee
8. Mahatma Gandhi
9. Ellen DeGeneres

Note: You could also display the images on a device and have students complete a digital version of the T-chart.

1. Divide students into small groups of two or three. Give each group a Connections and Questions T-chart student capture sheet.
2. Have groups visit each photo. As they view the photos and read each quote, students identify the person pictured (if possible) and note on their T-charts how they know the individual. Students should also record questions they have about the individuals and their quotes and consider how the images may relate to one another.
3. Once seated, have students engage in a class discussion to share their connections and questions. If necessary, point out that many (or most) of the individuals were recognizable to students even though their names were not on the photos. Ask students to briefly brainstorm how the individuals in the photos became successful.

Slide 3: A Closer Look

1. Tell students they will be taking a closer look at these people and their journeys to success.

Slides 4-13: What is Success?

1. Project slides 4 through 12 and share a brief story about each person's experience with failure before they became successful.
 - **Slide 4:** #1 J.K. Rowling, Author
 - Philanthropist and best-selling author J.K. Rowling was a single mom living on welfare when she began writing the first 'Harry Potter' novel.
 - **Slide 5:** #2 Sonia Sotomayor, Supreme Court Justice
 - In her memoir, Sonia writes of chronic disease, troubled family relationships and a failed marriage that accompanied her rise from a housing project in the Bronx to a seat on the Supreme Court.
 - **Slide 6:** #3 Coco Chanel, Fashion Designer
 - Against all odds, Coco made an infamous return to the fashion industry when she was 70 years old. She rebuilt her entire brand and reputation, despite the constant badgering from her many critics about her age.
 - **Slide 7:** #4 Michael Jordan, Professional Athlete
 - Now considered one of the greatest basketball players of all time, Michael Jordan was devastated when he was cut from the varsity basketball team during his sophomore year in high school.
 - **Slide 8:** #5 Lin-Manuel Miranda, Composer/Playwright/Actor
 - The musical "Hamilton" has won many awards, but it was not an overnight success. It took Lin-Manuel a full year to write one song from the show, "My Shot." And, although people he trusted told him to give up on the project, he worked seven years to finish it.
 - **Slide 9:** #6 Oprah Winfrey, Media Executive/Actor
 - Known worldwide for her work in entertainment and philanthropy, Oprah Winfrey was publicly fired from her first job as a news anchor for getting 'too emotionally invested in her stories.'
 - **Slide 10:** #7 Ang Lee, Director
 - Oscar-winning director Ang Lee failed Taiwan's college entrance exams — twice. Then he tried to go to acting school, but his English was not considered good enough.
 - **Slide 11:** #8 Mahatma Gandhi, Activist
 - Following his civil disobedience campaign, Gandhi was sentenced six years in jail for conspiracy. He has come to be known as the Father of India, and promoted non-violence, justice and harmony between people of all faiths.
 - **Slide 12:** #9 Ellen DeGeneres, Comedian/TV Host/Producer
 - A year after publicly coming out as gay in 1997, Ellen's sitcom was canceled and she thought her career in entertainment was over. As of 2018, she had won 14 Emmy awards for her daytime talk show.
 - **Slide 13:** All the quotes arranged in boxes.
2. Have students work in small groups to discuss what the biographies are saying about failure, what the speakers have in common and why the speakers may have said what they did about failure.
3. Have student groups share their conclusions. If necessary, ask questions to help them conclude, at a minimum, that failure is inevitable.

Slide 14: Lessons from Today

1. Have students record on a sheet of paper one thing they learned or one insight they gained about failure during Day 1. They should then ball up the paper and, when all students are ready, engage in a “Snowball Fight” by tossing their papers to each other.
2. Have students open the “snowballs” and read them aloud (as many as time allows).

DAY 2

EXPLORE, (Slides 15-16)

Overview: Students continue to examine the topic of failure by viewing a video of a TED Talk by Jia Jiang, an entrepreneur and author of “Rejection Proof.” Following the video, they consider the close relationship between success and failure and reflect on the potential personal impact of each.

Slide 15: If Failure Is So Great, Why Does it Hurt So Bad?

1. Explain to students that they will be creating a concrete shape poem with information they learn from a video clip. Encourage them to recall as much information as they can about the video's content.
2. Briefly discuss the connection between rejection and failure (e.g., failure can feel like rejection and vice versa, both failure and rejection can evoke feelings of anxiety, depression, sadness and a fight/flight response).
3. Show the video segment of [Jia Jiang's TED Talk from 2015](#).
 - Description (from TED.com): Jia Jiang adventures boldly into a territory so many of us fear: rejection. By seeking out rejection for 100 days - from asking a stranger to borrow \$100 to requesting a “burger refill” at a restaurant - Jiang desensitized himself to the pain and shame that rejection often brings and, in the process, discovered that simply asking for what you want can open possibilities where you expect to find dead ends.

Slide 16: Make it Concrete

1. After viewing the video, distribute Make it Concrete student capture sheet and show Slide 16 to provide directions for creating a concrete shape poem.
 - Students first draw the outline of one image, or a series of images, that represent the main concept of the video segment.
 - Students then fill in the outline of each shape with facts they learned about failure and rejection from watching the video. (An example is provided in the PowerPoint.)
2. After finishing their work, have students share their concrete shape poems in small groups.
3. Display students' poems in a classroom space to create a class collage of poems.

EXPLAIN, (Slides 17-19)

Overview: Students research successful individuals and present skills and lessons learned from each failure encountered in their careers. Students then conduct interviews with school personnel to learn more about failure from people they know. Ultimately, students will explain why failure is a more effective and enduring teacher than success.

Slide 17: The Failure of Success and the Success of Failure

1. Have students work with a partner to identify a successful individual they would like to research.
2. Direct each pair of students to research the person they have selected and create a “résumé of failures.” Their résumés should include the following, if possible:
 - Career(s)
 - Ways in which their selected individual experienced failure before becoming successful (and possibly after!) in their career(s)

- Lessons they learned that fueled their future successes
- 3. Display students' résumés and allow time for students to read several during a Gallery Walk.
- 4. After the Gallery Walk is complete, invite students to share the skills and lessons they wrote down. Have them compare their lists to the ones below.
 - **Skills:** Patience, perseverance, pride, humility, adaptation, resilience, coping, self-motivation, identify and regulate emotions, problem solving
 - **Lessons:** Power over decisions, learn natural consequences, take personal responsibility, understand the value of effort, embrace challenges, focus on learning and improving
- 5. Alternate Option: After building the résumé of failures, have student partners develop and share a "celebrity interview" with the class. One partner acts as the interviewer; the other acts as the person they researched. The interviewers ask the celebrities to describe their pathways to success and the skills and lessons they learned from the failures they experienced along the way.
 - Have students record skills and lessons they hear from each interview.
 - After all interviews are complete, invite students to share the skills and lessons they wrote down. Have them compare their lists to the ones above.

Slide 18: The Failure of Success and the Success of Failure

1. Tell students that we have seen how famously successful people have dealt with failure and that they will now have an opportunity to talk to some people we know to find out what they have learned about the importance of failure.
2. Work with the whole group to identify a list of 3-5 questions students will ask school personnel about their experiences with rejection and failure and the lessons they have learned.
3. Have students work in groups of 3 or 4 to conduct their interviews with school personnel (each group should interview a different person). (Note: If time allows, consider having student groups interview more than one person to gather additional data.)
4. When all students have completed their interviews, have each group share their findings. Ask students to note commonalities and differences they hear among the interviewees' responses.

Slide 19: The Failure of Success and the Success of Failure

1. Use Slide 19 to guide students through reflection and discussion questions to help them strengthen their understanding of the success of failure:
 - Are they surprised about the stories shared by their classmates? The commonalities and differences?
 - What takeaways do they have because of this exercise?
 - Which do you think is the more effective teacher – success or failure?

DAY 3

ELABORATE, (Slides 20-27)

Overview: Students learn about mindsets and discover how developing a growth mindset can change the way they tackle challenges. Students apply their learning by reframing a past failure using self-talk that focuses on process, growth and a commitment to trying harder or differently.

Slide 20: What is Intelligence?

1. Ask students to share their beliefs about intelligence by discussing the following questions:
 - Are we born smart or do we become smart?
 - Can intelligence change or is it fixed?
 - Is there more than one way to be intelligent?
 - Why does it matter?

Slides 21-22: Developing a Growth Mindset

1. Use Slide 21 to introduce the concept of **mindset** and explain the difference between a **growth mindset** and a **fixed mindset**.
 - “In a **fixed mindset**, people believe their qualities are fixed traits and therefore cannot change. These people document their intelligence and talents rather than working to develop and improve them. They also believe that talent alone leads to success, and effort is not required.”
 - “Alternatively, in a **growth mindset**, people have an underlying belief that their learning and intelligence can grow with time and experience. When people believe they can get smarter, they realize that their effort has an effect on their success, so they put in extra time, leading to higher achievement.”

Source: DevelopingGoodHabits.com
2. Show students the video on Slide 22: The Power of Believing That You Can Improve featuring Carol Dweck at her TED Talk in 2014. After the video, engage students in a brief discussion to gauge their understanding of the concept of mindsets.
 - Description from TED Talk website: Carol Dweck researches “growth mindset” — the idea that we can grow our brain’s capacity to learn and to solve problems. In this talk, she describes two ways to think about a problem that’s slightly too hard for you to solve. Are you not smart enough to solve it? Or have you just not solved it yet? A great introduction to this influential field.

Slide 23: The Language of Mindsets

1. Divide students into small groups. Give each group an envelope with the Fixed vs. Growth Mindset Phrases cut apart into separate strips (see resources following the lesson).
2. Have students work with their group members to decide whether each phrase is an example of a fixed mindset or a growth mindset and sort them accordingly.
3. Review the answers together. Ask students to explain how they sorted the quotes (i.e., why they considered a phrase an example of a fixed or growth mindset).
4. Share with students the information in parentheses following each quote to help them understand characteristics of fixed and growth mindsets.

ANSWER KEY

FIXED MINDSET	GROWTH MINDSET
“Ugh, I’m so tired of hearing about how great Kiera is at tennis. I’m just as good as she is.” (Threatened by the success of others)	“Kiera is an amazing tennis player. She practices every week. I’m going to join her next week for practice. (Find lessons and inspirations in the success of others)
“Ms. Logan said I need to include some references in my paper, but it’s fine just the way it is.” (Ignore useful feedback)	“I’m so glad I added those references to my paper. It really helped me prove my thesis statement.” (Learn from criticism)
“Every time I study for a math test, I fail anyway so why bother?” (See effort as fruitless or worthless)	“I got a D on my last math test, so this time I spent extra time practicing and studying and I got a B! I’m getting better!” (See effort as the path to mastery)

"I've been working on this for an hour and I still don't get it. I quit." (Give up easily)	"I can't get my experiment to work. I'm going to ask the teacher for help, then I'm going to try it again until I get it right." (Persist in the face of setbacks)
"Engineering Club sounds like fun, but it's too hard. I don't think I'm going to join." (Avoid challenge)	"Engineering Club is fun, but it's hard. But it feels really good to finish a difficult project. I love that feeling!" (Embrace challenge)
"I read the chapter, but I already knew everything in it." (Desire to look smart)	"I read the chapter, but I wasn't sure I understood it all, so I did some research on the internet to check my understanding. (Desire to learn)

Slide 24: The Language of Mindsets

1. Ask students to share their personal experiences with positive and negative self-talk (if they are comfortable doing so).
2. Then, ask, "Does it really matter how we talk to and think about ourselves? Why? What does this have to do with rethinking failure?"

Slide 25: Rethinking My Failure: Finding the Silver Lining

1. Ask students to reflect on a time when they failed at something and felt particularly upset, disappointed, or dejected (e.g., winning a game or contest, a test or project, making friendships, running for class office or completing a creative project).
2. Challenge students to reframe their thinking about the failure as they complete the Finding the Silver Lining activity.
 - Instruct the students to fold a sheet of paper in half vertically, creating two columns. At the top of the left-hand column, have them write the word FAILURES. Below that, have the students write a list of their failures in school and in life. Tell them that no one else is going to see their failures and that this part of the exercise will not be shared. Have them number each failure.
 - At the top of the right-hand column, have them write the word WISDOM. In that column, have them write any valuable wisdom they learned from each of their failures. Give an example such as: "Wisdom #1: I learned that I can never look to someone else to make me happy." Tell them they can have many "wisdoms" for each failure.
 - If necessary, use questions, such as the following, to help students identify some personal wisdoms:
 - Did you have a fixed mindset or a growth mindset?
 - How would you change your self-talk around the event?
 - If you could do it over, what would you do differently next time?
 - How could this failure lead to future success?
 - Have a volunteer in each group read one wisdom to the rest of their group (not the failure). Instruct them to keep going around the group clockwise, with each person reading one wisdom each time (with the option to "pass" if they wish). Tell them to read only the wisdom and not to go into detail about how they learned the wisdom. Have them keep going around the group until all in the group have stated all of their wisdoms.
 - Instruct students to tear their papers in half along the fold. This leaves them with their FAILURES in one hand and their WISDOMS in the other. Have them choose from the following four options:
 - Keep both your FAILURES and your WISDOMS.
 - Throw away your FAILURES and keep your WISDOMS.

- Throw away your WISDOMS and keep your FAILURES.
 - Throw away both your FAILURES and your WISDOMS.
 - After students make their choice, tell them that if they chose to throw anything away, to ball up the papers and toss them in the trash can.
3. Suggest to students that they continue to rethink their failures and consider keeping a Scrapbook of Failures along with a list of lessons learned from each one.

EVALUATE, Slides 26-27

Overview: Students create slogans to communicate the lessons they have learned and to empower others to rethink failure. Finally, they revisit the drawings they created on Day 1 and reimagine what failure looks and feels like to them.

Slides 26: Now What?

1. Tell students they will now have an opportunity to share the lessons they have learned about failure by creating posters with original slogans. Their slogans should be short motivational messages to their peers and should communicate something they have learned from the Rethinking Failure lesson. They can include graphics, color and other design elements such as images and interesting fonts. If students are having a tough time creating their own, share the following with them:
 - Don't let failures define you.
 - Learn from your failures.
 - Accept that failure is part of improvement.
 - Working your way out of failure helps you become who you are.
 - Don't think about failure when you're trying.
 - It is important to learn from the process of trying.
 - You move past failure when you refuse to let it stop you.
 - If you aren't making mistakes, you're not learning. If you're not learning, you're not growing.
 - Failure is a risk, but the reward is discovery. We make the most out of our lives when we risk failure.
2. When completed, display students' posters around the classroom and conduct a Gallery Walk. Later, students can display their posters around the school as part of a campus-wide effort to encourage their peers to rethink their own experiences with failure.

Slide 27: Redrawing Failure

1. Have students take out the drawings they created on Day 1 and turn the paper over. Explain that we are "Turning the page on failure." Direct students to draw what failure looks and feels like to them now.
2. Ask volunteers use their images to share their new perspectives on failure.

Optional Extension:

1. Hold a Failure Week to reinforce the lessons students learned about the importance of failure and how to move past it. An exercise like this one can also help students come to terms with the inevitability of failure and depersonalize it so they are able to move past it.
2. Encourage students to conduct independent research about the importance of failure and how to develop a growth mindset. Revisit the concepts in classroom conversations and/or create a Learning from Failure corner where students can share the resources they have found.
3. Conduct a "Flip the Tarp" activity. Have groups of 4-6 students stand on a tarp (or rug) and try to flip it completely over without stepping off the tarp or holding on to any object. Debrief the activity by asking students how they were able to meet with success (particularly if they fail the first time).

Standards

English Language Arts >> Anchor Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1](#): Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5](#): Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2](#): Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4](#): Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CONNECTIONS AND QUESTIONS T-CHART STUDENT CAPTURE SHEET

Consider: Who are they? How do you know them? How are they connected to each other?

CONNECTIONS	QUESTIONS
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	

MAKE IT CONCRETE STUDENT CAPTURE SHEET

Directions: Create a concrete shape poem about the Jia Jiang video.

1. Draw the outline of one image, or a series of images, that represent the main concept of the video segment. You may use the space below.
2. Fill in the outline of each shape with facts you learned about failure and rejection from watching the video.

FIXED VS. GROWTH MINDSET PHRASES

Directions: Make one copy for each group. Cut apart the strips and place them in an envelope (one set of strips per group).

“Ugh, I’m so tired of hearing about how great Kiera is at tennis. I’m just as good as she is.”

“I got a D on my last math test, so this time I spent extra time practicing and studying and I got a B! I’m getting better!”

“Engineering Club sounds like fun, but it’s too hard. I don’t think I’m going to join.”

“I read the chapter, but I already knew everything in it.”

“Kiera is an amazing tennis player. She practices every week. I’m going to join her next week for practice.”

“I read the chapter, but I wasn’t sure I understood it all, so I did some research on the internet to check my understanding.”

“I’ve been working on this for an hour and I still don’t get it. I quit.”

“I’m so glad I added those references to my paper. It really helped me prove my thesis statement.”

“Every time I study for a math test, I fail anyway so why bother?”

“Ms. Logan said I need to include some references in my paper, but it’s fine just the way it is.”

“I can’t get my experiment to work. I’m going to ask the teacher for help, then I’m going to try it again until I get it right.”

“Engineering Club is fun, but it’s hard, but it feels good to finish a difficult project. I love that feeling!”



"It is impossible to live without failing at something unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all in which case you have failed by default."

2

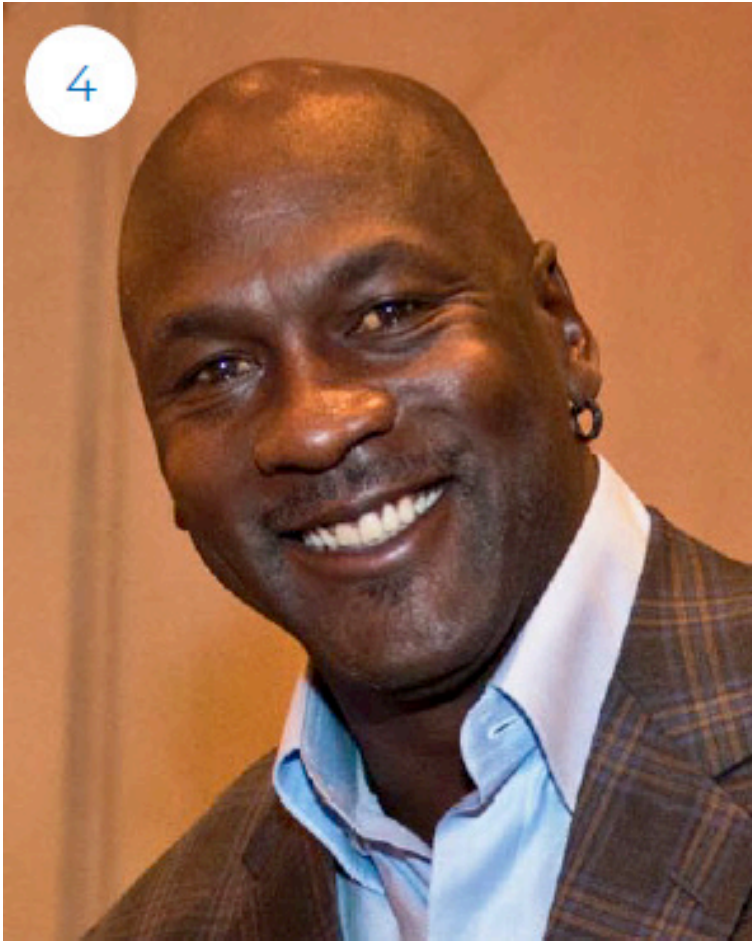


“You know, failure hurts. Any kind of failure stings. If you live in the sting, you will – undoubtedly – fail. My way of getting past the sting is to say no, I’m just not going to let this get me down.”



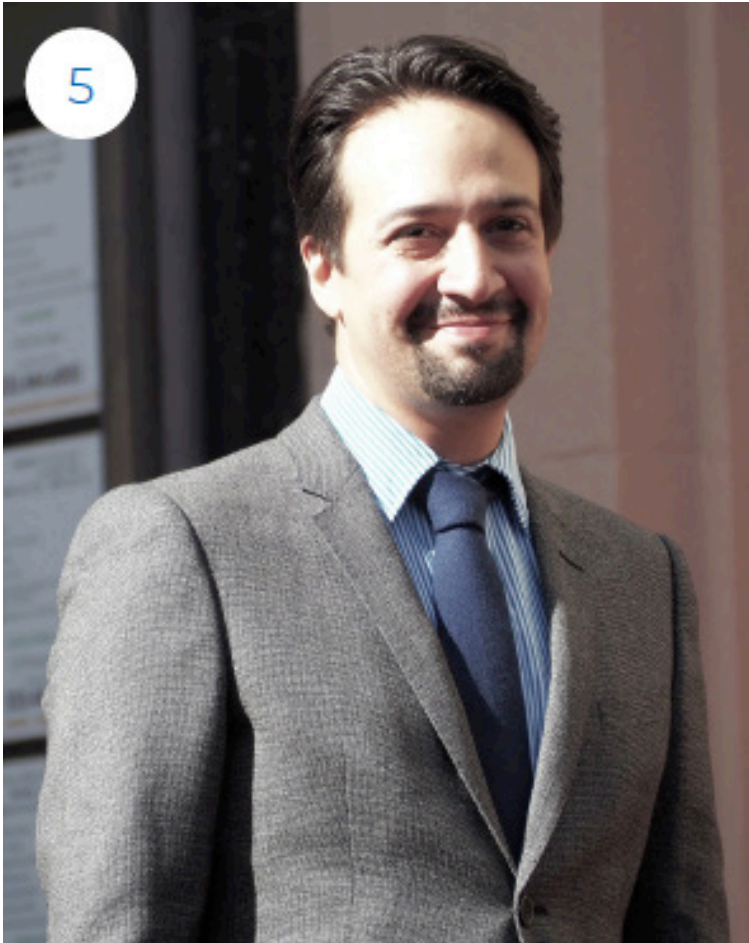
“Success is most often achieved by those who don't know that failure is inevitable.”

4



“I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game winning shot and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

5



"I try to let my decisions be guided not by what I think will succeed or fail, but what I'm going to learn from that process."

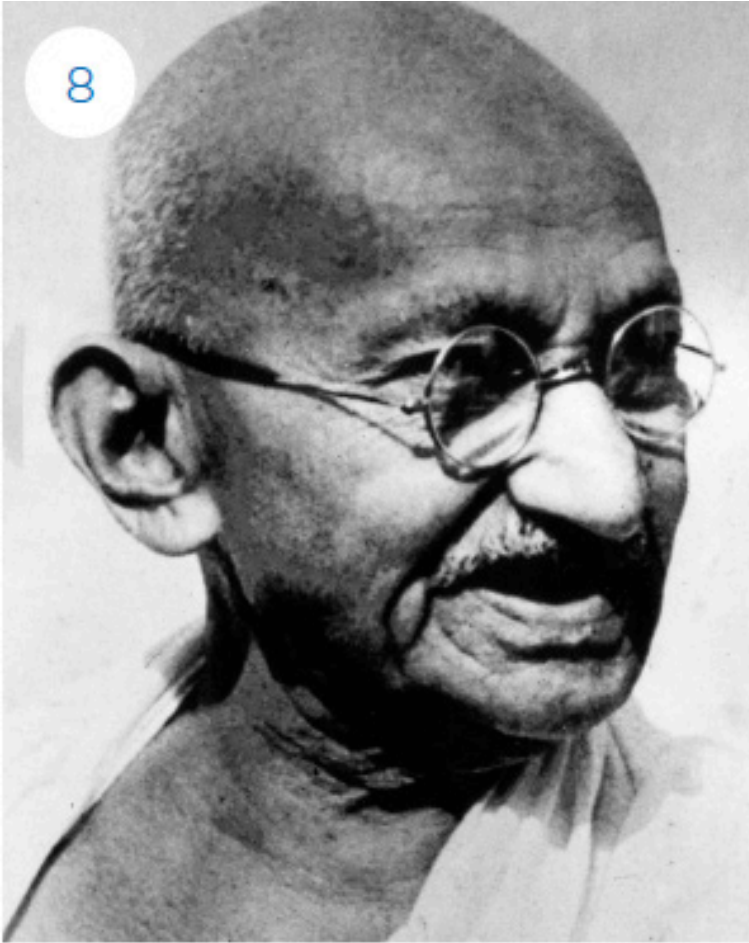


"It doesn't matter how far you might rise. At some point you are bound to stumble. If you're constantly pushing yourself higher and higher the law of averages predicts that you will at some point fall. And when you do I want you to remember this: There is no such thing as failure. Failure is just life trying to move us in another direction."



“Many times when you make a movie, it feels like your biggest mistake. But even if a film isn't a hit, you shouldn't view it as a mistake.”

8



"It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom. It is healthy to be reminded that the strongest might weaken and the wisest might err."



“When you take risks you learn that there will be times when you succeed and there will be times when you fail, and both are equally important.”