

Ep #389: Failure Is Your Best Friend: How to Learn, Grow, and Keep Going



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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[Feminist Wellness](#) with Búa Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, somatics and nervous system nerd, and life coach Béa Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. So over the past few weeks, we've been talking about the internal patterns that shape the way we move through the world. Eventually, all of those patterns get tested in the exact same place, which is failure. Most people think they're stuck. Things are ruined when they've failed. But what I'm here to say is that failure isn't actually what keeps you stuck. It's what happens right after that keeps us stuck. Meaning it's the meaning you make of it, the way you talk to yourself and whether you shut down and then ruminate and spin out and tell this story about woe is me and I'm a disaster and it's so terrible how I failed and all is lost. Or if you're able to like, stay present, move through it, learn the lesson, grieve if you need to be, really angry if you need to. But are you able to stay present?

If failure has ever made you question yourself or pull back or stop or feel like you're stuck in the mud, I want you to know that this is where the real shift happens. You ready? Let's talk about it.

I love this quote from the phenomenal Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön, and I find it quite apropos. She writes, "Fail. Fail again. Fail better," in her book of wise advice for leaning into the unknown. So often, my coaching clients tell me they're scared to do something because they're scared to fail. Scared to launch a business, to go on dates, to go for that big dream, to tell someone they're hurt, to apologize, to ask for a raise or a promotion, to change their diet or step away from those beautiful old crutches of caffeine, alcohol, or sugar, even to engage with self-care activities, because there's this place inside where fear lives and says, "Why bother to

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do these things, to take care of yourself? You won't actually feel better afterwards anyway."

All because failure seems really scary. And when I ask folks why they're scared to fail, they often look at me like I have 473 heads and say, "I'm scared to fail because, well, then duh, I'd be a failure." And while that's a totally understandable understanding of failure within the predominant cultural context, because it's what we're taught, I'm not down with it. I don't think it serves us.

The statement that if I fail, then I will be a failure, like then you'll be forced to wear the scarlet letter F on your chest forever, that is where the cognitive fallacy lies. That you are a failure because you failed. And that is one of the key thoughts, a thought error, in fact, that keeps folks, has kept me, and maybe keeps you, my perfect love, from taking that first step towards your dreams, that keeps you from caring for and about yourself in a deep and centered way, that keeps you feeling small and wishing for things to be different, but not doing anything about it, that keeps you from taking courageous action on your own behalf. The thought that because you've failed, you are a failure. You're doomed.

But that's just a thought, a sentence in your mind, written by your old monkey mind based on all those lessons from your family of origin, from our culture, from the patriarchy, from capitalism. And it doesn't serve you, my darling, not at all. If you failed, that means you tried. You learned that thing you did wasn't the right action to get you to your goal. And so now, you can do a different thing. Meanwhile, pausing to ask yourself why failing is so terrifying is a gateway in to seeing and learning to manage your own mind, which is the greatest gift you can give yourself. The thing about failure is that it's just an experience of something not turning out the way you expected it to. And there's discomfort inherent in it. You thought you'd get an A plus on that paper and you got a B plus. Is that a terrible thing, a failure? And so you should stop doing your schoolwork? I'd say not. It's just

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that your expectation wasn't met, that there is something to learn here, a space for growth.

Maybe you want to meet the love of your life. So you went on one date and that person wasn't the one. So do you call dating a failure and just stop? Like, never go on a date ever again? Well, that's an option. I don't think it's an option that serves you, but sure, it's an option to call one failure or 10 or 20 evidence that you have failed to be datable or lovable, or to start to tell some gigantic story about your failure as a human.

And what I see folks doing is that they stop expecting themselves to achieve their goals, stop asking themselves to get comfortable with the discomfort necessary in order to achieve something bigger, something new, something better. Folks stop having expectations of themselves, start doubting their capacity, and start spinning in this story of terrible failure.

And that's sad to me because how can you grow if you don't push yourself, my darling? If you don't push yourself gently and with love? If you stop holding space to get uncomfortable, knowing that growth and change and transformation and healing and dating and failing and so much of life is uncomfortable because it's new and new is scary and sometimes that's okay, because it's in service of your own goals, your own dreams. You just end up living the same life as always with low expectations of yourself to show up for yourself.

And maybe you're beating yourself up for that too. And you know, I'm not out here blaming, shaming, or guiltig. I just love you, you perfect human animal you. And I know you can meet that next goal. I know you can launch your own podcast. You can get yourself to the gym. You can do seven minutes a day of breathwork meditation. Start your own coaching business, write that novel, go on another date, or have the challenging conversation you've been meaning, wanting, dreaming of having. I know you can do it because I have set massive goals for myself and have done the work to meet them.

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So too have hundreds of my life coaching clients. I know you can meet your own expectations. But first, you get to learn how to manage and tolerate failure if you don't want to swim around in the same life you've always had. And listen, my darling, if your life is just fine, thank you, and you don't want or need to accomplish anything else, if there's no healing left to do, no growth left to do, if you don't want to gently push yourself toward that uncomfortable edge of growth, then that's that. Cool, cool, my love. But if you want more out of this life, if you want to continue to shift and grow and heal and create, then you get to learn how failure can be your best friend ever.

Let's pause on that. Let's breathe in and out. All is well. Let it sink in. Failure, failing on purpose can be your best friend, ally, and accomplice in the world, truly.

The thing to remember here is that your thoughts create your feelings. So you can set an expectation for yourself and you don't accomplish it. Okay. In our feminist empowerment model, you, my darling, are the boss of your own brain, which is so liberating. It means that you get to decide what you want to make that failure to meet an expectation you set for yourself mean. What you get to make it mean about yourself, your life, your past, your future. It can easily mean that you're the worst, a terrible person, so lousy, a disappointment to your entire family line for generations to come, that you failed, so you'll always keep failing, so why keep trying? Again, totally available to you.

You can choose that negative thought that will keep you stuck where you are and we've all done it. I've done it. You've likely done it, but you don't have to keep doing it. You don't have to keep making failure, not meeting an expectation, mean a darn thing about you, your capacity, your brilliance, your willingness to stick with it, to go the distance for your own goals.

And given that most of us work for someone else, you don't have to make your boss or supervisor saying, "This work isn't good enough," mean

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anything about you either. And you can realize that you have two options. One, start to roll around in the thought and feeling that you now embody failure, that you're terrible, that you mess everything up, or whatever your go-to is, which is a thought that leads you to feel negatively about your capacity, which often leads to the action of wasting time rolling around in that thought. Ugh, I mess everything up versus learning and doing it differently. Or, option number two, well, learning from it and doing it differently, accepting that you are a human and you're in a growth process and that's a beautiful thing. And that's the rub. You keep yourself from trying because you're afraid, deep down, of feeling a negative emotion that you have complete control over.

You choose your thoughts to create the feeling you want. Let me say this again for the folks in the cheap seats. You don't do something that stretches you past your comfort zone, like publishing your blog, going for that raise, exercising, trying breathwork, going on a date, because you're scared you won't meet the expectation you are setting for yourself, knowing likely subconsciously that then you will feel bad about yourself. You will beat you up. You will be mean to perfect you, forgetting that you and only you decide how you feel about yourself and everything else in the world, no matter what you've been taught.

That is, by embracing failure, you could realize that what would make you the most disappointed in yourself is not setting a goal and not trying and not risking failure. And then the disappointment comes from not doing the thing versus doing it and failing. See how that one works? It's a mind shift from, "I won't try because I'll fail and that's bad and then I'll be disappointed in myself and then I'll be mean to myself," to, "Not trying is failing and that's where the disappointment comes, in not trying."

You could also shift the whole paradigm on its head and decide to think, if I try and don't meet my expectations for myself, that's okay because I tried. And trying, but like really trying and giving it my all is so amazing. And I get

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to be proud of myself when I'm all in, when I'm going for it in earnest, regardless of the outcome. When you make a promise to not be mean to you, no matter what comes. And as I was saying this, I can picture every perfectionist out there, raise your hand if you're a perfectionist or a recovering one as I might label myself, starting to self-flagellate.

But I'm not talking about doing things perfectly because that's not a real thing. I'm talking about trying something challenging and going all in on it and being okay with failure, which is pretty much the opposite of obsessing about things being perfect.

All right, so let's pause. I'm going to pull back and start with an example because those really helped me in life. So you decide you want to exercise more. So you set the expectation you'll go to the gym five days a week for an hour. And life happens two to three days into this plan. Maybe the cat barfed, one of your kids needs help, the blender exploded, which actually happened to me not so long ago. I missed my workout and almost missed a flight to Hawaii for cleaning like protein powder, avocado, and coconut milk off the ceiling, but I digress as I am want to do.

So you had set this goal. You were going to work out five days a week and you missed two of those workouts. You failed to meet your own expectations. And you made it to the gym twice last week. That's fabulous. Next week, you can plan things differently. You can learn from those failures and you can see how that works out. And you can decide to just be in the flow of life, not constantly wishing things were going differently. You can pause to celebrate what you did accomplish, learn from what you didn't, and encourage yourself to find a way to continue to work towards your goal.

You only failed because you put yourself out there. You tried, you did the work. You bought the spandex and the sports top. And by challenging yourself to get started, you move towards your goal and you can choose to celebrate that. I do on the daily. I find so much more joy in a failure to meet

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an expectation set than in not setting myself up for failure by playing small, by not trying something new, by not going for it, by not applying. In my life, that looked like not quitting my day job as a primary care provider for years and years to start my life coaching practice, which is now thriving. Thriving because I went for it and dared myself to fail and fail and fail again, learning something new every day, knowing that this is how we heal and this is how we grow.

About two years ago, I challenged myself to notice three failures a day and to revel in them. A month into the challenge, I realized I wasn't failing as much as I could. And that's because I wasn't challenging myself to do so. I was working with my clients every day. My practice was solid, clinic was stable. I was doing well, but I wasn't growing in the ways I wanted to. So I started making note of my failures as a way to propel myself, to raise my own expectations of me, to get comfortable with failure as a business owner, a life coach, then healthcare provider, as a human.

And so I started looking for ways to fail. I upped the weight I was lifting at the gym and had some fabulous failures there at first. Like physical ouch failures, which I learned from. I kept on working on it and that weight that was way too much for little me to lift a year ago is now doable, now liftable, because I decided not to call that failure to lift 20 more pounds the first day out. I really did that. I was like, I can do this. I'm going to lift 20 more pounds. And then I had to like take an ice bath and like slather myself in Arnica montana for like days and days and days. But anyway, I decided not to call that failure a bad thing. I called it a chance to fail and not make it mean something bad about myself. Just something that happened. It didn't mean I was stupid or ridiculous, though I can laugh at it like in a loving way now. I could just actually label it in that moment, an expectation I hadn't met yet but would keep working towards.

So I lifted two more pounds and five more pounds and five more and five more until I could, over time and with constant courageous dedication, lift

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what I wanted to lift, striving to fail ever more and to show my perfectionist leaning mind that failure doesn't mean I'm a failure. It means I need more practice and to be all in, I took up the most failure-prone hobby I could think of: ceramics.

Now, for those of you who make ceramics, you know exactly what I'm talking about. There are just about 1,000 ways to fail at ceramics. If you don't wedge your clay right, it won't center right, and then you can't raise that wee smushy ball of clay up to be a bowl or a cylinder. And if you somehow manage to do it, it may crack while drying or it may explode in the kiln or your glaze may come out all like lumpy or ugly, or there's the thousand times I forgot to wax the bottom and had it stick to the kiln. There are 1,000 blessed ways to fail at ceramics.

So I kept doing it, kept learning without beating myself up at each failure because I was expecting it, praising it. I was all in for failure and framed it as a form of self-care, a way to slowly and with time detach with love from the very premise of failure as a bad thing, but rather to see failure as a chance to learn, to grow, to remember that I am, as you are, completely and utterly perfect, whole, worthy, magical, amazing, and yeah, there are tons of things I don't know how to do because I haven't done them yet. I made a bunch of ugly ass, lopsided mugs that weigh about 473 pounds each. I made bowls that wouldn't sit right on the table, plates with wobbly rims, vases that leaked all over the table, and I kept showing up.

I failed in every imaginable way. And the beauty of all that failure is that each one made me fear failure just a little less because I didn't beat myself up. I didn't make it mean anything about me. I just chalked it up to being new at something and an understanding that neophytes fail. And that's the way to success. To not fear failure, not to take it personally, but rather to keep on trying because that's the only way to mastery. And now I'm better at ceramics than I was when I first started. I mean, I'm not out here being like I don't make wobbly everything. But I'm getting better all the time. I get

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better because I keep showing up and risking failure because actually, it no longer feels like a risk. It's just what I do.

I welcome the failure because it means I'm trying. And now, after noting my daily failures for two years, I feel so much more confident in the world because I fear failure less and less each day, remembering as always that life is full of fear and failure and fear isn't something to hide from, but rather to show up for with full heart, to feel into, to get comfortable with because you are a mammal and fear is not going away. Fear is normal and natural and it's okay. And of note, writing down my failures was so much more supportive of my success than writing down my victories because it challenged me more. It's easy to be victorious at things you know you're good at like putting on pants or making a salad. But pushing yourself to do something new, that's like a failure playground. And that's where life feels the most exciting and invigorating for me because it's where I get to see just how much I can fail and how much I can learn from it all.

Fail. Fail again. Fail better. While this example of ceramics may feel trite, the whole concept of getting comfortable at failure, really embracing the discomfort of it all is so up for me in my life as I let go of my old role and title as functional medicine provider and step fully and firmly into my calling as a supporter and facilitator of true root cause healing through life coaching and breathwork. There is so much failure for me to grow from on this path. It's challenging for sure, and leaving the old, safe, steady, dependable world of ordering labs, diagnosing, prescribing, that old role and all its trappings to say, "I'm a life coach and I'll help you to know your mind, to feel into your worth and value because not knowing your mind, not managing your thoughts, not knowing how amazing you are and not acting from that place to set boundaries and limits, to act in your own best interest." That, all of that, is the true root cause of illness and disease.

And yeah, it's scary. And that's great because I have failed and I'll continue to. And that's how I'll learn and grow and will shift my relationship with this

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work of healing for myself and for you. Wow, what a gift. How beautiful to have something new to fail at. Also, to go back to ceramics, I really need something new to fail at because my partner is going to kick me and my 1,000 massive lopsided bowls out of our tiny apartment. So, cut off. I'm glad I have a new outlet for my daily failure plan.

And I also, yeah, I also have this like amazing new role model for failure. One of the most frequent failures I've ever met is my darling niece, Layla. She fails at just about everything she does and she is the happiest, most perfect animal I think I've ever met. She'll be two years old in December and let me tell you, Layla is all about failure. She's constantly trying new things, like running on sand and going on stairs standing up, not crawling, using utensils, putting words together into sentences, holding things in her hands without dropping them. I mean, that kid is a failure machine.

Not that long ago, she didn't know how to walk, but she kept trying. And I think nature, divine life force, whomever designed us humans was so smart to make babies out of putty and to give them lots of padding because, wow, did she fall over a lot. So just pause and think for one second, imagine little you, or imagine little Layla. I'll put a picture of her in the show notes. She's so cute. What if y'all, you, Layla, had stopped trying to walk after the first fall? We'd all still be crawling and in New York City that would be a particularly gross choice because look at this place. I mean, I try to touch New York City as little as possible and have no interest in crawling around in my hands and knees around here because I decided not to try to stand up and walk for fear of failing? See where I'm going here, my love?

It's only because we let go of our fear of failing to walk that we were able to stop being a toddler, to push ourselves up to standing, to hold on tight to the closest finger or wall, and to take those first steps, to risk failing at walking. And we fell down time and again, and we got back up. And for my listeners whose bodies don't walk or walk with crutches or other assistance, I see you. I love you. Not walking is not a failing for those mammals whose

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bodies weren't designed to walk on two legs. However you locomote is perfect. And fear not, there are lots of things that baby you failed at in beautiful ways too.

We only grow when we risk failing. The more you try to fail and realize that failure cannot hurt you, only your self-deprecating thoughts about failure can hurt you, the more you are able to grow. That's the thing. That's the lesson. It's only your thoughts about failure that make failure hurt. If you want to succeed, you need to fail more. That's it. That's it.

Fail. Fail again. Fail better. So my darling, I'm going to pause right there. This whole reframing of failure was a mind-blowing concept for me when I first realized what a gift it is to my inner child, to that past me that labeled myself a failure and hurt myself about it. I want to let all of this sink in.

My beauty, you're probably starting to notice that the work isn't, in my world at least, about fixing yourself because you're not broken. What are you talking about? How would you fix someone who isn't broken? No, no. My work is all about changing how you relate to yourself in real time. And that shift doesn't just change one area of your life, it changes how you show up everywhere. So if one of these episodes stood out to you, go back and listen again. That's usually where your next layer of work is. Hope that's helpful. All right, my darling, thanks for being here. I adore you. I'm so grateful you're here, so glad you're here. If you're enjoying the show, share it on social media, share it in your book club, share at the PTA, share it at work. Share it with your people. Make sure you leave a rating and a five-star review. It really helps the show get into more ears. That's what we're out here doing this for, right? Right.

Let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe. You are held. You are loved. And when one of

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us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. I will talk to you soon.
Ciao, ciao.