



Fabulous failures

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Definitions

▶ FAILURE

- ▶ Lack of success
- ▶ The neglect or omission of expected or required action
- ▶ The action or state of not functioning

▶ SUCCESS

- ▶ the accomplishment of an aim or purpose
- ▶ (Archaic) the good or bad outcome of an undertaking
 - ▶ "the good or ill success of their maritime enterprises"

Mindsets

▶ FIXED

- ▶ intelligence, abilities, and talents are traits that are inherently stable and unchangeable over time.
- ▶ Based on fear
- ▶ Believe failure is disastrous

▶ GROWTH

- ▶ Intelligence, abilities, and talents are learnable and capable of improvement through effort
- ▶ Based on curiosity
- ▶ Failure is a point of learning

Compassionomics | Evidence That Caring Makes a Difference

- ▶ Empathy – I feel your pain (literally)
- ▶ Compassion – I do something about that pain
 - ▶ Helpers high
- ▶ Compassion is essential for good quality healthcare
- ▶ Improved health outcomes
- ▶ Reduced complaints / legal action
- ▶ Reduced staff burnout / improved resilience
- ▶ Encourage compassion of self and others

The Ideal Academic

(Kate Sang, EDICa, 2017, 2025)



Failure CV – the early days

- ▶ Got the wrong grades at A level
- ▶ Poached my PhD studentship
- ▶ Turned off the freezers
- ▶ Failed at PCR
- ▶ Inserted essential controls in the last week of PhD practicals
- ▶ And then I got ill – and eventually disabled

Models of disability

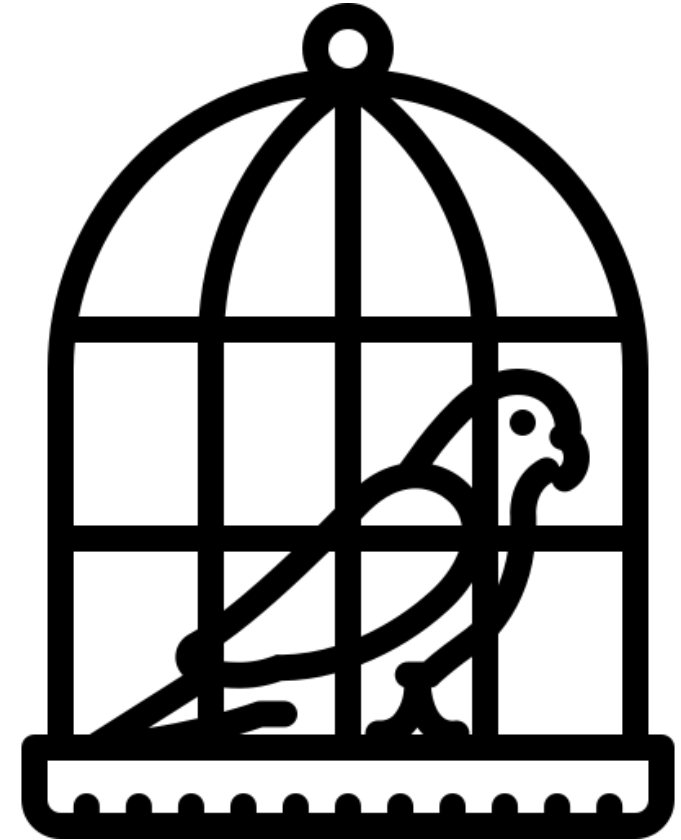
- ▶ Medical model
 - ▶ Try harder and you will cure yourself
- ▶ Social model
 - ▶ Society creates the barriers, so it should remove them
- ▶ Rights based model
 - ▶ Equality Act 2010 (Disability Discrimination Act 1995)

Disability – energy limiting condition(s)

- ▶ Fatigue and Post exertion malaise (PEM)
- ▶ Spoon theory (and the rest of the cutlery drawer)
- ▶ Pacing
 - ▶ Activity planning
 - ▶ pre-loading, planned crash landings, and delegation
 - ▶ Work from home (from bed)
 - ▶ Diet and hydration
 - ▶ Sleep
 - ▶ Temperature
 - ▶ Shaking and pain
 - ▶ Other illness and injury

Minoritised groups - Canary in coal mine

- ▶ Will fall first
 - ▶ Greater sensitivity to damage
 - ▶ Greater pressure
 - ▶ Less resilience
- ▶ But the gas is toxic to everyone
- ▶ Current research culture is toxic – and life threatening



Failures as an ECR

- ▶ Ridiculous numbers of failed job interviews
 - ▶ Moved to Cochrane reviewing, Birmingham University
- ▶ Multiple failed grant applications
 - ▶ Moved to Northumbria University
- ▶ More failed grant applications
 - ▶ Moved to Newcastle University
 - ▶ Had a baby
 - ▶ Many failed job interviews (from day 1 of this job)
 - ▶ Moved to UEA just after the market crashed - couldn't cover the mortgage

Next steps in failing

- ▶ Failed to spot a psychopathic manager
 - ▶ Love-bombed, bullied, over worked
 - ▶ Boundaries crossed, unprofessional and unethical behaviour normalised
- ▶ Became a wheelchair user
- ▶ During covid learned to work from home and never returned to campus
 - ▶ Increasingly now working from bed

Failed to specialise

- ▶ 9 Diagnoses
- ▶ 13 Symptoms
- ▶ 11 Research methods
- ▶ 8+ Interventions (clinical)
- ▶ 6+ Interventions (systemic)
- ▶ 4+ Interventions (meta-science)

GDPR – how to break in multiple ways

- ▶ PhD student A recruited a group of people with Parkinson's and one set of issues
- ▶ PhD student B also needed people with Parkinson's and slightly different issues
- ▶ Should have been that Student A sent an invite to Student B's study
- ▶ Instead Student A gave a list of his participants to Student B
- ▶ Breach, freeze of both projects for 6 months, apology.
- ▶ Both completed and passed
- ▶ Student C needed to understand patient priorities of 2 measures – was it better to reduce symptom amount or improve symptom management
- ▶ Should have asked PPIE advisers, instead asked all participants
- ▶ Minor breach, no freeze, no apology.
- ▶ GDPR team brilliant in advice and worries about student wellbeing in both cases.

Failed to stay quiet

- ▶ Member of Access All Areas Working Group
 - ▶ Improved campus accessibility
 - ▶ 30% of undergraduates declare a disability
- ▶ Member of UCU
 - ▶ Departmental Rep
 - ▶ Free membership for PhD students – access to training
 - ▶ Mask mandate through Covid – no on campus spread
 - ▶ UCU represented over 60% of those placed in “at risk” pools

One option closes another opens

- ▶ Having a “no” has made other options available
- ▶ Learning from errors
- ▶ Supporting others through errors
- ▶ Building trust and credibility
- ▶ Changing culture one case study at a time
- ▶ Getting better at speaking up and challenging
- ▶ Getting better at demonstrating different options
- ▶ Trying to be more compassionate to self

Failure is unavoidable

- ▶ Choice to learn
- ▶ Choice to change
- ▶ Choice to be compassionate
- ▶ Look at systems – where are the fail safes missing?

Thank you – and now your thoughts and stories...

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