

TPP11 - The Fear of Failure

What if I told you that your fear of failure is holding you back from getting the results that you want? That the only path to success is through failure? Not by avoiding it. Don't believe me? Keep listening to find out more.

This is the physician philosopher podcast. I'm Dr. Jimmy Turner and anesthesiologist, personal finance blogger and life coach for doctors.

The physician philosopher podcast teaches you how to create the life that you deserve. One thought at a time. Start before you're ready, start by starting, start now.

Hey, everyone, welcome to episode number 11 of The Physician Philosopher Podcast where we take an uncurated unapologetic look into physician life. Today's thought is this real progress can only be had, once you move past a fear of failure into embracing failure as a sign of moving forward. Failure really often stops us in our tracks. And so why is that? What is the issue that's going on there? So let me give you an overview. Failure often leads to shame, that shame we usually overgeneralize it into who we are and our identity. So let me tell you a little story to tell you what I mean. So when I was an intern, I was actually in the emergency department. And I had built central lines up to be like this big procedure that anesthesiologists which I was becoming, we're really good at. This is something that you needed to be facile and efficient, and just have a knack for. Well, I was in the ED and we had a patient come in, and this patient was septic. She unfortunately was also on Coumadin. Her INR was greater than three. And I was asked to put a central line in. And so I built this up to be a really big deal. And so I actually stayed like three, four hours after my shift ended to put my first central line in. My upper level supervising me, and we take a look at the patient's neck.

And there aren't the best targets there, the upper level doesn't really want us to go there. So we're gonna put in a femoral central line. And, and so I've watched some other people do the procedure, obviously several times at this point, and I get the wire in and I dilate. And then when I take the dilator out, I pull out everything. And for those of you that don't know, or haven't done a central line, that is not ideal. So I basically just put a large hole in this femoral vein, in a patient has an INR of more than three. And so as you can imagine, patient started to bleed, so I got to hold pressure. And as I did that my upper level looked at me and said, Well, I guess you'll never do that again. And at the time, the way that I heard those words, you'll never do that, again was as a failure just as a pure, unadulterated failure. Like what an idiot, I can't believe I just did this. And the thought that I had is I'm going to be a terrible anesthesiologist, like if I can't use my hands in an ultrasound machine, and put a central line in somebody then like I'm going to be really bad at my job. And so that immediately became shame. So I actually went home, like ruminated on this, I couldn't sleep, I actually didn't sleep for several hours after my shift.

And so you're talking like going into five o'clock in the morning, because it was a night and evening shift. And I made it more about who I was then about the failure itself, right. So when that upper level said, Oh, you'll never do that, again. Instead of looking at those words, and

thinking like, oh, like, she's telling me that this is an opportunity to learn and pay like, no big deal, hold pressure, you're gonna remember this one forever, which I have, the way that I interpreted that the way that I made it mean, what I made it mean is that I was a failure that I was a terrible anesthesiologist and training and that I was going to be really bad at my job. And that became part of my identity. And I actually had issues moving forward in terms of being super anxious around central lines, when I got to my anaesthesia training. Now, of course, looking back, I laugh at that because I can throw a central line in pretty proficiently at this point. And I use ultrasound in my hands to do regional anesthesia every day that I work. But that said, what happened there is that I took that situation, that failure, if you will, and then I turned it into shame, and I made it my identity. And that is when things get dangerous. So the problem here is that many people get stuck and try to do things the right way. People do not want failure in their lives. And the reason for that is because we are afraid of it. We don't want it to be who we are. And where I see this the most in my world right now is when someone asks me to do some business coaching for them, they want to start a side gig or some version of non clinical income, they don't know how to get it off the ground. And people will get stuck at step number one because they're so focused on getting it right. Instead of following the mantra of this podcast right start before you're ready, start by starting start now they get stuck.

They don't ever start at all. And the reason why is because there's so afraid of getting it wrong. As if there's one decision that's right and there's one decision that's wrong and if they pick the wrong one that is going to be a failure. And when you dig down deep The reason that they want to get it right is because they are afraid of failure, they're afraid of failing. The fear of failure is one of the biggest issues in the physician community, particularly for those who are interested in generating non clinical income or starting a side gig or starting an entrepreneurial effort or just clinical practice with procedures, right, we really don't deal well with mistakes, like failure is not an acceptable part of medicine. Many physicians, it turns out are perfectionist, we expect to get it right all of the time. And I know this is true, because this happened in my own life for a long time, where if I did something right, 99 out of 100 times, like, I would expect that but the one time that I didn't, I would overgeneralize that shame, that failure into my identity. So I keep using this word overgeneralize.

What do I mean?

So overgeneralization is actually a cognitive or a thought distortion. This is a way of thinking that is actually flawed. So what we do is we overgeneralize one situation, one example, one failure in this situation, or the example that we're giving in this podcast, and then we turn that into meaning everything who we are like our identity and the situation, we overgeneralize in other areas of our life, too, right? We just had an election, this podcast is coming out the Monday after the Tuesday vote. And so I'm not sure at the time of this recording, who's gonna end up winning that. But people when they think about someone on the other side of the aisle, if you are a democrat think about republicans or your republican thinking about a Democrat, we will typically overgeneralize what we think about those people based on one thing that we fundamentally disagree with, and that will determine who we think they are as a person, even though it's just one topic that we disagree with, when it comes to political topics, but we'll over generalize that

into what kind of person they are. When it comes to failure, we overgeneralize that into our identity, like I refuse to be a failure. I'm a doctor, I'm a perfectionist, I can't get it wrong, I have to get it right. And so when we fail, we overgeneralize that into our identity. And that is super painful. That's the reason why doctors don't deal well with failure. And the problem is that it makes us want to avoid failure in the future. So anything that gives us that feeling, the one time we did x and a patient didn't do well, the one time we did why an outcome was bad, we will remember that. And it will change our practice into anecdotal non evidence based medicine. How often have you seen an attending that you worked with in training, who just didn't do something this one way, because they had that one bad patient outcome, and they were unwilling to experience that ever again. The reason why is because they're afraid of failing, it makes us want to avoid taking risks, it avoids our ability to live life outside of the normal track. So like when we're in medicine, a lot of reasons why people won't start side gigs or entrepreneurial efforts is because that's just not a well worn track. And so going outside of that, well worn track means that they might fail, that they might publicly fall on their face that they might have to publicly put themselves out there. And that there's a chance that people will have opinions about that. And this is what traps doctors in their practice. This is what traps doctors from starting businesses. This is what traps doctors in a place. That's honestly not very helpful. So what do we do? So an exercise that I take people through all the time is where I asked people like, hey, if you had to tell me, what are some feelings that you want to feel, they will almost always say universally all positive emotions, I want to feel hope and joy and gratitude and love.

And then when you ask them, okay, what do you actually experience most days or weeks, they'll be like, Oh, well, stress, anxiety, disappointment, and most of them will actually be negative. And so what we want is all positive, what we actually experience is all negative. And that's pretty silly, right? Because we know that human experience is negative and positive, right? Like we can't avoid negative feelings. In fact, Halloween just passed. And people watched horror movies, because they wanted to be scared that we wanted a negative feeling. Similarly, people watch ROM coms, right? Because they want to cry. And I'll unashamedly say that I watch ROM coms with my wife and love the genre, and I'll cry, right? Oh, watch it, I know that's going to happen probably. So we really don't expect to have positive feelings all of the time. We just think that's what we want. And what I want to teach you is to clip that script when we are willing to embrace all of human experience all of the feelings that we have all of human emotion. And we recognize that those negative feelings can't really cause actual harm to us that they're just a feeling. We can move forward. Even though they're there, we can move forward, even though we're scared or anxious, even though we're afraid or fearful of failing. So the solution to any negative feeling is not to avoid it. It's not to drink your way out of it, or overeat or under eat your way out of it by buffering it's not to resist it, because that almost always leads to a worse feeling. In fact, it is to allow that human experience both the positive and negative feelings that it provides, and at times to recognize that we not only want to experience those things, but we want to seek them out and failure, it turns out is one of those really powerful things. So Brooke Castillo at the Life Coach School often say that discomfort is the currency of your dreams, and what she's meaning is that if you're a business owner, a coach, a blogger, a podcaster, you've thought about starting real estate on the side.

But you just can't get started. The reason why is because it's an uncomfortable place to be and you're afraid of failing. But when you realize that discomfort, that actually failing, like failing forward, this idea of moving forward, despite failure is actually what makes you move forward. And progress is you and your business and in your clinical practice, or your ability to be a great mom, dad, husband, wife, parent, like whatever your situation is, once you release yourself from the fear of failure, and viewed as part of the human experience, and as a sign of future success, that's when the real change happens. So let me give you an example. Many of you know that we recently launched the Fall Enrollment for the alpha coaching experience. And that starts on November 18. And I want to tell you, like we have this 10 day launch, we're trying to help as many doctors as we possibly can, right? Like this entire point of this business is to change the culture of medicine, one doctor at a time, we want to empower you guys to become who and what you want to be. And I'm in the middle of this launch, trying to help doctors, and it's a passion of mine. It's a calling, it's a purpose, like I want to have impact and help people.

And you know what, so many things went wrong. So many things. I literally have a list of seven or eight things like I actually wrote them down. And I kept asking myself, like, how is this working for us? What am I learning from these mistakes? These fails, these missteps. And let me give you some examples, right. So I lost my internet connection completely out of my control spectrum, our internet provider. I don't know if a cable got cut or something happened, but it just completely went down. On the day of our first webinars. We had something like 400 people signed up for some webinars that day, and my internet went out.

So when that happened, I obviously wasn't thrilled. I went around and tried to solve the solution and bought a hotspot, the first webinar, it ended up just being terrible. Like I couldn't even run the thing, like I was glitchy my mic wouldn't come through like nothing was working. And so we basically had to abandon ship on our first webinar in this launch of this product that like everything for the last three years has worked towards this work towards helping doctors become the partner, parent physician, they want to be to potentially get business coaching, if they want to start non clinical income like this is where everything is led to and the first webinar during this launch failed. Another thing my site crashed twice, on two other live events, like we sent traffic to the site.

During those events, and my site crashed, it just crashed, right kajabi were my program, the alpha coaching experiences hosted that crashed, I got emails from people telling me that I was sending too many emails. And if you if it's your first time through this, and you haven't learned how to really accept and embrace and actually look toward failure, you'd look at all these things. And they may have any of these one events would have previously in my life stopped me in my tracks and just said, I'm done. Like, nothing's working. My Internet's out, like I just I give up, there's just no point, I look like an idiot spy business. And this is not representing myself, this is not representing the physician philosopher, well, I could have just stopped. And that honestly would have been the comfortable thing to do. And that's what a lot of people would have done. You get an email from someone that's really nasty and hateful that says, hey, you're sending too many emails, you could look at that situation and say, oh, gosh, like I'm really bothering people.

Or you could look at the other 99 emails of people saying, this is something that I've needed for so long. Thank you so much for providing the service, and recognizing that you reached doctors who needed help, because you sent that one last email. And yeah, you got an email back saying that, like, hey, this isn't what I wanted from your site. But then the idea that you reach somebody that you help somebody who is in need, right?

That is a completely different mindset, you can look at the failure, the email of someone that's upset, or you can look at all of the positives and say, like, how are we learning from this? Are we accomplishing our goal? Are we failing forward, and with that thought process with that mindset with the idea that I wanted to reach failure, and that was a sign of success, I kept myself out of the dreaded state of guilt and shame and embarrassment and worrying about falling on my face publicly. Like you own a business, you have nonclinical income, you're an entrepreneur, you are going to fall on your face. I do not know a successful entrepreneur, who has not embraced failure, and literally, without exception. So you know, now what did I learn from that? Right? I kept asking myself, What am I learning? What is this teaching me at the physician philosopher with all these fails? Well, now I have two internet providers. So one is through Ethernet, and one is through cable. So if one goes down, I have a backup, I now have a Wi Fi hotspot that I know how to use. So I actually have three internet sources so that if God forbid, something happens, I can get the show up. I also changed hosts on my web site so that it wouldn't crash anymore. And now I'm going to be handing over the reins to someone else to maintain my site. So that is going to work and when it doesn't, I can hand that over to someone else so that they can actually do their job. Because if I'm being honest, like coding and running a website and like all the back end features that I don't understand, like I've been trying to do those for three years now. The physician philosopher turns three this month.

And that is stuff that I now say look, I learned from this I've learned that in order for me to run an effective business and to grow the business and help more doctors, I need to hand that over to someone else. And that all came out of failures. Those all came out of missteps, right? those emails that I got from people that said, Hey, like, this is just so many emails, I looked at that and said, Yes, like, good. I've sent enough, I finally got the email that said, Hey, man, you're sending way too many emails. And as it turns out, actually, that doctor, the reason that they didn't appreciate the emails is because they wanted coaching and just couldn't met it. They later admitted that in a later email. And so it's super fascinating how this works. But you can look at any one of those things as a failure, right? You can look at potential job changes, you're like, I just want to do the right thing. That's another example of areas where clients that I work with, they're like, I just, I don't know what to do. I've got this one job. And it's not great. It's actually pretty toxic environment. I'm thinking about taking this other job, but I just don't want to do the wrong thing. I want to get it right. And what they're really saying is I'm afraid of failing, I'm afraid of doing the wrong thing, as if that is like the worst possible outcome that exists. And what if you flip the script, and one of the feelings you actually wanted? Was failure?

What if you said instead of all these feelings, you just want our joy and gratitude and love and peace and comfort and contentment? What if you said I actually want to fail, not because you didn't show up? But because you've showed up so much and put in so much work? that failure

is a sign of your success? What if you could flip that script, right? And the first time that I ever heard this kind of idea, two different places, actually. One was from Thomas Edison, right? famous quote, I've not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work like Thomas Edison, what he's doing there is flipping the script on failure. He's saying I didn't fail. I just found 10,000 ways that won't work. I learned from each of those opportunities. Right. And that's a famous quote, unless you really understand it, and you're really getting inside your you know, inner Thomas Edison mind, you won't realize that what he really done there with that thought is he's flipped the script on failure. And that pushed him forward. He failed forward. Ramit Sethi is someone else that I recently last couple years, her talk on the subject remote actually has he runs a site, I will teach you to be rich. And I've heard him speak at fin con great speaker. And I've heard him speak before on this folder he has on his desktop on his computer, and it's called epic failures or something like that. And his goal is to have five epic failures every single month as a goal, like he actually is trying to fail epically five times a month, because he knows as a business owner, that by doing that, he is pushing the envelope, he is finding new pathways, he's carving his own niche, and he's a trendsetter, right, unless you're failing.

And I can tell you as basically the first physician, male physician coach going out into the space in a very broad way, that I am absolutely failing epically all the time. But now I look at that is just such an opportunity for success, because that means that I'm doing my best to help other doctors get the help, they need to stop feeling burned out and overwhelmed to help them build side businesses or non clinical income when that's, you know, something they want to do. And so I have completely flipped the script on failure, just like Thomas Edison, just like Ramit Sethi, I actually now seek it, it doesn't generate shame.

For me, it doesn't make me who I am. I now recognize that failure is a sign of success. Failure is a sign of success. I'm failing forward. So other ways to view it, you can view it the way Thomas Edison does as a way that won't work. You can view it as an opportunity to learn like how is this working for me, which is a tactic that I took during my launch, when I had seven or eight, like massive things go wrong. If you're growing a business, you can view it as a blessing. Imagine the epic failure that I had with my internet going out right now. And imagine where this business is going to be five years from now, when we're not helping 100 or 1000 doctors, but we're helping 10,000 or 100,000 doctors that need coaching that need help with building non clinical income that need help with financial freedom, right? I'm so glad that these things happen on a smaller scale, because as your business grows, which it does, every time that a failure happens, it's on a larger and larger scale. So great.

Now I have two internet sources. So when I have a webinar, that's not with 400 people, but with 4000 people, I know that I'm gonna have a backup. I learned that now. And when you look at failures as an opportunity to learn as a way that won't work as a sign of future progress and moving forward, that is when the real power gets released, right when you're no longer afraid of failure, because you recognize fear, and failure, like those are just feelings and they can't actually cause any real harm to you.

That's when real progress can happen. So today's thought is this real progress can only be had once you move past a fear of failure into embracing failure as a sign of moving forward. Until next time, start before you're ready, start by starting and start now. Even if you're afraid of failure, because you're afraid of failure. You guys got this. Don't hesitate to reach out to editor@physicianphilosopher.com if you have questions I always love hearing from you guys. And I've heard so much about your thoughts on the show. Really appreciate you being a dedicated listener. Tell your friends that you feel like you would benefit from this show. And make sure you subscribe so you see every episode. I'll see you next week.

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