

7. Life is Full of Hard Knocks

JUST THE FACTS: Failing is a part of life. In fact, it accounts for many, many successes – for without failing, success is almost impossible. Learning how to bounce back from failure is not always easy, but it is necessary. Enthusiasm for goal attainment is a necessary characteristic for success. This activity helps participants understand that failure is not something to fear and in fact often a necessary step on the path to success.

Time 20 Minutes

Materials • Activity 7a or 7b • Whiteboard or flip chart with markers or blackboard

Directions Write the following statement large enough so all can see (and read aloud): THE ROAD TO SUCCESS IS PAVED WITH FAILURE.

Divide the larger group into smaller groups. Ask each group to discuss the statement and what they think it means. Alternatively, ask individual participants to draw a picture of what this statement means to them. Ask each group to share their feedback and encourage other participants to comment or expand on the responses.

Decide whether you will use Activity 7a or 7b (Success or Failure), based on the make up of your group: • Option 1: Activity 7a was developed for discussion, though it could certainly be adapted to include a word bank or list of words from which to choose. • Option 2: Activity 7b provides materials that can be copied, cut out, and placed in separate envelopes to be used as



an independent or small group matching exercise. • Option 3: Alternatively, you might choose to have 10 large pieces of paper placed around the room, each with one of the 10 descriptions written on it. Sentence strips or note cards could then have each of the 10 famous people written. Participants can take turns matching the famous person with their famous failure, and, thus, their eventual success.

NOTE: Participants may benefit from having pictures of each of the famous people on the individual cards (along with the names). You can use an Internet search engine to find pictures of each famous person.

- Optional: Paper and colored pencils for drawing
- Optional: Envelopes

Conclusion Discuss with participants different ways people might deal with failure. Pinpoint how people might deal with failure differently in different environments, such as at home, at school, or at work. Be certain to wrap up the activity in a positive way, focusing on the fact that without making mistakes, we would never succeed. Ask, “What do each of the people we discussed today have in common?” Answer: They refused to quit.

Further discussion questions include: Would you have given up if you lost 8 elections? What if you wrote a book and 23 different publishers rejected it? What if just one publisher rejected it? What would you have done? What might the world be like today if Thomas Edison had given up?

Journaling Activity Think of a time when you experienced a personal failure. What was the failure? How did this failure help you to become a better person, make better decisions, or succeed in a way you hadn’t imagined? Do you believe that failure is important? Why or why not?



Extension Activity If you have Internet resources, check out some of the YouTube videos on “Famous Failures.” Simply type “famous failures” into the search bar to find results.

Have students research additional “famous failures” and work in teams to create a YouTube video showcasing one of their own failures that ultimately had a positive effect.

Another suggestion would be to use the information provided in this activity (famous people’s successes and failures) and have small groups work together to create a similar game or activity appropriate for younger children. This could then be shared with a local elementary school.

CAN YOU NAME....

1. ...a famous person who was defeated seven times while running for political office?
2. ...a cartoonist who was told by the editor of the Kansas City newspaper, “It’s easy to see from these sketches that you have no talent.”
3. ...an author whose first children’s book was rejected by 23 different publishers?
4. ...a famous singer who was fired after his first performance at the Grand Ole Opry?
5. ...a famous actress who dropped out of high school and held a variety of odd jobs, including doing the hair and make-up for corpses, before finally succeeding in show business?
6. ...a famous author who lived on welfare for years in an apartment infested with mice?
7. ...a famous athlete who was cut from the varsity basketball team his sophomore year in high school?
8. ...an inventor who was thrown out of school in the early grades because his teachers thought he couldn’t learn?



9. ...a famous Harvard University drop out?

10. ...an inventor of a fried chicken recipe that was rejected by more than 1000 restaurant owners?

ANSWERS:

1. Abraham Lincoln was defeated in eight different elections. Yet he persisted and succeeded in becoming the 16th, and one of the most respected, presidents of the United States.

2. Walt Disney was told he had no talent and fired from a newspaper job. He wound up doing volunteer work for a church in an old run down garage. One day he decided to sketch one of the many mice that were running through the garage. This mouse became the famous "Mickey Mouse."

3. Twenty-three different publishers rejected Dr. Seuss's first book, while the 24th accepted and sold 6 million copies of it.

4. Elvis Presley was fired after his first performance at the Grand Ole Opry. The manager told him, "You ain't going nowhere, son. You ought to go back to driving a truck." He went on to become one of the most famous American singers of the 20th century.

5. Whoopi Goldberg dropped out of high school, was on welfare and worked as a bricklayer, bank teller, and licensed cosmetician. After graduating from Beauty College, she took a job at a mortuary fixing the hair of and applying make-up to the corpses.

6. J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series, lived on welfare for years, in an apartment infested with mice, and was rejected by 12 publishers before going on to fame and fortune.

7. Michael Jordan was the athlete who was cut from the varsity basketball team in his sophomore year of high school. Angry and embarrassed, he began to get up early each morning to practice with the junior varsity coach. Eventually he not only made the varsity team, but also became one of the most popular athletes in the world. Michael Jordan is quoted as





saying, “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.”

8. Thomas Edison was the inventor who was kicked out of school. Following this, he was homeschooled by his mother. It took him over 700 tries before he got the filament right for the light bulb. Edison is quoted as saying: “I have not failed seven hundred times. I have not failed once. I have succeeded in proving that those seven hundred ways will not work. When I have eliminated the ways that will not work, I will find the way that will work.”

9. Mark Zuckerberg dropped out of Harvard University. He went onto become the youngest millionaire (at the age of 26) and is the CEO of Facebook.

10. Harland David Sanders (better known as Colonel Sanders) had his fried chicken recipe rejected by more than 1,000 restaurant owners before it was accepted by one. Today, people still eat it at KFCs across the world.

