

REDEFINING FAILURE

Last week during a coaching session, a client told me “If I measured my success solely on this past week, I’d feel discouraged. But since we’re shifting focus to making lifestyle changes, I feel successful. Overall, I’ve made a lot of improvements”.

That statement alone was a big win for the week.

So often are hard on ourselves when we slip up or ‘fail’, or can’t follow the plan perfectly. We commit to a diet plan, or at least we vow to start to be more mindful of our eating. Yet, despite our best intentions, we slip up.

For many of us, a single ‘slip up’ is a catalyst for complete derailment. Instead of getting back on track, we let things go. We start feeling guilty, deciding to no longer care at all (letting a single stress donut escalate into an all night binge), or ditching the plan altogether, feeling like a failure, losing hope of ever being successful. We may punish ourselves by overeating or vowing to pay penance with extra minutes of cardio training the next day.

Eat. Fail. Berate. Repent. Repeat. The yo-yo, on-again-off-again rollercoaster ride continues.

Sound familiar? If this sounds like you, you’re not alone. The problem isn’t that you ‘fail’, the problem lies in the way you view slip-ups. Here are three ways to shift your lens on ‘failure’:

1. Expect ‘slip ups’. They’re going to happen. You’re human. For some reason, when it comes to diet, we have this need to be perfect. Perhaps its because we don’t have full control over any other part of our life, so we want to have control over our eating habits. Or we think we *should* be able to stick to a diet plan, and if we don’t, we are somehow fundamentally flawed.

So, when we do make a mistake, it becomes a really big deal. We think that if we can’t be perfect, what’s the point in trying at all.

In every other situation in life, we don’t expect that we’re going to ‘get it’ right away, or sometimes ever at all. Imagine if you expected to golf a perfect round every time you go out and play? Or imagine if you expected to play the piano perfectly after the first few lessons!

Look at healthy eating as a practice, just like everything else in life. Aim to make progress; don’t aim for perfection. Slip-ups will have a lot less power if you look at eating this way.

2. See ‘failures’ as a fantastic opportunity to learn more about yourself so that you can improve. Recently I spoke at a conference in Alberta. Before and after my talk, I spent my time interacting with people in the audience as well as the other speakers. After the talk, I went out for drinks and dinner, and then immediately to another person’s house. That’s

when my own eating habits fell off the rails. There were snacks, drinks, and despite not being hungry, or really even enjoying the food, I let myself go with no breaks.

In the past, I would have felt guilty and like a failure, then I would spend an hour or so creating a new neat and perfect diet plan that I could start the next day. But this time was different.

First, it was one night- and definitely not worth getting worked up over. And secondly, I took the opportunity to learn from the situation.

I'm an introverted person, and spending an entire day without any time on my own to regroup and recharge was exhausting. I used the food to zone out. Next time, I can arm myself with what I really needed: a break.

3. You cannot actually fail unless you *choose* to fail. Shift your focus to long term measures of success, which allow for a lot more wiggle room. Ups and downs are a natural part of the process, but when you zoom out to the big picture, you'll see that the curve trends upward, as long as you keep trying.