

Put Yourself on an Upward Spiral of Success

By Dana Lightman, Ph.D.

“Create the outcomes you want. Regardless of the circumstances.”

Don't be fooled. Success isn't only about getting it right. Success hinges just as much on how you handle things when they go wrong. When things aren't exactly going your way, here are three key strategies to put you on an upward spiral and bring more success into your life.

1. Learn how to fail. Striving towards any goal is an unsteady path. Whenever you are engaged in an endeavor that stretches you and places you outside your comfort zone, it is normal to experience some level of discomfort and inadequacy. You can expect that, at some point, you will encounter a setback, such as a failing grade, missing out on a promotion, sitting on the bench or being rejected for a date. To maintain your balance, remind yourself that obstacles are an integral part of moving towards your objective. Rather than being surprised or disheartened in the face of a setback, learn to tolerate failure by tapping into your willpower.

Believe that you have what it takes to overcome an obstacle, and you will succeed. In this way, you will be creating thoughts, feelings and behaviors that will place you on an upward spiral of perseverance and strength.

2. Turn negative experiences into positive opportunities. Be sure to look for the success within the failure. Thomas Edison is a model for this approach. He finally invented the incandescent light bulb after thousands of attempts. When a reporter asked what kept him going, Edison is reported to have said, “I have not failed. I just found 10,000 ways that didn't work.” By finding a way to reframe his failures, Edison found a way to motivate himself and to work with optimism and persistence. To reframe your setbacks so they can inspire you, ask yourself questions such as:

- What was I trying to achieve and why didn't it work?
- What are the successful aspects of this situation or experience that I can identify?
- What lessons have I learned as a result of this setback or obstacle?

- What can I do differently next time to create a successful outcome?

When things go wrong, you won't be wasting your time and energy beating yourself up. Instead, you will be adopting an attitude of optimism that will propel you to the next step and create conditions for a successful outcome.

3. Ban perfectionism and set reasonable standards. POWER Optimism is based on the healthy pursuit of excellence, not on perfectionism. In contrast, perfectionists believe that mistakes must never be made and that the highest standards of performance must always be achieved. As a result, they are full of self-doubts and fears of ridicule and rejection. Because the perfectionist is driven, he or she sets standards that are beyond reason and reach and then becomes depressed when they are not met. Mistakes become evidence of unworthiness, so the perfectionist becomes preoccupied with fear of failure and disapproval. The end result is a depletion of energy on all levels.

In the end, it's much harder to create success by pushing yourself to be perfect than by allowing yourself to truly and fully engage in life. Why? Because life is an ongoing process and you are always evolving. You will never get it all done, and you will never get it all right.

Let your creativity and passion flow. Give yourself permission to fail. Look for the positive possibilities in the midst of negative outcomes. Tap into your perseverance as you aim for excellence. These strategies will certainly put you on the upward spiral of success!

Dr. Dana Lightman is an accomplished motivational keynote speaker and trainer specializing in positive psychology. She has over 20 years experience as a presenter, psychotherapist, coach and educator, presenting her POWER Optimism™ programs to a wide range of audiences at conferences and conventions, corporations, hospitals, non-profits, universities and schools.

