

September 3, 2015

Yup. I. Failed.

This summer, I had the privilege to attend [Failure Lab](#), an event where successful people share their stories of their greatest failures with the hopes of empowering others and de-stigmatizing failure. It was a powerful, thought-provoking evening that made me contemplate my own failures and what I've learned from them.

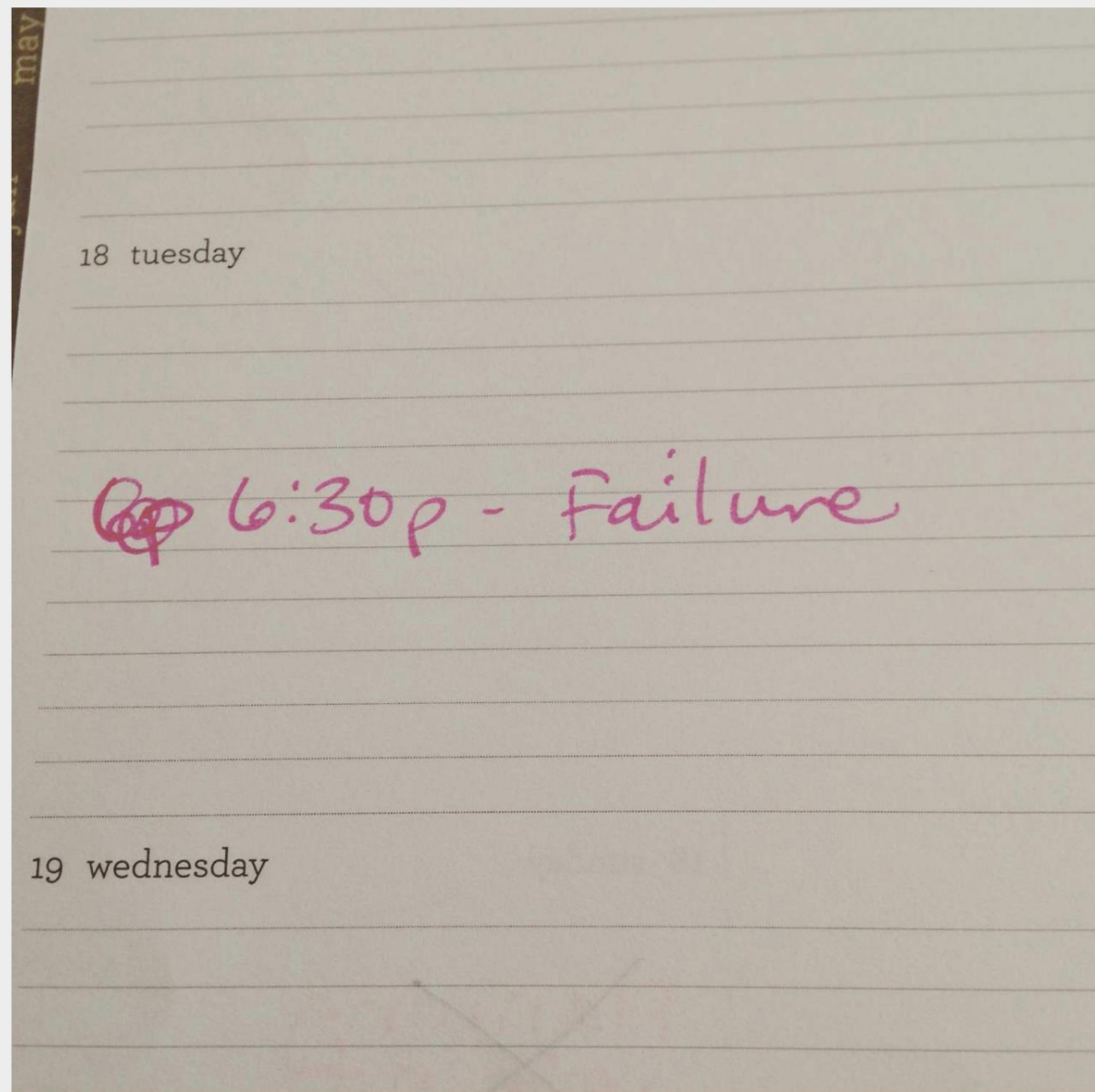
When I started writing this post, I was going to make a list of funny fails, many of which happened in the course of teaching yoga. Like the time I lit my notes on fire while guiding a candlelight meditation (no damage done, except to my ego). Or the time I was guiding students to *become very aware of the sounds within this room* at the exact moment that someone began loudly urinating in the bathroom at the back of the studio. One class I got really into it, building dramatically to our opening OM: *The yogis recognized a deep light of awareness within that they called the Atman. You might experience this as the wisest part, the one who watches and knows what's true for you. We will now chant the ancient mantra representing this deep wisdom, the sound of OM. Inhale.* And then I started leading the chant with a lot of enthusiasm and vigor (not to mention VOLUME) and my voice completely cracked like a 13-year-old boy. *OOOACKKKKKKKCOUGHCOUGHKKKKKKMMMMM*. Hopefully this is not really what my deepest wisdom sounds like.

But owning up to those cute, funny fails would be just a cop-out. That's not the real stuff. No serious consequences. No real vulnerability.

What about the real messy stuff? What about the yoga teacher who should know wayyyyy better than to: Neglect her own well-being. Bring her life out of balance. Abandon the self-care measures that she wishes for her students. Ignore the return of the pain and panic attacks that had been long gone.

Well, that's my greatest failure. I was sitting in Failure Lab this summer listening to others' stories in the midst of my greatest failure. And I'd like to share how I got there, what I learned from it, and how yoga helped me pick myself back up.

There is nothing I'm more passionate about than helping others be kinder to themselves: mind, body, spirit. I believe each of us has a deep wisdom that can be a true guide. I became a yoga teacher to facilitate the time and space to connect with and explore that wisdom. However, I soon remembered that I still have bills to pay and so (as is common), I took on a lot of jobs. Some yoga related, some not. It's exciting to see yoga gain popularity, and thrilling to be asked to teach more and expand this reach. And I'm absolutely intent on continually engaging in rigorous training so that my students have the very best I can offer. And so that's where this started. An excited yoga teacher a few years in, starting to get some momentum, seizing every awesome opportunity. Oh, and I have a personal life too, did I mention that? Lots of stuff happens in it, especially this year.



So, earlier this year, I set myself a strict schedule. I ran my mind like a drill sergeant, even as I was planning programming to help other people do the exact opposite. *That doesn't apply to me right now. It's for them, not for me.* I thought I could sacrifice myself. I. Know. Better.

You see where this is going. My practice fell stale. I went through the motions, mind racing. That inner voice that I'd always counted on fell silent. Without it, I was lost. So I reverted to old habits: I pushed harder.

The body doesn't lie, and my body doesn't take any crap. In the face of this constant pressure and lack of balance, it keeps the score. Soon, some of my old ghosts insidiously crept back: my chronic pain, panic attacks, and, worst of all, a complicated endocrine disorder I had well-controlled got worse...way, way worse.

This would be a logical time to step back and learn from it all, right? Not yet. This is what makes it a failure. I knew better. I was aware it was too much and I continued on anyway. My setbacks made me more frantic and more certain that I needed to do all the things. The more I felt like I was failing, the more I refused to accept reality and the more I scrambled and forced. The more I lost connection with my wisdom, the more the drill sergeant took over. Soon, this part was just straight up running the show. Every day. Every night. Every weekend. All the time. You can fight with reality, but as Richard Miller says, reality always wins.

And so the inevitable collapse. *I can't take it today.* Soon, I was under the watchful gaze of my best friend. She studied me for a minute before speaking. She didn't sugar-coat it. *I know you, and I know that this is very, very dangerous,* she said gravely. Her intensity surprised me. The internal sergeant sat down and was quiet. And that's when I realized it. The gig was up. I had somehow unlearned the greatest lesson of my life: balance comes first. And that was just not OK.

I failed. But failing isn't the end. It's a normal part of life that literally everyone on the planet experiences. The question is, what do we do next? Here's what I learned:



My accountability partner and best friend, Lindsay.

ideal). Nevertheless, it is not a luxury, it's essential time. That's reality.

1. **Ask for help.** You know how it makes you feel good to help others? Well, guess what, other people feel that way too! We forget this a lot of the time. Reach out. If you're struggling, the people close to you want to know. They want to help. You would do that for them. Let them do it for you.

2. **Practice. But don't just go through the motions.** What I need from my practice changes constantly. This is why I utilize a range of styles in my practice. If your current regimen is making you more harsh and agitated, mix it up a little. The first thing I did when I knew I needed to take it down a notch? Called my good friend, the amazing [Erin Cowan](#), who teaches truly outstanding yoga and is now incorporating somatics yoga into her practice. A couple sessions with her and I could hear that inner voice once again.

3. **Schedule self-care first.** I learned to make a list of things that are essential for my well-being. My list takes up more daily time than I find ideal (or maybe it's the drill sergeant who doesn't find it



4. Trust that all is unfolding, just as it should. I have to credit one of my favorite teachers, [Daren Friesen](#), for that one. He often includes this sentiment in his grounding meditation and I still hear these words in his steady voice. Maybe all is going exactly as planned. Maybe you're not meant to get that job. Maybe that guy isn't the right one. Maybe this year's "disaster" is a blessing in disguise, nudging you to something even greater. According to yoga philosophy, you are being trained for bigger things and everything is running right on schedule. Trust.

5. Practice pratyahara (drawing the senses inward). Wrap your head. It's really as simple as that. You want a clean, breathable bandage that you can wrap around your head comfortably. I like the Indian-made bandages from the Iyengar tradition, but I hear ACE wraps work just as well. After you wrap, sit or lie comfortably and focus on lengthening and smoothing your breath. The slight pressure on your eyes helps to activate the parasympathetic (rest and digest) part of your nervous system. It's amazing how immediately restorative this practice is, and it gets special points for helping with those stress headaches. Plus, you can't look at your phone. Bonus.

6. Just breathe. Make your exhales longer than your inhales. Allow your breath to be smooth. You'll cue the nervous system that it's time to simmer down, regroup, and replenish.

So there you have it, yogis. I failed and lived to tell the tale. And just that realization doesn't make it all magically better. Finding balance and finding it again takes work and a lot of trial



Haven't taken class with Erin Cowan? Why not? [Remedy that now at Moksha Yoga Center.](#)

