FAILURE STORIES

FAMOUS FAILURES

(from Joey Green, THE ROAD TO SUCCESS IS PAVED WITH FAILURE)

If at first you don’t succeed, don’t be surprised or take it personally. First of all, it’s arrogant to expect to be good at something without having worked VERY HARD for it. Failure is simply a minor stumbling block on the road to success. Of course, you might not necessarily be on the right road—but you can always get off at the next exit and ask for directions. Take pride in your failures—because you can’t possibly succeed unless have the courage to fail.

- Michael Jordan didn’t make his high school basketball team. He was later named the greatest athlete of the 20th Century by ESPN.

- Marilyn Monroe was dropped in 1947 by 20th Century Fox after one year under contract because production chief Darryl Zanuck thought she was unattractive.

- Dr. Seuss’s first book was rejected by 27 publishers and Seuss considered burning the manuscript. The eventual publisher sold six million copies.

- Barbra Streisand’s broadway debut opened and closed on the same night.

- Tom Cruise was rejected for a role on the TV show FAME because he wasn’t “pretty enough.”

- Ulysses S. Grant failed as a farmer, real estate agent, US Customs official and store clerk before becoming a general and later president.

- Joan of Arc was illiterate.

- Rock Hudson required 38 takes to successfully execute one line in his first movie.

- After being dropped by 20th Century Fox after 6 mediocre movies, Humphrey Bogart was fired from a job reading radio playlets for laxatives. He then earned a living playing chess for 50 cents a round.

- Dr. Ruth Westheimer never completed high school, had two failed marriages and worked as a housemaid.

- Sigmund Freud’s first book only sold 600 copies and earned him 250 dollars in royalties.

- Walt Disney’s first cartoon production company went bankrupt.

- In 1977, Cyndi Lauper was told she would never sing again. She won a Grammy in 1984.

- Burt Reynolds first TV series was cancelled after one season. He then appeared as a bachelor on the dating game and was never chosen.

- The Beatles were rejected in 1962 by the Decca, Pey, Philips, Columbia and HMV labels.

- George Lucas’ first film flopped in 1971 prompting every major studio to turn down his next movie, AMERICAN GRAFFITI.
- Orville Wright was expelled from the 6th grade for mischievous behavior.

- Christopher Columbus miscalculated the size of the globe and the width of the Atlantic Ocean and wound up discovering the island of San Salvador in the Bahamas (which he believed to be an island of the Indies), Cuba (which he thought be a part of China), and the Dominican Republic (which he also mistook as part of the Far East).

- Sylvester Stallone was thrown out of 14 schools in 11 years. His professors at the University of Miami discouraged him from a career in acting. Stallone was also rejected for roles in the movies, *DOG DAY AFTERNOON*, *SERPICO*, and *THE GODFATHER*. His screenplay for *ROCKY* was also rejected by all but one company, who insisted that if they bought it, he would not act in it.

- Billy Joel, embarrassed by his first album, *COLD SPRING HARBOR*, spent 6 months playing bar piano in the lounge of the Executive Room in Los Angeles under the pseudonym Bill Martin.

- Myrna Loy failed her first screen test. She later became Hollywood’s number-one female box-office attraction.

- Elvis Presley’s music teacher at L. C. Humes High School in Memphis gave him a C and told him he couldn’t sing.

- Jay Leno failed an employment test at Woolworth’s.

- Billy Crystal was cut from the cast of Saturday Night Live before the show ever premiered.

- Barbara Walters was told to “stay out of Television in 1957 by a prominent producer.

- Jack Benny was expelled from high school.

- Marlon Brando was expelled from military school.

- Jules Verne, having written a full-length play at age 16, gathered friends and family together to read his work to them. The audience’s unexpected laughter prompted Verne to stop reading after the first act and later burn the script. He later wrote *20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA*, *AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS*, and *JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH*.

- Clint Eastwood was fired by Universal studios after his first two movies for talking too slowly.

- Betty Grable was told by a ballet teacher to give the idea of ever becoming a dancer. She later became one of the most beloved dancers in Hollywood.

- Lucille Ball was told that she had no talent and should go home from Murray Anderson’s drama school. Failing to get into any Broadway chorus lines, she worked as a waitress and soda jerk.

- William Goldman was fired after writing his first screenplay. He went on later to win two Academy Awards for Best Screenplay.

- John Keat’s first book of poetry in 1817 was a financial failure.

- Van Halen’s first demo tape was rejected by every major record label.
John F. Kennedy lost the election to be President of his freshman class at Harvard. He failed to win a post on the student council as a sophomore and dropped out of Stanford Business School.

Thomas Edison was fired from his job working in a telegraph office after one of his experiments exploded.

Dustin Hoffman, after failing to work as an actor in New York, worked as janitor and an attendant in a mental ward.

Benjamin Franklin attended school for only two years.

Katie Couric was banned from reading news reports on the air by the president of CNN because of her irritating, high-pitched, squeaky voice.

Steve McQueen was fired from his first role, where he only had to say one line, after only four days. He later became the highest paid actor of 1960s and 1970s.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg received no job offers when she graduated from law school. She now serves on the US Supreme Court.

Mick Jagger was deemed “unsuitable” by the BBC to sing on the radio in 1962

Bachman-Turner Overdrive was rejected by 24 record companies.

F. W. Woolworth’s first store failed. Later he created the Woolworth empire of stores around the world.

Fred Smith received a C on a project at Yale where he outlined a plan for reliable overnight delivery service. He later founded FEDERAL EXPRESS based on the same idea.

Jerry Lewis had to repeat 5th grade and was expelled from high school.

Steven Spielberg’s mediocre grades prevented him from getting accepted to UCLA film school.

John Cheever was expelled from high school after failing French, Latin and Math. He later won a Pulitzer prize.

The Sex Pistols’ first single was dropped by EMI and their second single was banned by the BBC.

John Grisham’s first novel was rejected by 16 agents and a dozen publishers. He later wrote *THE PELICAN BRIEF, THE CLIENT* and *THE FIRM*, which were all best sellers and were made into movies.

Richard Pryor was expelled from high school.

During the first year, Coca-Cola only sold 400 Cokes.

During his first three years in the automobile business, Henry Ford went bankrupt twice.

R. H. Macy failed seven times before his store in New York caught on.

Novelist John Creasey got 753 rejection slips before he published the first of his 564 books.

Thomas Edison was thrown out of school in the early grades when the teachers decided he could not do the work.
President Harry S Truman went broke in the men’s clothing store business he started.

Bob Dylan was booed off the stage at his high school talent show.

Thomas Edison tried more than 2,000 experiments before he was able to get his light bulb to work.

Chester Carlson took his invention to 20 big corporations in the 1940s. After years of rejections, he was able to persuade Haloid, a small Rochester, NY company, to purchase the rights to his electrostatic paper-copying process. Haloid became the XEROX corporation.

General Douglas MacArthur was denied admission to West Point twice.

Buddy Holly was fired from the Decca record label in 1956 by Paul Cohen, who referred to him as “the biggest no-talent I ever worked with.”

Academy Award-winning writer, producer and director Woody Allen failed motion picture production at New York University and City College of New York. He also flunked English at NYU.

Wilma Rudolph was born prematurely. At age 4, her survival was in doubt because of scarlet fever and double pneumonia. She was left with a paralyzed leg and told she would never walk again. She later won 3 gold medals in Olympic Track and Field competitions.

Glenn Cunningham suffered such severe burns when he was 5 yrs. old that doctors told him he would never walk again. In 1934, he set the World Record for the mile.

Washington Roebling suffered severe brain damage and only had use of his index finger. This didn’t prevent him from building the Brooklyn Bridge.

Albert Einstein didn’t start speaking until he was 9 years old.

Claude Monet had horrible cataracts. Fortunately he still became one of the world’s greatest painters.

Winston Churchill had a stuttering problem as a child. He later became one of the world’s most respected public speakers.

Ludwig von Beethoven was deaf when he wrote some of his best music. Most people wouldn’t think a deaf person could succeed in music.

J. S. Bach was the fourth choice for the job of Kapellmeister at Thomaskirche in Leipzig, Germany.

Rudyard Kipling submitted a story to a California newspaper in 1888. The editor replied, “I’m sorry Mr. Kipling, you just don’t know how to use the English language.” He later won the 1907 Nobel Prize for Literature.

Randy Travis was rejected by every major record label twice.

Robert M. Pirsig received 121 rejection slips before ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE was published. It sold 3 million copies.

John Huston’s screenplay for TREASURE OF SIERRA MADRE elicited the following review from Warner Brothers: “I don’t think you’d be missing anything to pass this up. It’s a draggy tale, unrelieved by either comedy or practical colorful incident….I think we should leave this alone.” That screenplay won the Academy Award for Best Screenplay.
Woody Allen’s screenplay *ANNE HALL* was called a “chaotic collection of bits and pieces that seemed to defy continuity” by a prominent Hollywood film editor. The screenplay later won 4 Academy Awards.

Babe Ruth holds the major league record for having struck out the most times in a career.

Walter Payton never made it to a Division I school to play College football. He later became the NFL’s career rushing yardage leader.

Jerry Rice never made it to a Division I school to play College football. He later became the NFL’s career leader in several receiving categories.

In his first 20 years of business, Tom Monaghan went broke twice, lost control of his pizza company, and was sued for trademark violations. Later on that pizza company went on to become Domino’s pizza.

Luciano Pavarotti could not read music. He went on to become one of the leading Tenors in the world and still has trouble reading music!

If you can fail as mightily and continually persist in the face of overwhelming obstacles, then you too can be as successful as the people on this list!

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