

Freedom to Fail

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

The teacher was blunt, her words cruel. “He has too many learning disabilities. It’s a waste of time for him to even attend school here.” Later, Ralph Showers overheard his Grandmother soothing his parents with this great declaration. “I don’t know what people think of Ralph. But I know what God thinks of him. He’s O.K.”

The young man struggled through high school and college, and finally persevered his way through Seminary.

Others labeled him a failure, but, undaunted, he began to build his dream — a ranch for the mentally handicapped. While working on its construction, he made an almost fatal mistake by backing into wires carrying over seven-thousand volts of electricity. God saved his life, but both arms were lost to gangrene.

His Grandmother’s words rang in his mind, and her belief in him gave him the courage to keep going. Despite great odds, He continued building that ranch, and today has three ranches for the mentally handicapped in northern Arizona. Delegations from around the world come to him for advice in starting ranches like his. You might

say of him what Thomas Edison, another famous person familiar with failure, used to say of himself: “**He failed his way to success.**”

It was Ralph Showers’ success, but his Grandmother held the secret to it. She gave him the **Freedom to Fail**, and in that gift was the **Freedom to Succeed**. We can give our mates, our children and our friends this same gift. We hold the secret to success for the people we love. And we must **choose** to withhold the gift or **give it liberally**.

We can give our mates this same gift.

Imagine this scene. You and your husband are sitting in a fancy restaurant. You are wearing a new dress. You feel beautiful. Your husband fumbles as he reaches for his cup of coffee. It spills onto the table and into your lap. What then? How do you respond to your husband? His mistake cost you. What are you going to do about it?

Here’s another scenario. After a harried morning, you and your wife have finally left for the airport. You’re fifteen minutes down the road, when she suddenly realizes she has left her purse with the airline tickets at home. Returning for

them may make you miss your plane. What do you do? What do you say to your wife? Her mistake has cost you both.

Perhaps the most significant gift we can give one another is the **Freedom to Fail**. It’s an expensive gift — one which we sometimes pay a high price for. But the cost pales in the light of its benefits, for the Freedom to Fail is tied with the cords of self worth. Allowing the people we love to make mistakes without condemnation makes a bold and validating declaration. “**It is YOU I value, not your performance.**” “I value YOU more than my new dress.” “YOU are worth more than getting to an airplane on time.”

Rejection is the natural consequence of failure.

Somewhere along the line, most of us have concluded that **rejection is the natural consequence of failure**. That’s why we’re afraid of it. That’s why we blame. That’s why we passionately defend ourselves when blame is cast our way. We already *feel* like failures, we don’t need someone else to flail us with our own whip.

Failure (cont')

Feelings of rejection usually makes us react in one of two ways. Either we escalate our performance, determined to avoid the possibility of failure and rejection in the future. Or we throw up our hands and quit. "What's the use in trying if all we're going to do is fail?" Some people have become aggressive workaholics because of this fear, while others have become passive bystanders of life.

Is there a solution? Can we counteract the effects that our parents, teachers, coaches and friends have had on us, our mates and our children for a life time? Yes. Emphatically, yes! It will take time and effort, for growth is a process. **But we CAN learn to allow the people we love the freedom to fail.**

This huge gift has smaller ones — segments of the whole — inside it. The first of these is the Gift of **Compassion** — choosing to empathize with your loved one's feelings. Compassion says, "I am not

like those who have rejected you. My love for you is unconditional."

The second gift is perspective.

The second gift is **Perspective** — choosing to view the mistake within the overall picture. Perspective says, "This failure is not insurmountable. It is solvable. I fail too, but God doesn't waste anything, and He can turn this around for good."

The third is **Affirmation** — choosing to approve of the **person**, instead of the performance. Affirmation says, "You are still worthy. You are not stupid if you make a mistake. What you DID failed, but YOU are not a failure."

The last gift is forgiveness.

The last gift of Freedom is the most important. It is **Forgiveness**. When we forgive the one who fails, we

open the door to healing. When we forgive, we give up the right to punish and the right to throw the failure back in our beloved's face. Forgiveness says, "I refuse to reject you for your failure. I choose, instead, to accept you fully, just as you are, and I won't remind you of this mistake in the future."

The next time your husband, wife or child makes a mistake, instead of condemning them, why not say something like: "I feel frustrated about the position this puts me in, but I know you didn't mean to do it. I make mistakes too, so I'm not going to blame you for it. Now, let's see what we can do to solve this problem." Words like these hold the secret to our loved one's success — the gift that **allows them to fail without being a failure** — the **evidence that proves their value** — and the **courage that frees them to reach for their dreams**.

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