Push's Quick Guide to…

Failure for Fuel

Building confidence and resilience

Why do we fail?

Failure is a huge part of what develops us as human beings. We aren't born knowing how to do anything apart from breathe and recognise touch and the smell and sounds of our parents. We can't even see properly when we're born: it is only 5 months after we are born that our eyes and brains are able to work in collaboration to form a three-dimensional view of the world. And remember: you all weed and pooed all over yourselves, endlessly, in the first years of life. You learned to potty train, probably with a lot of tears, frustration, thought, nerves and stress…but then you experienced pure joy when you finally got it right (for you, and your parents/carers!). And now it all just feels natural and instinctive. Initial failure is the gateway to developing every single element of our lives, including absorbing knowledge for long-term recall, learning new skills, and handling and navigating work environments.

"Our soul can be understood as a chariot driver, struggling to rein two horses, one representing our better nature and the other our baser impulses."

– Cal Newport, Digital Minimalism

What are you most fearful of?

According to a recent global study into fear, the most common things we are scared of experiencing are…

- Snakes
- Spiders
- Heights
- Being trapped in small spaces
- Needles
- Airplanes
- Strangers
- Mice
- Dogs
- Crowds
- Blood
- Darkness
- Fire
- Drowning
- Public speaking

Anger, fear, anxiety = our 'alarm system emotions'

The Amygdala is our primitive part of the brain. It is an integral part of the Limbic system, which regulates our most basic human functions like eating and sleeping. It works along with our hippocampus – which plays a vital role in regulating **learning, memory encoding, memory consolidation, and spatial navigation.** Our alarm systems are triggered in any situation we feel nervous about.

Fear is crucial to our survival:

The Amygdala is in the lower brain: our most primitive part.

"the amygdala processes responses to dangerous situations and helps us avoid or escape those situations."

-Ben Kingston-Hughes

We do 3 things when we get scared or nervous:

1. **Freeze**: cortisol (stress chemical) floods our brains and stops us from moving, or thinking logically.
2. **Fight**: we generate adrenaline (another stress chemical) and our brains re-route our entire body's system to fighting the danger in front of us. Our immune system and pain receptors are suppressed, to give us a better chance of surviving.
3. **Flight**: cortisol and adrenaline work together, and we generate a focus on escaping as quickly as we can. People who experience this say they run quicker and longer than they ever thought possible.

It is going to all go wrong:

Let's say you've got to deliver a speech to a room of work colleagues - or present some findings to a client in a meeting - with your boss sat next to you: everyone in those rooms are really glad that they are not the ones having to present, so they will empathise and be on your side. Rarely does anyone want you to fail, or put pressure on you. The only person who is putting pressure on you is you. We will often imagine the crowd will be hostile, and that we're going to go wrong and they will laugh or sneer.

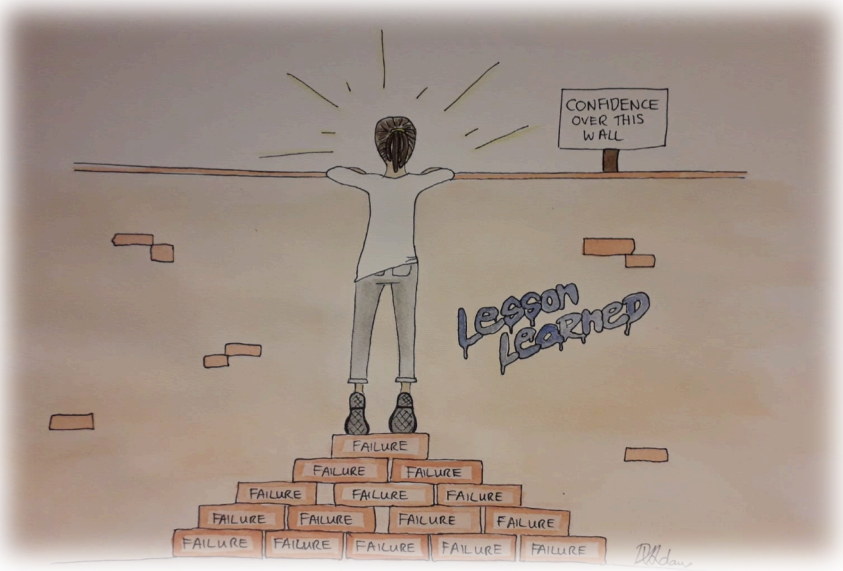
"We can't fight the maths (or the maths teacher!), we can't run away from the maths and we can't lie still so the maths thinks we're dead and leaves us alone"

-Ben Kingston-Hughes, play specialist

This is evolution at play again: for 100,000s of years (way before written language) we learned to form narratives around risky or dangerous situations that are about to unfold: this is what helped us predict things that could harm or kill us and our tribe. Fears of physical harm, captivity, and poison once helped

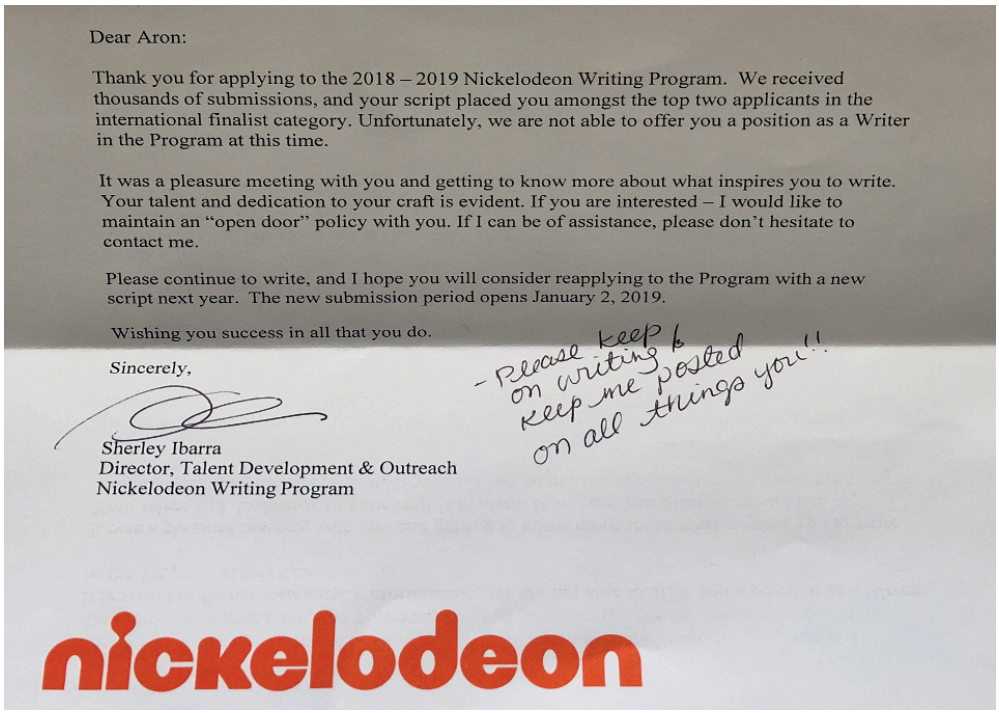
our ancestors survive. Picturing the worst outcomes means you'll be able to adapt to things going wrong. The problem is that our brains haven't evolved to be able to tell the difference between real fear and imagined fear: a speech is not going to kill you like a lion coming out of the bushes and decimating your camp would have, but our brains react in the same way. Just accept the narrative, and your nerves, but then breathe deeply and channel the adrenaline, and change the narrative: imagine the situation going right and that everyone is on your side. We want people to succeed at challenging tasks. That's evolutionary too: the survival of ourself depended on the success of our tribe.

The odds of it going wrong:
We're not saying that it's all in your head and won't go wrong. In fact, the odds you'll succeed at something first time, second time or even third time around are slim. When you first attempt anything new (learning a piece of information or a new skill) the odds of you failing are high. But remember – that's being human. If it went right the first time, would you really cement that information or skill in your head more than if you didn't get it right, and had to process it, using your brain's energy to re-wire itself to try again.



Formative testing:
That's why formative testing is so important when learning in school, college and uni. You need to test yourself on things to see where you are failing and succeeding. Then you focus your energies on the bits you aren't quite getting right. You get feedback from others, which helps you gradually improve. It's time effective and cements memories more than just a fluke "oh – got it right first time, that's nice". That doesn't really teach us anything. And the brain is always looking for patterns on how to do things better: failure is the foundation of those neural patterns. Our brains get hit with dopamine (feel good chemicals) when we finally get something right. I'll repeat: when we *finally* get things right. The greater the journey to getting something right, the more dopamine is released when we do eventually get something right.

Re-framing a failure: read this example of a 'failure' below.


Dear Aron:

Thank you for applying to the 2018 – 2019 Nickelodeon Writing Program. We received thousands of submissions, and your script placed you amongst the top two applicants in the international finalist category. Unfortunately, we are not able to offer you a position as a Writer in the Program at this time.

It was a pleasure meeting with you and getting to know more about what inspires you to write. Your talent and dedication to your craft is evident. If you are interested – I would like to maintain an "open door" policy with you. If I can be of assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Please continue to write, and I hope you will consider reapplying to the Program with a new script next year. The new submission period opens January 2, 2019.

Wishing you success in all that you do.

Sincerely,

Sherley Ibarra
Director, Talent Development & Outreach
Nickelodeon Writing Program

- Please keep in touch & keep me posted on writing & all things you!!

nickelodeon

If we said:

"Push manager Aron 'failed' to get selected for the Young Writers Programme: a global competition to find new writing talent"

That sounds negative and brutal. The words we use about failure – especially in our heads – really matter. They determine how we see and process failure. What if we instead said:

"Push manager Aron was so talented that he beat a lot of competition across many other countries, and impressed the Nickelodeon team so much with the quality of his writing, and his personality, that he got shortlisted as one of the top 2 new writers in the world"

Now, that sounds incredibly uplifting. It could be used as a story in an interview, or written in Aron's CV, for future writing work. It doesn't actually matter that he didn't get the position. Yes, he was incredibly sad for a few days, but when he allowed himself time and space to process his emotions (feeling sad is human: it means you really care about something) and he reframed it, he looked back a month later and realised he'd made an incredibly useful contact in Sherry at Nickelodeon. And how impressive his story was for applications. He has used it since, as a key part of his pitch for future work, of which he has been selected, and he's even kept in touch with Sherry – who has offered him a writing project at the new place she works: Netflix. He now says the experience has made him not only a better writer, but a more resilient writer. And a person able to navigate applications for creative writing projects more confidently. Nothing is a failure. It's all part of a journey to building yourself, your opportunities and your desirability to others.

"We significantly overestimate how noticeable our embarrassing behaviours are to others"
-Tom Gilovich, psychologist at Cornell University

Watch Stephen's quick guide on how to approach failure

"We need a chance to feel sad if we're able to be authentically happy"
-The School for Life

Tips to building confidence:

These techniques can help you prepare for a situation or task that may or may not go right, when you attempt it the first time:

- **Reverse**: take yourself out of the situation, and look at it from a wider perspective. What will really happen if it goes wrong? Will it be the end of the world? Never.
- **Revisit**: Now close your eyes and imagine the best possible narrative: repeat the image of it going right, over and over, in your head. Positive visualization is so powerful, and used by professional athletes and theatre performers.
- **Re-frame**: you are NEVER set in stone. The brain is plastic: it re-wires itself and your body re-grows. In a single day we grow 40 trillion new cells, and 40 trillion die: we are always changing and we should never feel we need to stick to one comfortable thing.

"University of New South Wales research found that accepting and allowing for temporary sadness improves attention to detail, increased perseverance and generosity, and makes us feel grateful for what we have"
-Helen Russell, author of 'How to be Sad: Everything I've Learned about Getting Happier'

- **Breathe slowly and deeply**: 3,4,5 is a good technique. Breathe in for 3 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, then breathe out for 5 seconds. Repeat this cycle 3-5 times. Try it with your eyes closed.
- **Power Pose:** Americans love their funky phrases. We just call these non-compressed poses. The way you stand hugely affects how you feel. Athletes and people in equally high-pressure roles like a soldier or a surgeon (or a surgeon soldier) are aware every second that how they stand affects their perception of whether they can navigate a challenge or not. Holding one of these poses below for just 2 minutes, can make you feel more confident – and think more clearly – about the task you're about to undertake.





- **Mantras:** another incredibly powerful tool used by athletes, and it's one we can all use. If you repeat the same positive incantations (chants: a small positive phrase) over and over out loud, it can generate a feeling of positivity and elation, where nothing can knock you. Combined with a power pose (like below) can be a winning combination.



- Witches – innocent women persecuted since the 1400s by the church – have generated powerful mantras in the 21st Century, which give them the belief in creating positive magic to improve their everyday lives. They call them spells. Studies show that athletes who have a mantra as part of a wider ritual, including power poses and deep breathing exercises, are more successful in high pressure situations. LeBron James – the highest scoring basketball player of all time – dedicates a lot of time, before any match, to his mantras. Why not do the same when you have an exam coming up? That's a high-pressure performance. Here are 2 negative to positive mantras (going left to right) to try out loud for yourself, but you can create your own.

repeat to yourself the two phrases below: which one feels nicer?
The language you tell yourself matters and affects your levels of confidence when navigating new experiences and the fear of setbacks

I can't do this
YET

It hasn't gone right
THIS TIME

repeat to yourself the two phrases below: which one feels nicer?
The language you tell yourself matters and affects your levels of confidence when navigating new experiences and the fear of setbacks

1st phrase:
"I've no idea what I'm doing"

2nd phrase:
"I've never done this before, but I'm smart enough to figure it out"

A guide to handling stress

A guide to handling nerves