

SEPTEMBER 2016

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HOW TO
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TRUE STORIES

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RECOVERY *after* FAILURE

By Torie Temple Illustrations by Jennifer Wilham

There is power in the word "failure." It can be the dome impeding your reach for the stars, the gravity that keeps you from breaking through the glass ceiling, or the paralyzing fear that keeps you from passing go. Anticipating failure is often the best excuse to give up and the sole reason dreams are never made into reality.

But it has also proven to be the storm needed to make success bloom.

I was demoted to one of my own employees

Keri Brown recalls the moment her first failure brought her back to a harsh reality. "I wasn't getting the job done even though I was working from 7am to 7pm every day," she says. "My employees started to complain because I was snappy. Clients were not getting their uniforms, and I wouldn't call back when there was a complaint. The day before a scheduled day off, I was called into the boss's office and told they would have to take me off the job. I was demoted to one of my own employees, and one of my employees was to be promoted to my position. I came in that following Monday to find my former employee at my desk, and it was a horrible feeling."



The path to Keri's situation had started when she was looking for her first professional job out of college. Unable to find a suitable position that allowed her to put her English degree to work, she interviewed at a local company that was starting a new division and looking for someone to manage the new uniform program.

"I had no clue what was involved and was really green," Keri confesses, "but I interviewed, and apparently I interview really well because my boss later told me I got the job based on how well I interviewed and not really because of my qualifications."

I didn't have managerial skills or administrative skills and was flying by the seat of my pants as I filled uniform orders and hired people to do customer service."

Without the skills to properly perform her job, Keri found herself unable to achieve success for the first time. "I was one of those people who succeeded in school and was used to getting accolades or awards, but I completely failed at this job," she says.

Being demoted didn't stop Keri from taking what she learned about herself and finding a career that would enhance her strengths. Though she lacked follow through with customer complaints at her



Keri Brown was **DEMOTED**

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last job, she realized she did handle these types of situations well when she stepped up to the challenge.

One of those strengths was customer service, which was something she excelled at and enjoyed. Because of this, when a friend told her about a position at UPS in the international calling center, she immediately applied for and got the position. She found herself comfortable in her new endeavor and was successfully performing her duties for two years when she felt called into teaching.

Despite past failures, Keri bravely went back to school and got her teaching degree. "I learned that it was more than just teaching; there was a lot of administrative work to it, but I was able to compensate by knowing my weaknesses like doing paperwork and calling parents," Keri says. "I tried to focus on those so I could get them done."

Keri successfully taught for six years before making the decision to homeschool her children. "I love homeschooling my kids. Not that there haven't been moments of failure, but I feel like a success in this job," Keri says. "While trying to find a job that matched my skills, I didn't feel discouraged to the

extent that I felt like a failure because I knew I wasn't qualified for certain positions. I kept going because I knew I had skills and there were jobs out there I could succeed in doing."

Feeling discouraged doesn't have to be a bad thing, says Katie Gangler, licensed clinical social worker of Better Self Counseling. "I think feeling discouraged can be a healthy reality to failing if kept in check," she says. "I don't think it can be avoided if you don't meet your goals. Discouragement can help motivate us [into thinking,] 'I don't want to feel that way again, so I will try something else.'"

Allowing discouragement to act as a form of motivation is what Dr. Kathleen Lewis did when getting into medical school proved to be no easy task.

I kept going because I knew I had skills and there were jobs out there I could succeed in doing



Dr. Kathleen Lewis was **DEMORALIZED**

"I wanted to go to med school more than anything in the whole world, so I spent all my time on prep courses and worked for a local surgeon doing dictation trying to get some experience," Dr. Lewis says.

I felt so demoralized that I couldn't even celebrate with them.

"I worked hard to get the credentials to apply for med school, but the first time I applied, they didn't even call me for an interview because my scores were so low compared to the others that applied. Two good friends of mine got into med school that same year, and I felt so demoralized that I couldn't even celebrate with them."

Family members advised her to choose another path, but Dr. Lewis decided it was time to step up her game. "Anytime someone says I can't do something, I kick it up into high gear, and that's what I did," she says. "The second time around, I made a study plan and was trying to keep my grades up.

My mentor would tell me things to do to strengthen my application, and I made sure I did everything I was told. I sunk every free moment into making my application stand out."

Her hard work was a success, and Dr. Lewis finished med school, then went on to complete a residency in internal medicine and pediatrics. She is currently a hospitalist, a doctor who strictly sees patients in the hospital, at the University of Louisville and was doing the same type of work in Oregon before coming to Louisville.

During her journey of overcoming failure, Dr. Lewis had a support system that made her believe she could succeed. "There were three people in my life that believed in me, and one of them was my sister, who thought I could do anything I put my mind to," she says. "So that made me believe it, too."

Katie Gangler encourages her clients to reach out to a support system as Dr. Lewis did. However, if there isn't a support system in place, she says, "Evaluate, hear constructive criticism, and try different things to help ease the pressure. Exercise, quality sleep, diet, and lifestyle changes can help with pressure, anxiety, and low mood."

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Jennifer Powell was **DIVORCED**

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Feeling low is something Jennifer Powell can attest to after being blindsided by an unexpected failure. "My ex-husband and I had been together since I was 15 and got married when I was 24. He was my life partner, and I made him my life," Jennifer says.

He told me he wanted a divorce

"I worked third shift and came home one morning to find his wedding ring on the dresser, and that was the last time he slept in our bed. I had no clue what was going on in his mind, and I didn't see this coming. Four weeks after this, he told me he wanted a divorce."

After being together a total of 18 years, Jennifer was devastated to lose someone she considered her best friend. Adding to the pain was her ex-husband's lack of communication and explanation for leaving. "In my mind at that time, I felt I had lost everything," Jennifer says. "I lost my husband, I lost my best friend, I lost my home, half of my belongings, and a huge piece of myself. He and I had been together for so long, he helped create the person that I was."

Jennifer's parents took her in and loved on her while she healed. Jennifer tried venturing out with friends, but



nothing she did seemed to fill the emptiness. She struggled to find who she was as a single person and couldn't help wondering if she did something wrong during their marriage. "It was completely horrible," she says. "So, I thought I needed some type of social life and changed my work schedule in order to see people and go to church with my parents."

Though it wasn't the church her parents were attending, Jennifer felt a pull to visit Southeast Christian Church, where she quickly found solace. "I would go and just sob every time — I couldn't control it," she says. "I couldn't help but feel like this was the place I was supposed to be, and it felt right. It was almost like God was filling that empty space that nobody else could fill."

After being baptized, Jennifer began a happier journey that led her to a recent marriage to a man that she feels God brought to her.

Making a tangible change and exploring new interests as Jennifer did is something Katie Gangler recommends to cope with failure and create an opportunity for change. Also among her list of ways to bounce back are taking time to grieve, writing for 15 minutes a day to identify patterns and ways of thinking, planning something enjoyable for the future, and getting active.

But sometimes when struggling to keep your head above water, you have to look higher. "Hanging around godly people truly helped me pull through," Jennifer says. "All I can say is God pulled me through all of it."

