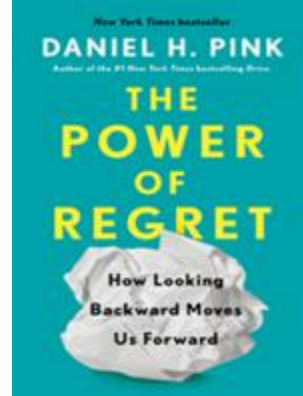
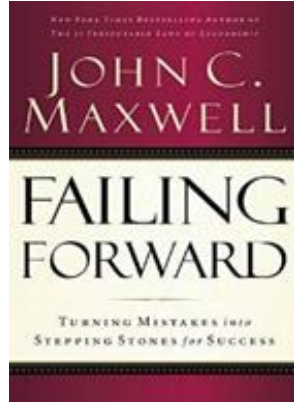
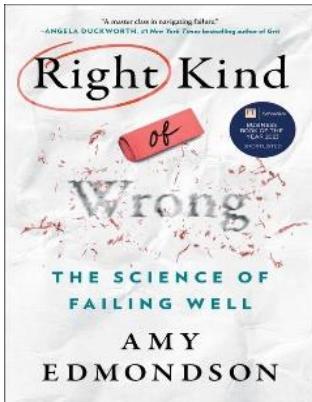


Reframing Failure: Unlocking the Power of Intelligent Mistakes

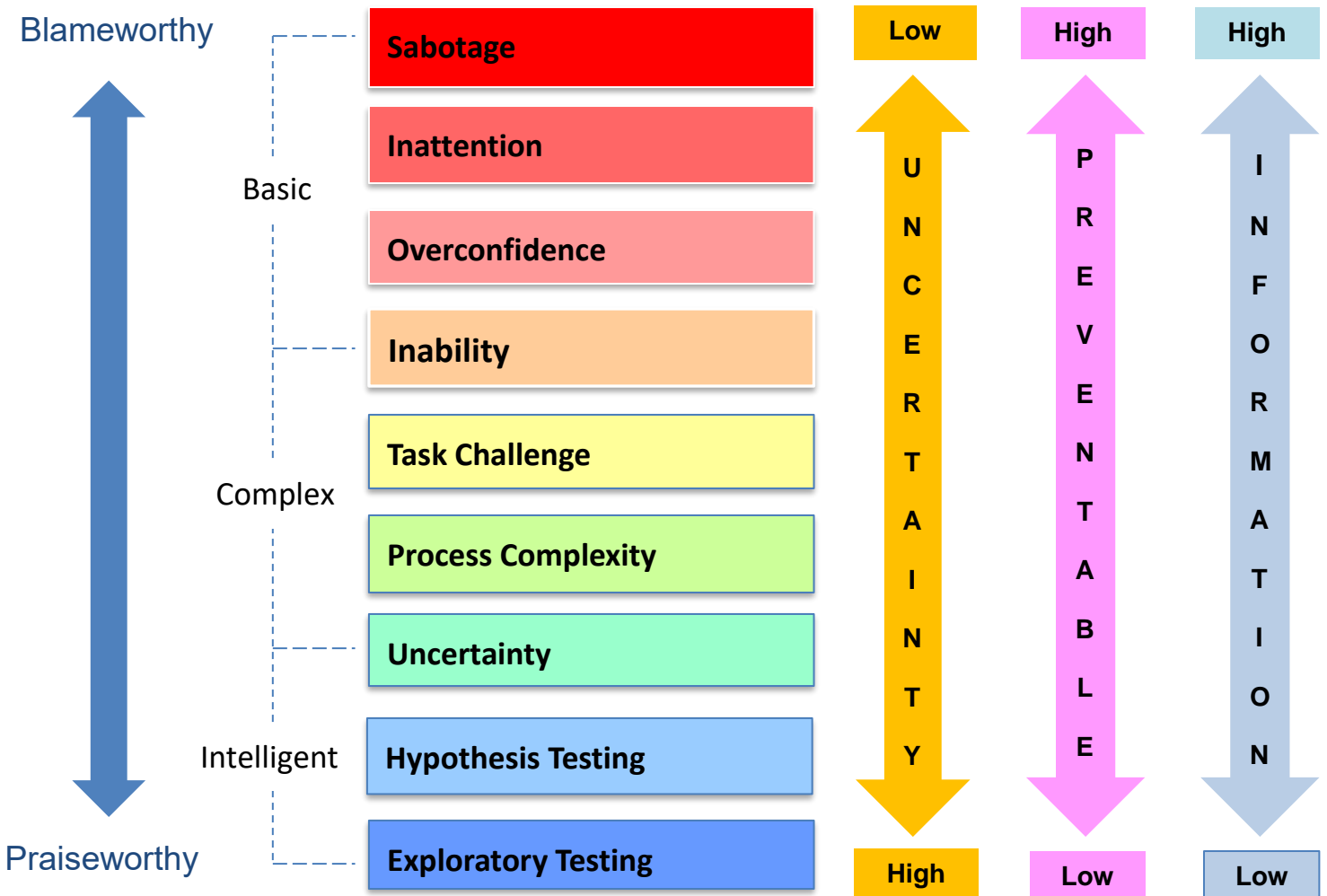
Lawrence Loo MD (Lkloo@llu.edu); John Byrne DO (John.Byrne3@va.gov) and Amy Schill MD (ASchill@llu.edu)



A) Amy Edmondson: *Right Kind of Wrong. The Science of Failing Well.* Atria Books. 2023.

1) The Failure Landscape: *“Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm.”*

– Winston Churchill



2) New Topology of Failure:

“Not all failures are alike”	Basic Failures	Complex Failures	Intelligent Failures
	Definition	<p><i>“The only (wo)man who never makes a mistake is the (wo)man who never does anything”</i> – Theodore Roosevelt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known territory. Occur in areas where knowledge already exists about how to achieve a desired result. • Most easily understood • Most preventable. Can be avoided with care and access to relevant knowledge. 	<p><i>“A bad system will beat a good person all the time.”</i> – W. Edwards Deming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mistakes occur in familiar settings (unlike intelligent failures) where there is usually plenty of knowledge and experience. • Failed results occur due to the inherent uncertainty, complexity, and interdependence we all face in our day-to-day lives. • Inevitable - <i>Always</i> with us and on the rise.
Cause(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often due to a single cause that arises from inattention, fatigue, neglect, overconfidence, or faulty assumptions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple causes and sometimes bad luck too (“The perfect storm” and “Swiss cheese” phenomena). • Generally preceded by small warning signs that get missed, ignored, or downplayed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results of a thoughtful experiment or approach (e.g. hypothesis driven), not a haphazard or sloppy one. • Often driven by curiosity.
Best Practices & Opportunities to Learn	Befriend error (we all make them – “To err is human”) and vulnerability (admit one’s own mistakes).		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These mistakes are unintended and punishing them as a strategy for preventing failure will backfire. • Put safety first • Catch and learn from errors (e.g. blameless reporting) • “To err is human, to prevent basic failures, divine.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to early warning signs and learn from past failures. • Leverage the recovery window. • Welcome false alarms. • Catch & correct errors • Avoid just blaming an individual. Consider the fundamental attribution error and system contributions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin with preparation. • Minimize impact on others, time, and resources as much as possible. • Experiment fearlessly. • Learn as much as you can. • Make friends with failure.
Cultivate and Enhance Psychological Safety			

3) **Saying Your Sorry – The Good Apology:** *“A good apology wields almost magical powers in repairing damaged relationships . . . (It) sends a clear message that you care about the other person.” – Amy Edmondson*

a) **Reasons why good apologies are hard and often fall short:**

- i) pose a threat to one’s self-image as a good person
- ii) unable to do so (e.g. lacks compassion, narcissistic personality)
- iii) don’t believe an apology will be effective in repairing the relationship or situation
- iv) fear of / lack of accepting responsibility for failure is often the deeper explanation

b) **Attributes of a good apology** *Focus on your impact, not on your intention.* (Cur Dir Psychol Sci 2018;27[2]74-78 and <https://www.christinecarter.com/2015/08/the-three-components-of-an-effective-apology/>)

i) **Clearly express remorse:** *Tell them what you feel – just the remorseful feelings, please.*

- Good example: “I’m so sorry and sad to hear my lack of timely communication has caused so much confusion in the Dean’s office.”

- “Not yet” (bad) examples: “I’m so sorry.” “I’m so sorry you feel that way.” “I’m so sorry that you misunderstood what I said.” “I didn’t expect you to be so sensitive.”

ii) **Accept responsibility and the negative impact it had:** *Empathize with the other person and ask oneself: How is the other person feeling? What did I do that caused that feeling?*

Demonstrate that you know how they feel. Could I have done something differently? Then acknowledge these things.

- Good examples: “I’m so sorry that my comment hurt your feelings and harmed your reputation with our friends.”

- “Not yet” (bad) examples: “I was so stressed out because of the upcoming exams.” “It’s not my fault the alarm clock didn’t go off.” “Everyone else was doing it.” “I really didn’t know that you would be offended.” Most people are tempted to offer an explanation for their behavior. When in doubt, leave the explanation out. Trying to explain away one’s actions can come across as being defensive or making excuses.

iii) **Offer to make amends or change going forward:** *Good apologies include reparation of some kind, either real or symbolic.*

- Good example: “I promise the next time, I’m going to do act differently by ___ (be specific).”

- “Not yet” (bad) examples: “I promise to do better next time (not very specific).” Or just left out entirely.

- If one isn’t sure how to make it right, just ask “What can I do to make this up to you?”

4) **Practicing the Science of Failing Well:** *“Being wrong is part of being alive in a complex and uncertain world.” – Amy Edmondson*

a) **Foster Self-awareness, Situation awareness, and System awareness.**

b) **Cognitive Habits for Responding to Failure:**

i) **Stop:** *Disrupt the automatic emotional responses (i.e. shame) to mistakes and failures. Ask yourself –* What is going on right now? What is the big picture? How am I feeling now and before this happened?

ii) **Challenge:** *Reframe one’s thinking. Ask yourself –* What am I telling myself that is causing how I am feeling? What objective data do I have to support or negate my interpretation? What other interpretations are possible? Was my interpretation in my best long-term interests?

iii) **Choose:** *Say or do something that moves you closer to achieving your goals. Ask yourself –* What do I truly want? What is going to help me achieve my goals?

The Struggling (or Inconsistent) Learner: Identifying “Secondary” Issues – the 8 Ds

(Revised January 2024 - Lawrence Loo, MD)

- 1) Distracted by life (e.g. family/ financial concerns)
- 2) Depression and other affective disorders
- 3) Drugs and alcohol
- 4) Learning Disabilities (e.g. learning disorders such as ADHD or autism spectrum disorder)
- 5) Sleep Deprivation (acute or chronic)
- 6) Disease (acute or chronic)
- 7) Personality Disorders
- 8) Dysfunctional Learning Environment

Sources: (1) Lucey CR, Boote RM Working with problem residents: a systematic approach. In: Holmboe ES, Hawkins RE, eds. *Practical Guide to the Evaluation of Clinical Competence*. Philadelphia, PA: Mosby; 2008. Pages 204 – 206. (2) Iobst W, Holmboe ES: The learner with a problem or the problem learner? Working with dyscompetent learners. In: Holmboe ES, Durning SJ, Hawkins RE, eds. *Practical Guide to the Evaluation of Clinical Competence*, Philadelphia, PA. Mosby, 2018. Pages 288 – 302. (3) Kogan J: *ACGME Faculty Development Toolkit – Approaches to Challenging Feedback Situations @ Facilitator Guides - OneDrive (sharepoint.com)* 2022. (accessed January 27, 2024).



B) John Maxwell: ***Failing Forward. Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success.***
HarperCollins. 2000.

Self-Reflective Exercise: Think about a recent setback you experienced. How did you respond?

Failing Backward	Failing Forward
Blaming others	Taking responsibility
Repeating the same mistakes	Learning from each mistake
Expecting never to fail again	Knowing a failure is a part of progress
Expecting to continually fail	Maintaining a positive attitude
Accepting tradition blindly	Challenging outdated assumptions
Being limited by past mistakes	Taking new risks
Thinking I am a failure	Believing something didn't work
Quitting	Persevering

Key Mindset / Perspective: *"No matter how difficult your problems were, the key to overcoming them doesn't lie in changing your circumstance. It's in changing yourself."* – John Maxwell

- 1) **Realize there is one major difference between average people and achieving people.** *It is their perception of and response to failure.*
- 2) **Learn a new definition of failure.** *Failure (and success) are not single events (e.g. a test or arrival at a specific destination). Failure (and success) are a process, a journey. And until one breathes his/her last, the jury is still out.*
- 3) **Remove the "you" from failure.** *Don't say to yourself "I'm a failure." Instead say "I failed at something" or "I made a mistake." There's a big difference.*
- 4) **Take action and reduce your fear.** *Recognize and break the fear cycle. Accept there is fear & act anyway.*
- 5) **Find the exit off the failure freeway.** *The first step is to utter the 3 most difficult words to say "I was wrong." And then change your response to failure by accepting responsibility.*
- 6) **Don't let failure from outside get inside of you.** *No matter how bad the external circumstances, failure is created within. Are you an optimist or a pessimist in life?*
- 7) **Say good-bye to Yesterday.** *You will not be able to be your best today until you say good-bye to (the past mistakes and regrets of) yesterday.*
- 8) **Change yourself and your world changes.** *Discover and examine your strengths and weaknesses.*
- 9) **Get over yourself and start giving yourself.** *Get over yourself – everyone else has.*
- 10) **Find the benefit in every bad experience.** *Recognize the many benefits of adversity.*
- 11) **If at first you do succeed, try something harder.**
- 12) **Learn from a bad experience and make it a good experience.** *Failure is either your friend or your enemy and you are one who decides.*
- 13) **Work on the weaknesses that weakens you.** *Review the top 10 reasons why people fail and determine which one you will work on 1 of these areas.*
- 14) **Understand there's not much difference between failure and success.** *Find purpose in life and pursue it with determination and grit.*
- 15) **Get up, get over it, and get going.** *One needs not only determination and purpose (grit) but also a plan for getting up after making mistakes.*

C) Daniel Pink: *The Power of Regret*. Riverhead Books. 2022.

1) *“Regret is healthy and universal, an integral part of being human. Regret makes us human. Regret makes us better.”* – Daniel Pink

2) **The Deep Structure of Regret – Four Categories of Regret**

- a) **Foundation Regrets:** Failure to be responsible, conscientious, or prudent.
- b) **Boldness Regrets:** Failure to take the chances we didn’t take, rather than the chances we did.
- c) **Moral Regrets:** Behave poorly and / or compromise our belief in our own goodness
- d) **Connection Regrets:** Neglect the people who help establish our own sense of wholeness.

Category	What it sounds like	The human need it reveals
Foundation	If only I’d done the work	Stability
Boldness	If only I’d take the risk	Growth
Moral	If only I’d done the right thing	Goodness
Connection	If only I’d reached out	Love

3) **The Three Benefits of Regret: Positive Power of Negative Emotions**

- a) **Regret can improve decisions:** the stab of negativity slows us down, make us contemplate what we hadn’t done previously, and prepares us to adapt for future interactions.
- b) **Regret can boost performance:** regret can deepen persistence and infuse subsequent deliberations with more strength, speed, and creativity.
- c) **Regret can deepen meaning:** critical reflection can endow both major life experiences and relationships with greater meaning.

4) **Reframing Regret as an Opportunity Rather than a Threat Helps us Grow and Transform:**

- a) Reframing regret as a judgment of our underlying character – who we are – can be destructive. Framing it as an evaluation of a particular behavior in a particular situation – what we did – can be instructive.
- b) Feeling regret results in three possibilities:
 - i) ignoring, bury, or minimizing it leads to delusion
 - ii) feeling and wallowing in it leads to despair
 - iii) thinking about and addressing it leads to improvement and growth
- c) **Counterfactual Thinking (CFT):** Looking at the image, can you determine who is the gold, silver, and bronze Olympic medalists? (J Pers Soc Pscychol 1995;69[4]:603-10.)
 - i) CFT is the human tendency to create alternatives to the events that have already occurred, something contrary to what actually happened.
 - ii) CFT often leads us to say 2 options:
 - “**If only . . .**” makes us feel worse in the moment; delivers discomfort and distress; but they can help us improve our lives for the future
 - “**At least . . .**” makes us feel better in the present; delivers comfort and consolation in the present; but are less likely to alter our behavior or boost performance in the future.



Photo Credit: Tim de Weale. Getty Images

d) **Regret Remade:**

- i) Step 1: Undo it – apologize (see page 3 “The Good Apology”)
- ii) Step 2: Self-Compassion (see page 5)
- iii) Step 3: Self-Distance by analyzing & strategizing (see page 3 – “Stop, Challenge & Choose”)

Commitment to Change (CTC) Statement

(Empirical Evidence to Support CTC Statements Predict Actual Change in Practice: Overton GK: J Contin Educ Health Prof 2008;28:60-6; Myhre D: Med Educ 2010;44:516-7; Shershneva MB: Eval Health Prof 2010;33:256-75. Wakefield J: J Contin Educ Health Prof 2003;23:81-93)
(Updated November 2024 – Lawrence Loo MD)

At the finish of this faculty development session, **name at least 1** (and no more than 3) **behaviorally based change(s)** you would like to make the next time you experience a **failure or mistake**:

1) Behaviorally based change #1: _____

Level of Motivation to Make This Change				
Not at All Motivated	Minimally Motivated	Somewhat Motivated	Moderately Motivated	Highly Motivated
1	2	3	4	5

Anticipated Difficulty in Making This Change				
Not at All Difficult	Minimally Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Moderately Difficult	Extremely Difficult
1	2	3	4	5

What are potential barriers and how might I overcome these? _____

2) Change #2 (optional): _____

Level of Motivation to Make This Change				
Not at All Motivated	Minimally Motivated	Somewhat Motivated	Moderately Motivated	Highly Motivated
1	2	3	4	5

Anticipated Difficulty in Making This Change				
Not at All Difficult	Minimally Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Moderately Difficult	Extremely Difficult
1	2	3	4	5

What are potential barriers and how might I overcome these? _____

Commitment to Change (CTC) Statement *(continued)*

(Overton GK: Requesting a commitment to change: conditions that produce behavioral or attitudinal commitment. J Contin Edu Health Prof 2008;28:60-6; Myhre D: Using a commitment-to-change strategy to assess faculty development. Med Educ 2010;44:516-7; Shershneva MB: Commitment to practice change: an evaluator's perspective. Eval Health Prof 2010;33:256-75. Wakefield J: Commitment to change statements can predict actual change in practice. J Contin Educ Health Prof 2003;23:81-93)
(Updated November 2024 – Lawrence Loo MD)

At the finish of this faculty development session, **name at least 1** (and no more than 3) **behaviorally based change(s)** you would like to make the next time you experience a **failure or mistake**:

3) Behaviorally based Change #3 (Optional): _____

Level of Motivation to Make This Change				
Not at All Motivated	Minimally Motivated	Somewhat Motivated	Moderately Motivated	Highly Motivated
1	2	3	4	5

Anticipated Difficulty in Making This Change				
Not at All Difficult	Minimally Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Moderately Difficult	Extremely Difficult
1	2	3	4	5

What are potential barriers and how might I overcome these? _____

Four to six weeks from now, review what you wrote. Were you successful in implementing the change in your behavior(s)? Why or why not?
Do you want to try changing anything else?

! THANK YOU !

LLUSM Department of Medicine Grand Rounds – Wednesday, October 15, 2025

(Based on ACGME National Annual Education Conference Session SES104, February 22, 2025)

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Self-Reflective Exercise #1:

Self-Reflective Exercise #2: ? Basic Failure ?

Self-Reflective Exercise #3: ? Complex Failure ?

Self-Reflective Exercise #4: ? Intelligent Failure ?