LET THEM FAIL

by:
Reynaldo B. Visda
Principal II, Limay National High School - SHS

How do you respond to failure? How do you react every time you fail? When failure comes, how do you perceive it? Do you get frustrated and quit? Or are you learning from it and try working for a goal once again?

Learning to walk could be one of the precious moments we cherish with our child. This is the time when he learns to discover the balance that he needs to stay upright and walk. Normally, we will all have the same reaction for sure, when we see them fall or stumble. Our instinct shall move us automatically to take him up and pamper him so he would stop crying.

There was a story of two fathers in the park who happened to stroll with their toddlers. They were both seated on grass while watching their toddlers chase one another. Suddenly, one of the toddlers slipped and hit the other one causing him to slide and fell. The father of one of the toddlers immediately got up, reached out to his kid and raised him up and cooed him to stop him from crying. On the other hand, the father of the other child did not make any move, although his attention were fixed at his child who was slowly getting up while crying. When the child finally rose, he gently called his attention and embraced him and said, “It’s okay, now stop crying so you can play again”. After a few minutes, the child went off to play. But this time, he had to play with another child because his once playmate was not allowed to play again. His father’s reason was to protect him from getting hurt for the second time. Of the two toddlers, who do you think would likely to succeed in life as they grow up? Is it the one who stumbled but tried again? Or the other who was protected from experiencing pain?
In an article written by Whitney Willard, he said that we must stop protecting our children from failure. Our instinct is to build a boundary fence that will protect them – just like what the father of the child who was not allowed to try the ground again.

We too, have tendency to protect our children from getting upset. We want to see them safe and happy, but sometimes, long-term happiness comes from being upset at the moment. It is our response to failure that will let us experience success and long-term happiness. Nevertheless, today’s generation has the mindset of quick success. They were taught that all things can be gained in an instant, it requires less effort in getting what you want. This thinking binds our students’ impulse today, especially in junior and senior high school. They will enroll in school and attend classes in the first few months, then don’t show up anymore without a word of explanation. Some will just come and go. They show up on Mondays, absent on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, present on Thursdays then hang-up somewhere on Fridays. Then show-up again, this time, with their parents to plea for a chance to make-up for their grades. The teacher will, of course, give them another chance but the sad thing is, they give chances not because the student asks for it but the parents did. In some cases, the second chance given will eventually become third chance, fourth chance and the chains goes on without seeing any effort from the student and eventually, the student graduates… not because he studied hard, but because of the plea of the parents for chances.

In the scenario above, we may infer that both parents and teachers did not help them at all. We can imagine what would become these students in years to come. They will experience failure and will not do anything to overcome it for they become dependent on other people to make things up on their behalf.

The best thing we can do as parents and educators are to let them fail. They wont die if they fail – but they will live – lives that are worth living for. Failure will teach them to be responsible. Here is another story of a man applying for the position of Chief Machine Operator in a microchip manufacturing company. He was called for an
interview and was able to give a good answer to every question. Then the last question the interviewer asked him, “Who will be responsible if one of your operators running the machine broke it and failed to function?” The applicant answered, “I am responsible for it sir.” The interviewer replied, “Really? But why not the operator?” “Because I failed to check the machine before letting the operator use it.” The man got hired. We all know that we are responsible for our actions. This applicant knew that as chief operator, it was his job to conduct inventory and testing of the machines before an operation. He could have easily pointed the blame to the operator and kick that employee out of the team. But he quickly recognized that the failure of the machine is his responsibility as the leader of the operations team.

When the students failed, they will blame something or someone, but they did not realize that they are responsible for their failures. You are not yet a failure until you start blaming others. Mistakes and failures are learning periods. We must teach our children, our students, to own up to them to improve and move on.

Failure will teach them to become accountable. Allowing our children the space for accountability is not easy. It’s allowing our children to see us fail and get back up again. It’s showing that we are the rule-enforcers but also admitting we are human. It’s apologizing when we are wrong. It’s letting them fall without interfering. We tend to heavily praise for accomplishments and dwell on failures. We lose sight of the part that matters most: the effort. A perfect average or a big win won’t bring students from adolescence into adulthood. Resiliency is the trait that will ensure their long-term success.

A big part of growth is a failure. There is a blessing in failures because it gives us a chance to look at our mistakes, become even more resilient to try again. Failure is painful but it is not a life sentence.
So, if we earnestly desire that our youth be successful, we must learn also to think twice, and train our instinct to stand by for a while, when it says we must pick up a crying child to cajole – shall we hold him for so long that he can’t experience falling again?

Reference:

Whitney Ballard, “Parents WE Need to Let Our Children Fail If We Want Them to Succeed”

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