

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Neil Pasricha | You Are Awesome (Episode 277)

We're currently living in an era of ultimate abundance with the highest ever rates of longevity, wealth, and education, yet we also have the highest ever rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide. In fact, *The New York Times* now reports that one in three college students suffers from clinical anxiety. The downside to unbridled prosperity, it seems, is that we're losing the knack for handling bumps in the road that make the journey of life interesting — but less than smooth. We're becoming less resilient.

[On this episode](#) we talk to author Neil Pasricha, who deals with this phenomenon in his latest book, *You Are Awesome: How to Navigate Change, Wrestle with Failure, and Live an Intentional Life*. Here, we go over practical strategies for growing our capacity to withstand failure, strengthening our inner resolve, and building up calluses of resilience to catch life's curveballs without succumbing to their impact.

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The Problem with Cell Phones

“Cell phones are a huge scourge right now,” says Neil.

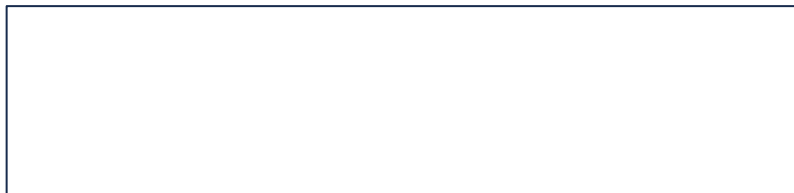
“We’re using them over five hours — touching them over 2,500 times — a day.” These problems are:

Psychological. “You wouldn’t put a picture of the way you look right now on Instagram, but everyone else is. So there’s a psychological deficiency. You can’t be the best basketball player in your high school anymore, because you’re competing with the world. You just are never the best.

Physical. “We’re developing into a nation of hunchbacks. When you look down at your phone, you’re putting 60 pounds of pressure on your spine. [Plus] we’ve got black bags under our eyes and broken thumbs [from texting all the time].”

Physiological. “When you look at a bright screen an hour before bedtime, your brain doesn’t produce as much melatonin. You’re not sleeping as well. So you wake up in the morning, you’ve got lower resilience. Because you didn’t have a good night’s sleep. So what do you do? You check Twitter because you’re in a low resilience state.”

If you’re honest with yourself, do you overuse your phone? Maybe you’re not on the high end of the spectrum with five hours a day under your belt (or maybe you’re higher), but whatever your daily phone usage happens to be, challenge yourself this week to cut it down by half. Your brain, your spine, your thumbs, and your eyes will thank you for it!



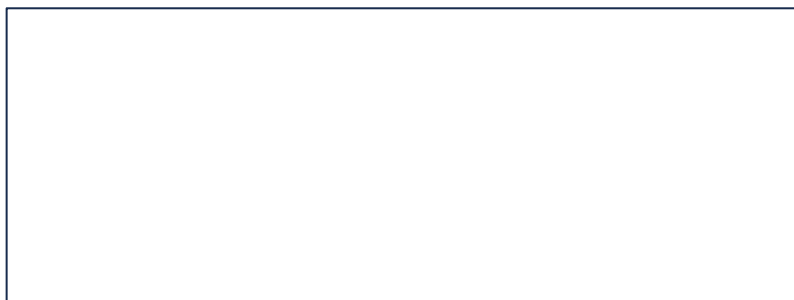
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More Failure = More Success

As he and I are roughly the same age, Neil points out that we grew up in a culture where the popular idea is: less failure equals more success. But he's here to tell us that the exact opposite is true: more failure equals more success.

Neil says: “[I always ask wedding photographers] ‘How did you guys get so many good pictures of the wedding? How’d you get 50 awesome shots?’ And they all answer the same way. They say, ‘Well, I took 2,000 photos. The failure rate on my pictures is way higher than yours, but because my frequency is so much higher, I get more success.’ We have to start thinking of failure as the pathway to success. It is the thing you need to exponentially increase in order to build up that thick skin, to get that resilience going, and ultimately to win more in the long run.”

Rather than aiming to be perfect at your first time doing something, mentally prepare yourself for the journey of practice that takes you closer to desired perfection. An added benefit: the more you fail, the less afraid of failure you'll be, and the more resilient you'll become. In your own personal or professional life — it could be a hobby or a skill you use for work — what can you afford to repeat in order to improve?



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Acting Into Thinking

Neil was in his mid-30s when his now-wife — on their second date — asked him if he liked to swim. The truth of the matter? He was afraid of water and had never learned. So when she said it was her favorite thing to do in the world, he clandestinely found a place to take swimming lessons right away.

“I signed up — \$40, eight weeks,” says Neil. “I was like ‘Buy! Buy! Buy!’ Guess what I learned? It’s not motivation leading to action. It is action leading to motivation. It’s easier to act yourself into a new way of thinking than think yourself into a new way of acting.”

What would it take to make you do something you might otherwise think impossible? Maybe running a marathon is on your bucket list, but you obsess too much on preparation like having the perfect shoes, or playlist, or running buddy instead of just getting started. Whatever it is, what would it take to make you start?

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An Untouchable Day

After publishing his first few books, Neil quit his full-time job to make more room for writing. Instead, what he discovered was this “extra” time would easily fill up with meetings, phone calls, and other unnecessary correspondence — he actually had *less* time to write. So he figured out a way around these time wasters: something he calls an untouchable day.

“It’s the only thing in my iPhone calendar that’s actually in all caps,” says Neil. “It screams at me. 16 months out, I plan one of these days per week. What is an untouchable day? It’s a day where I am literally unreachable, untouchable, incommunicado to everyone in the entire world, including my wife. My phone is off. I have no contact. And it is a blissful day where my productivity, honestly, 10xs. On an average day, I’ll write 500 words. On an untouchable day, it’s not unusual for me to write 5,000 words.”

Neil says there are two components to untouchable days: deep work per Cal Newport’s concept for focusing solely on one task at a time without distractions, and what Neil calls nitros — little activities for helping you get back into deep work when you lose focus, like going for a walk, meditating, taking a short nap, etc.

If you could establish your own untouchable day to accomplish 10 times more than you do on an average day, what would you use it for? And if you can’t establish your own untouchable day, what excuses are currently holding you back?

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Failure Budget

In order to increase your failure rate — which, as we talked about before, increases your success rate — you need to keep trying new things. But how do you make sure you're not failing yourself into poverty by buying into these eye-opening life experiences?

“The way I think about it is you take your salary and you move the decimal place over three digits,” says Neil. “It’s really simple, so it’s like it puts the amount you’re spending on your failures in the tenths of a percentage point range, which makes it so small that you shouldn’t care about it. What I mean is if you’ve got like a six-figure salary, you’re in the three-figure game. You’re like, ‘I make 150 grand a year. I can afford to spend like \$500 to go on a bike trip or take this online marketing course I’m interested in.’ If you’ve got a five-figure salary, you’re in the two-figure game. Two-figure is what you spend your failures on. So you’re like, ‘Oh, I can spend \$75 on a cooking class or a softball league.’ It’s a small enough percentage of your total income that you shouldn’t overthink it, yet you’re making yourself open to, you could call them Black Swan opportunities here. You’re betting chips, small chips, on a lot of different hands.”

Based on numbers alone, what would be your failure budget?

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The Saturday Morning Test

“I have a test that I use in The Happiness Equation,” says Neil. “I always called it the Saturday morning test, which means when you wake up on a Saturday morning with nothing to do, what do you do? Brainstorm wildly from that. If you’re like, ‘Oh, well, I always get up and play guitar.’ Well, what could you do in the music industry? Could you teach guitar lessons online? Could you become a ukulele importer? You know what I mean? There’s so many things you can brainstorm wildly off the thing.

What are the results of your own Saturday morning test, and how might you fit some of the best ideas into your failure budget?

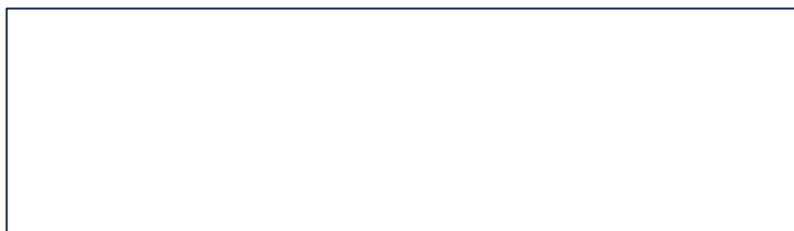
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Don't Buy the \$5 Million Condo

When Neil told Dean John McArthur of Harvard Business School that his job search at the world's top companies was going poorly, he said, "You're like a horny guy outside of a beach looking in at like, the 10 bathing beauties. You want to run in with a thousand other people and try to get together with one of them? Your odds are super low, and if you actually get together with them, you're going to be looking over your shoulder the whole time. You've got to get off the beat. Go to the library, find a nerd, find the broken company, the banker company, the places that aren't flying to Harvard recruiting sessions. If you go into one of those companies, they're going to take what you say seriously. They're going to give you a bigger job. They're going to actually need your help." Neil took this advice and soon found a good job that paid well. He was the big fish in a small pond.

"When you open up *The New York Times Magazine* and it says 'Condos on Hudson River starting at five million,' you would be the smallest fish in that pond," says Neil. You would have literally a condo on the second floor with no view — into the courtyard; everyone else is looking at the river — with no amenities at all. You'd constantly be feeling lesser than. Instead, what you should buy is a better apartment at another place. You can apply this principle anywhere."

Are you trying to be a small fish in a pond that's way too big for you? How might you scale back your efforts to find a job, house, hobby, or any number of pursuits that would better suit you today? This doesn't mean you can't aspire toward a bigger condo in Manhattan someday, but you've got to grow into that pond first or risk being devoured by competition or your own nagging imposter syndrome.



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The End of History Illusion

When Neil worked in HR at Walmart, he had to sit in on employee terminations. It could be terrible, but it also gave him some perspective and a chance to stretch his own empathy, compassion, and understanding.

“What I heard from those people every single time was, “I’ll never find another job. This is the end of my career. It’s all over for me.” Every single time, people confuse the fact that they couldn’t *picture* the change with the fact that they *wouldn’t* change. A 2013 study by Daniel Gilbert called The End of History Illusion says that we confuse the improbability of changing in the future with change itself. Whenever I’d meet the people that were terminated from Walmart, years later, guess what they always said to me? ‘Best thing that ever happened to me.’”

What catastrophes have you survived — in spite of your absolute certainty that your life was over as they were happening? Do you think the past 10 years were more tumultuous than the 10 years ahead are likely to be? In hindsight, how many catastrophes actually served to catalyze what you can see now as improvements to your life rather than the end of it?

Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here.](#)

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About



Join us as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers – from legendary creators to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth – and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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