

As a gifted student, I am frequently confronted by people who claim that I am “infallible.” Whether they are well-meaning grandparents, astonished peers, or overly optimistic friends, they fail to recognize the damaging effects of their good intentions. No matter how many correct answers I get on tests, I find that I think too much about my own shortcomings when I am told that I cannot fail. I will consistently remember the times that I *do* fall short, and think that I have failed my supporters when anything goes wrong. Gifted students like myself are frequently plagued with an unhealthy fear of failure. This fear is further amplified in a competitive setting, when there are scholarships or college acceptances on the line. However, the problem with this mindset is that students like myself will subject themselves to unrealistic expectations and face stress that can cause even more failure. Fortunately, there is a much healthier way to understand and work with learners to “fail forward.” Rotary’s Four-Way Test helped me to understand that failure is an essential and healthy part of life for students.

The Four-Way Test first asks, “Is it the truth?” Failure is a fact of life for even the most talented students. Although today’s educational system is designed to reward perfect scores and good grades, these objectives can be difficult to achieve and not necessarily helpful. Failure, on the other hand, allows for constructive criticism that can lead to greater success in the future. For instance, I consider myself a better writer today because of teachers’ constructive criticism. While many students view these criticisms as a form of torture, they are simply a way to transform errors in one’s writing into learning opportunities. English teachers expect these small failures, and their feedback shows that missteps are expected in the learning process.

The next question is, “Is it fair to all concerned?” Although failure may seem to be an obstacle in a student’s path to perfection, it is actually a natural force that affects everyone. I have certainly faced many failures during my academic career. For instance, I earned a low grade on

my first analytical essay and endured humbling criticism. Failure is simply a counterexample to the misinformed idea that perfection is an expectation. An educational community may think that failure is impossible for its best students, but failure promotes equity and allows everyone the opportunity to try again.

“Does failure build goodwill and better friendships?” While failure may seem to isolate those who face it, its universality can actually bring people together. Failure allows people to understand each other without fear of imperfection. My field hockey team exemplifies failure-based goodwill. When a teammate was having difficulty finishing a run, the team joined her in support. Although she failed to complete the run in time, she helped to promote our team’s goodwill. Speech and debate also encourages failure in team-building activities, using groups of students to better each others’ performances. Students also benefit from the positive atmosphere and are able to bond with each other by showing their true, imperfect selves.

Finally, the test asks, “Will it be beneficial to all concerned?” With the help of the growth mindset, failure becomes a tool to help on the path to success. The growth mindset, characterized by desire for challenge and willingness to learn from failure and criticism, has been proven as a method of achieving success. While those with a fixed mindset are confined by the need to “look smart” and consequently fear challenge, people with a growth mindset are able to pursue opportunities and become successful.

In summary, failure is a part of life that can be used to one’s advantage. Using the Four-Way Test allows those who face failure to understand its benefits and harness the growth mindset. I urge students to stop viewing failure as a personal problem and begin to celebrate it as a path to a true, fair, and equitable future.