

Failure

To be unsuccessful is to live in such ways that the world seems reluctant to go the way you want it to. You try to start a small business and just as you open your doors the bottom falls out of the economy. You stand in line for a job at the newly opened tomato canning factory, and just as you get to the front of the queue the company quota turns out to be filled, and you are out of luck. Or it may simply be that your skills don't mesh with the needs that are out there. You may be as outstanding interpreter of the Sutras at a time when the Universities don't need such skills. It is of course possible to be unsuccessful in certain things, and successful in others. I may be a brilliant and successful fry cook, at the same time that I am striking out in my love life.

Examples

1

I have always been unsuccessful at following orders, or directions. (Fortunately, no army ever got stuck with me.) When I am told to go in this or that direction, or carry out this or that action, I am likely to find some way—if there is one—to miscarry the expected action. Faced with directions for setting up a toaster oven, a trap for catching chinchillas, or for repairing a toilet, I am likely to panic. These are adolescent behaviors, but they build on one another. Long accumulated sense of weakness, in following instructions, has made me underconfident at handling such directional challenges. I have areas of confidence. I can imagine, project, formulate in language. But these areas of confidence don't seem to translate into the direction-following areas of my brain. Is there some self-discipline that would help one to modify his weaknesses by blending them with his/her strengths?

2

I have failed on a lifetime basis to conquer one of my persistent problems, claustrophobia. Having been trapped in an elevator as a child has influenced this anxiety, but something more seems required to explain the lifetime hold this anxiety has over me. To this day I refuse to go alone in an elevator—it's the alone wrinkle that puzzles me--, to ride the Arches train in St. Louis, which carries one in a confined car high over the city, or to sit squashed in by other passengers in a railway car. I have tried to reason myself out of this weakness, but I have failed. Since I can manage life inside such a problem, I am willing to settle for one more example of my limitations.