



Fear of failure is really fear of humiliation

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“Why is the prospect of failure so frightening, that we can’t risk failing even when we know that’s the only real path to genuine success? Actually, it isn’t failure itself that scares us most. What really makes our hearts thump and palms sweat is the prospect of being *seen* as a failure. . . The fear of humiliation is the least understood, but most paralyzing, of all inhibitions” (emphasis in original).

Richard Farson and Ralph Keyes: *Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins: The Paradox of Innovation*

In his book *Orbiting the Giant Hairball: A Corporate Fool’s Guide to Surviving with Grace*, Gordon Mackenzie, former Creative Directive for Hallmark Cards, wrote he used to host field trips for young children. He would ask the youngsters if they could draw, sing and dance. Kids in kindergarten didn’t just answer – they demonstrated their abilities right then and there. Mackenzie said that by the time they were in third grade, more than half of the kids had “learned” that they could not sing, dance or draw. Why not? It wasn’t because they had forgotten what they’d known two years earlier – it was because they had learned how to be embarrassed. Then we grow up and get serious (“I’m dead serious about this” we say, but if you’re dead serious long enough you end up seriously dead: we all know people who are deader than cut grass, but who haven’t stopped breathing yet so we can bury them without breaking the law).

They stuff us into suits and ties (or pantyhose, which I hear are worse) and our days of singing, dancing, and drawing are over (unless we’re taking a class – then it’s okay to be bad at something). Sometime between the ages of 5 and 10 we begin to be conditioned to not do things that might embarrass, humiliate, or mortify us (or our parents). One of the blessings that can come from having your world turn upside down on you is that you can unlearn some of those lessons and erase some of that programming. Heck, if you can survive cancer, the possibility of having a business fail is really no big deal.