# The Invisible String: Viewing Life's Setbacks as a Growth Opportunity

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# Today We Will Cover:



- What is the Invisible String Theory?
- Why do We dwell in Failure?
- The Power of Mindset
- Reframing of “Failure”
- Frameworks to Help Us Reframe
- How to Take This into Our Work

# If you see a Star...

- This is an interactive portion in your packet
- Follow this QR code for the packet

# The Invisible String

# Guidance through Life?

Invisible String Theory states that we are connected to a soulmate and that the universe will bring us together when the time is right.

But, what does this have anything to do with my career and life?

(Taft, 2025)

# Invisible String?

In this case we are not using it to describe being pulled towards a potential “soulmate”.

Instead we are taking a step back, learning to reframe the moments in life when we thought a failure would define us, and instead seeing where it could lead.





# Think back...

What are some points of “failure” in your life that felt like the end of the world? Where did those points lead?

# Remember the Journey



| My “Failures” | New Opportunities |
| --- | --- |
| Originally wanted to attend the University of Arizona for undergrad, could not go at the last minute. | Met my husband, who had just moved from Arizona to California. |
| Started out Pre-Med in undergrad, realized I hated it. | Switched to theater and graduated with a degree that got me a job at Disney. |
| Got laid off from Disney due to the Pandemic. | Met one of my best friends and started my Master’s degree. |
| Graduated, had to leave a great job because my parents needed help in Arizona. | Finally got the opportunity to return to the school I had originally wanted to go to, now getting my PhD. |

# Take a Moment...

Use the provided worksheet to write down moments you have perceived as “failures”.

What changes happened because of them? Write down both good and bad, whatever feelings come up are fine during this exercise, we are not looking for forced positivity.

# Let’s Unpack



What feelings come up for you when you think about “failure”?

Feel free to shout them out or put them in the chat.

# Why Are We Afraid of Failure?

Ways we may cope with Failure:

1. Success Oriented: View failure as learning for the sake of learning, a way of improving
2. Over-Striving: Avoid failure at all costs through over exertion
3. Failure-Avoidance: Never try, procrastinate, or makes excuses
4. Failure Acceptance: Given up completely



Failure is directly tied to our feeling of self worth.

Based in our biology and psychology, we do not want anything to challenge our sense of self worth.

(The South African College of Applied Psychology, 2024)

# Ugh... Why Did I Do That?!

Ever do something cringy, fail at something, or be embarassed by something... only for that memory to come back to haunt you?

This is called an involunatary memory, and our brains tend to focus on it rather than positive ones.

Why? It’s biology and survival!

(Hagan, 2023)

# Negativity Bias



Biology you say? Yes!

Our brains hold onto negative occurances better than positive, because a threat is more important to remember in order to survive.

But why does this come up with our failures?

Our body doesn’t want to make that same mistake again, and will bring up the memory to protect us whenever a similar neural pathway is activated.

(Hagan, 2023) (Moore, 2019)

# Does it have to be this way forever?

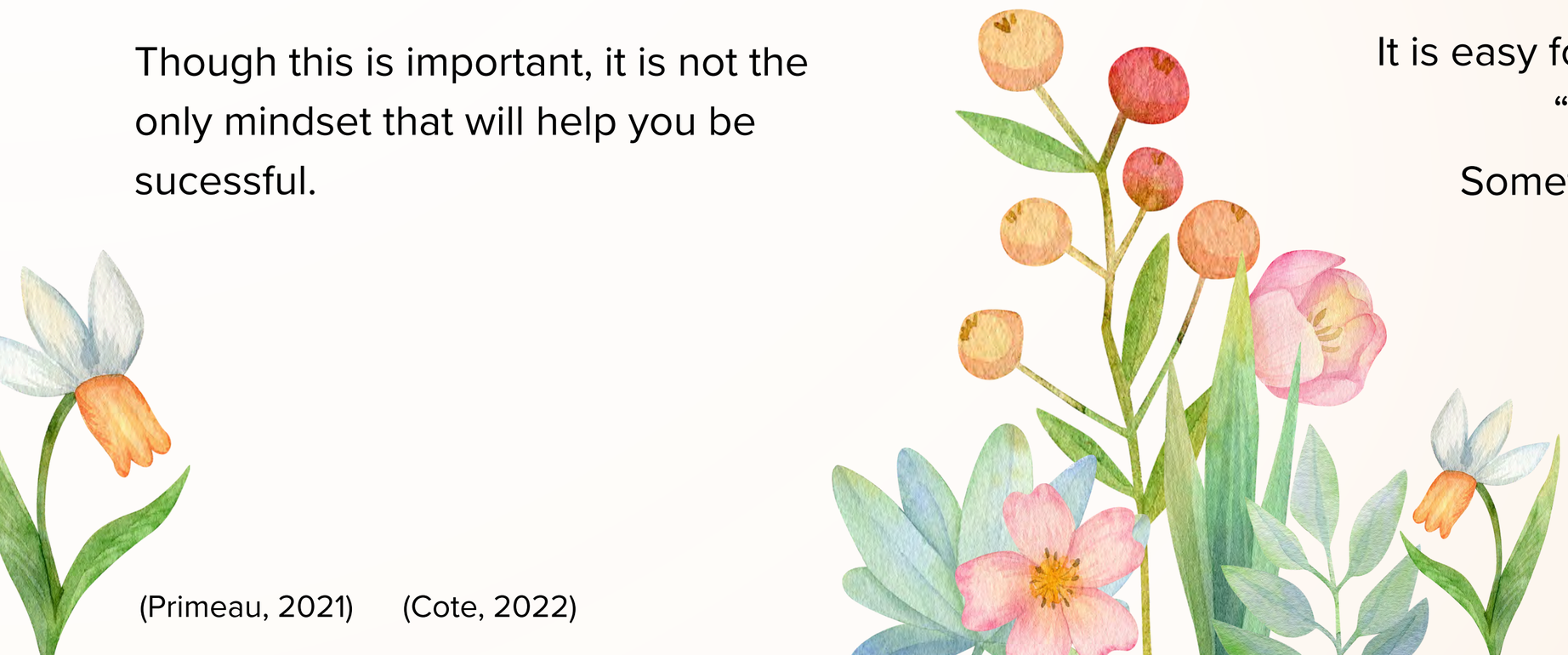
Do we have to hold onto negativity and failure, and the emotions associated with them forever?

Though we should not try to invalidate our negative feelings, we can make sure they do not overpower us!

# Growth Mindset... Is it that Simple?

Growth mindset seems easy, think in terms of ways you're growing instead of in the fixed mindset of "I can't do it" or "Why try, I'll just fail".

Though this is important, it is not the only mindset that will help you be sucessful.



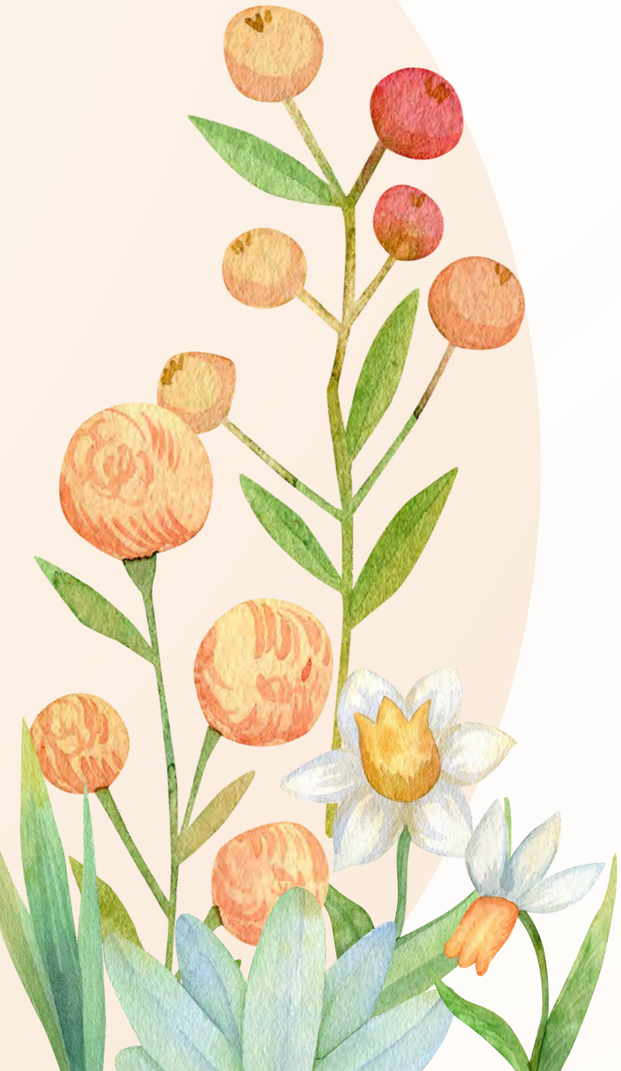
We aren't going to be growing all the time, sometimes we may need to rest and reflect before we can grow.

It is easy for us to get caught up in the "Growth" of Growth mindset.

Sometimes another mindset might match the situation, or your personality better!

(Primeau, 2021) (Cote, 2022)

# Gratitude Mindset



This is not forced, it is a concious practice to center small moments of gratitude throughout your day.

This shifts you from a mindset of what went wrong in your day, or a “failure”, and instead finding a moment of gratitude from the day or event instead.

You do not, nor should do this for every “failure” point, especially super close to particularly painful moments. But could be used in hindset instead.

(Tran, n.d.)

# Let’s take a Moment

Use the provided worksheet to think of a few moments of gratitude that you have had this week.

Small? Absolutely fine!
Silly? Absolutely amazing!

Need a second?
What thoughts are coming forward instead?

# Can I be honest?



Emotional Honesty is a powerful tool when we deal with “failure”.

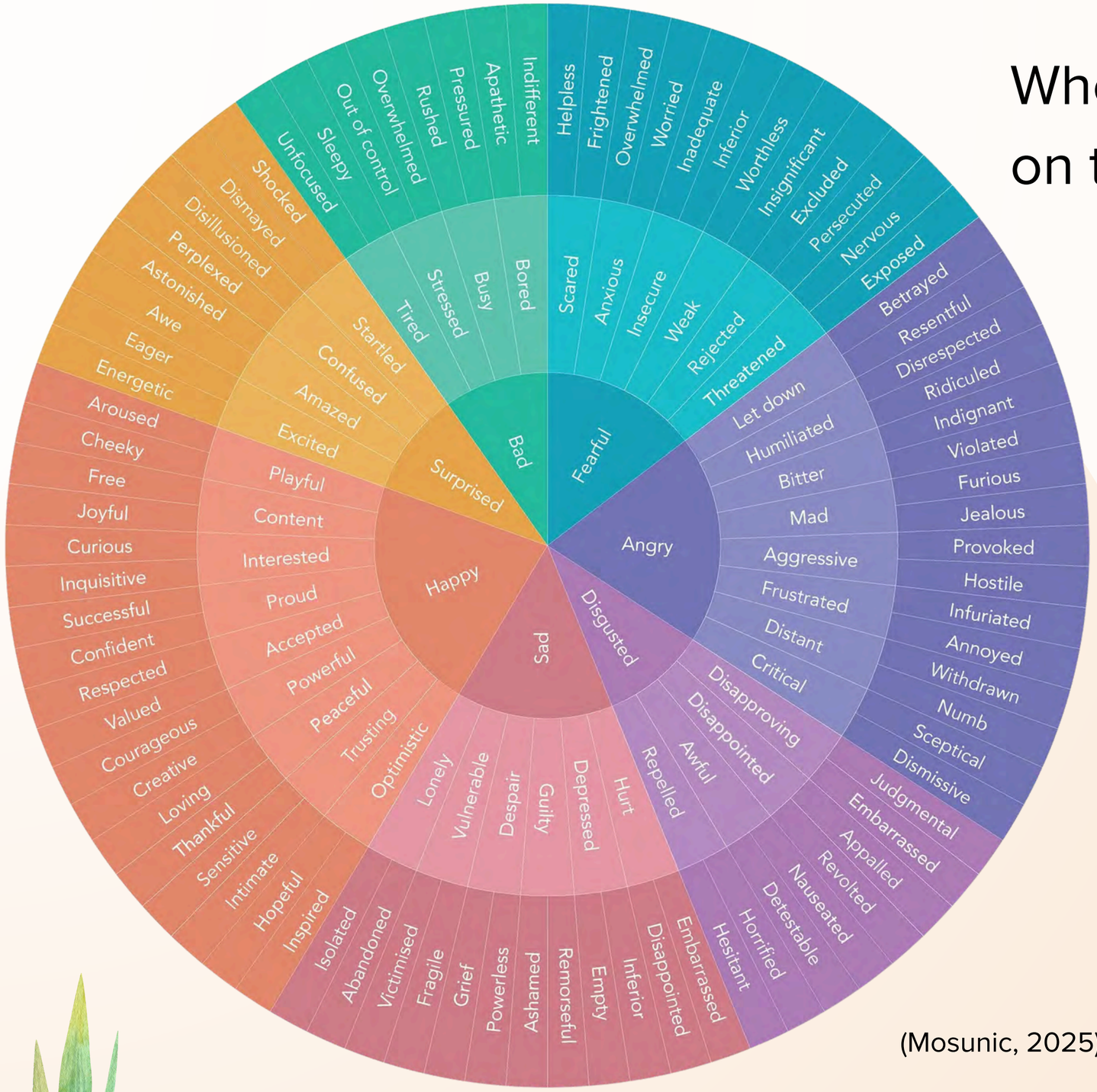
If you are able to connect and articulate the way “failure” makes you feel can help us overcome the negative emotions.

But what do we do if we don’t know why we feel a certain way?

Remember when it comes to “failure” a lot of negative emotion is rooted in fear, anger, and disgust.

(Bloom & Bloom, 2011)

# Where are you on the wheel?




(Mosunic, 2025)

# Don’t be afraid to name your emotion

Many emotions are rooted in a basic one, but it can be difficult to find.

Name your feelings, even if you’re unsure of the words, and use the wheel to help you discover the root.

Once you’ve discovered what the emotion is, you can use this to reframe and overcome the feelings associated with the “failure”.

(Mosunic, 2025)

# How do we reframe “failure”?

Now that we have discussed mindset around “failure” how do we overcome these moments in order to grow?



(Henley, 2022)

### Acknowledge It

No matter how small the “failure” is, acknowledge it!
Everything from dropping your coffee to missing a deadline, they all matter in how you process failure.

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### Don’t play the blame game

We naturally want to find someone to blame, this is how we process things easily. But instead acknowledge the “failure” without blaming someone, even yourself.

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### Learn from it, actively

We discussed learning earlier, but you must make an active choice to learn something. This is not passive, when failure comes up, choose to learn from it instead of running away or ignoring it.

# What type of “failure” happened?

Identifying the type of “failure” helps us  in reframing it and overcoming it.

Basic “Failure”: You know better and did it any way, these are usually caught by the system and can be easily rectified.

Intelligent “Failure”: An experiment didn’t work, if may have even made things worse. This is hard to overcome as it tends to feel personal in nature.

Complex “Failure”: When several things go bad all at once. A “perfect storm”. These ones are difficult to get to the core of as there are so many factors, but there are often warning signs.

(Edmondson, 2023)

# The Three “R”s



Relax: We have gone over ways to regulate our emotions around “failure”, this is the first step to dealing with it. Breathe, at least 90 seconds to relax before reacting.

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Reflect: What went wrong? Listen to stakeholders, do not assign blame to anyone. This is a time to listen, not to solve the problem.

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Respond: Now that you have taken a moment, you can respond to your “failure” effectively.

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If this doesn’t work at first, you can always try again.

(Goodman, 2020)

# Self Compassion

Remember that “failure” is a natural part of life.

It is okay to give yourself compassion.

A tool that is simple is reframing who had the issue, would you be upset if your best friend made this mistake? How about five year old you?

(Harvard Health Publishing, 2024)

# A safe place to “fail”



There is one important caveat when we discuss “failure”, sometimes it is not safe to fail. This is usually life or death situations.

Obviously, most of the time we “fail” it is not life or death.

Therefore, we must create a safe place to fail for our students and ourselves.

(Appelo, 2016)

# Tools for safe “failure”

Psychologcial Safety: Having a safe place for free discussion allows people to admit when something has gone wrong, and ask questions.

Experimentation: Allow people to try things, such as a student taking a certain class or changing their major, you sometimes have to try something.

Define Boundaries: It is important to define boundaries, because those who are not given parameters will see how far they can push something.

(Appelo, 2016)

# Lead by example



Showing our students, or discussing our own setbacks helps them overcome their own issues.

When we realize that we have more in common, and have all made similar mistakes, then we can overcome the feelings of “failure” quicker.

(Appelo, 2016)

# When did you feel safe to fail?

Take a moment in the provided worksheets to reflect on a time it was safe to fail?

Were you the one who failed? Was it someone else?

How did you react? What made it safe to fail?

# Remember this is a process





“Failure” is a skill. It is not something we are going to be perfect at right away.

If we attempt to react better, learn, and develop this skill, “failure” will be something we can not only overcome but learn to thrive in despite of.

# Hindsight is 20/20

As we discuss our “failures” we see that they often lead to learning, new opportunities, and growth.



Take what you learned today and think about the opportunities, learning, and other things you got as a result of that “failure”.



# Questions?

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# Thank you!