

WTF Jeff? 

How I put failure into context 

“We don't remember isolated facts; we remember things in context.”

- Moonwalking with Einstein by Joshua Foer 2011

I asked my wife (who was also my business partner for over 10 years) to help me with ideas for where I failed. At one point I had to ask her to stop sharing. 😏

How have I learned to put failure into context?

What is failing?

Is it a simple mistake that created a domino effect of perpetual "face plants"?

Is it as straight forward as not delivering for a client?

Or is it those many moments when I thought, "C'mon Jeff you had one job!"

The answer to all of the above is, yes! Putting what you failed at into proper perspective or framing it within the context of where you're at in your career is what's most important.

5 stories of failure 🙄

1 "Captain Obvious" Moment 🙄

2 Psychological Theories 🤔

1 Really bad short poem 🎉

5 Take Aways for everyone ❤️

What Were You Thinking, Jeff!? 😡

I was a pioneer in Podcasting in 2006. I failed to market myself.

I made everything about the disciplines (IA, UX, IxD) and other thought leaders.

It's unlikely anyone on this call knows who I am. 😞

I consider this to be a big opportunity lost, early in my career.

I also didn't ask to get paid for my time. At a minimum, I published 5 conferences and interviewed speakers. I did all of the coding, designing, editing and on average it took me 3 months and cost me over \$80,000. Doing that math, that's \$400,000!

This is what many would consider a business failure.

While interviewing thought leaders I had three different publishing companies ask me to write a book. 📖

I turned them all down. WHY?! It takes 1-1.5 years to write a book. What do I write about (one year after the first ever iPhone) that would be relevant after publication? HUGE Fail! Another opportunity to position and market myself.

I gave a closing keynote at a major university 🦄

...and went nearly 45 minutes over time holding up a convention waiting to get into the main auditorium. While the talk was a success, the venue and organizers aren't bringing me back.

I set up an international conference with a young design firm I was mentoring for two years, without a contract. They called two days before to tell me they didn't have the \$100,000 🤪

I didn't create a contract, nor did I look into international business laws, or tax implications in Canada during a recession.

Kristina Mausser and I ran workshops around the world - Caribbean, USA, Mexico, Canada, Europe - that ultimately became what are know as design sprints. 🏃

Most companies were presenting dry, boring 8 hour long PowerPoint presentations on their frameworks. I turned that around and created hands-on, interactive fun workshops. People were given experiences, sponsors provided books and online tools all for the cost of a day long session. While the workshops were a huge success - and many companies copied them within a year - there was no need to come back to me for help. I gave too much away.

1 "Captain Obvious" Moment 🙄



My original degree was a major in behavioural and cognitive psychology. 🙊

I know about how people behave and how hard it is for people to change.

Yet I went into fields like Information Architecture and UX believing people would want to know where they were failing to mitigate risk.

Early in my career I didn't consider how I was sharing recommendations and research.

Specifically, I was focusing on where their services and products were failing customers. However, I didn't consider how to share results with different disciplines and leaders.

2 Psychological Theories 🤔

Patterns of Earned Dogmatism ...

If "society" or other experts label someone else as "expert" that person's ability to be creative and curious about their own beliefs, dramatically drops off. From my perspective, the thought leaders stopped leading people to new thoughts and ideas.

... which gets reinforced by "Pluralistic Ignorance"

When groups of people (teams) are uncertain, we are more likely to look to the actions and ideas of others, as correct.

Without strong leadership (clear direction, the opportunity to learn, fail and grow in your career) a kind of "group think" is created that dominates and ultimately leads to poor outcomes.

Side stepping Earned Dogmatism

When you are looking for answers from other thought leaders, seek inspiration, not absolutes.

Avoiding Pluralistic Ignorance

When you or your team are uncertain, bring together a diverse group of people and backgrounds. Put all your ideas on the table and consider outcomes, accordingly.

1 Really Bad Short Poem 🎉

Roses are Red. Violets are Blue. I've fucked up throughout my career... and if you're successful, so will you! ❤️

With Gratitude and Humility 🙏

Nokia, Saba, Ubisoft, NBA, Dairy Farmers of Canada, Government of Canada, ManuLife Financial, GEICO, IA Summit, UX Poland, Booking, Capital One, Tribal World Wide DDB, CanUX, Follow the UX Leader, Kina'ole, Adaptive Path, Kristina Mausser, FatDUX, Mad*Pow, Rosenfeld Media, VizThink, Morgan Kaufmann, CogniLore Inc, Boeing, HootSuite, Fujitsu, OpenText, iStock, Blackberry, Rogers, Zappos, Canada Post, TUG, Boxes and Arrows, Johnny Holland, Chris Baum, Jerome Van Geel, Christina Wodtke, Dan Klyn, Andrea Resmini, Mrs. Miller, (The authors of the over 500 books I've read in business and design), Neil Peart, John Bonham, Socrates, Dr. Elizabeth Gould, Werner Puchert, Dixon Lo, Peter Morville, Louis Rosenfeld, Andrew Mayfield, Elizabeth Buie, Dave Gray, Brendan Schauer...

Putting Failure in Context

💡 To get to a better idea faster, simply admit when you don't know. 🤔 🤔

😡 Haters are going to hate. They also are usually not the ones innovating. 🧠

👏 The way to live without regret is to try, fail, and carry on. 🚶 🏃

👉 You aren't failing. You're learning, gaining wisdom. 🧠

👉 Follow your joy. 😄

Thank you!

Reach out if you'd like to chat:

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