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A little more than three years ago, I had to put together this presentation at work. It was on a topic I wasn't very familiar with, but I took it on anyway, figuring I could get up to speed and deliver something useful and productive.

Friends, if you hadn't guessed yet, I bombed it. I wasn't prepared enough, I missed a few major points, and I didn't give myself enough time to complete it. Not my greatest work.

But I have such fond memories of that presentation — O.K., maybe not exactly *fond* — because it was my first significant screw-up at a new job. It's still something I look to when I'm in a similar position at work; I know what went wrong then, so I can try to fix those issues now before they become problems.

When things go right, we're generally pretty good at identifying *why* they went right — that is, if we even take time to analyze the success at all. Preparation, proper scheduling, smart delegation and so on. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. But falling on our face gives us the rare opportunity to find and address the things that went wrong (or, even more broadly, the traits or habits that led us to fail), and it's an opportunity we should welcome.

That's where the failure résumé comes in. Whereas your normal résumé organizes your successes, accomplishments and your overall progress, your failure résumé tracks the times you didn't quite hit the mark, along with what lessons you learned. (And yes, my disastrous presentation has a spot on mine.)

Melanie Stefan, a lecturer at Edinburgh Medical School, knows this well. A few years ago, she called on academics to publish their own "failure résumés," eventually publishing her own. On it, she lists graduate programs she didn't get into, degrees she didn't finish or pursue, harsh feedback from an old boss and even the rejections she got after auditioning for several orchestras.

What's the point of such self-flagellation?

Because you learn much more from failure than success, and honestly analyzing one's failures can lead to the type of introspection that helps us grow — as well as show that the path to success isn't a straight line.

"At the time, I thought we were really not talking enough about failure" in academia, Dr. Stefan said. "I had just finished my Ph.D. and was applying for so many fellowships to do a postdoc, and I got rejection after rejection, and I said it was something we don't really talk about a lot."

She added: "Sometimes I look back on them and see how much I've actually struggled to be where I am. That's a powerful reminder that I deserve to be here," she said. It "is a good reminder of how much you've tried."

(Just to be clear: Despite her failures, Dr. Stefan is indeed quite successful: She earned her Ph.D. from the European Bioinformatics Institute, she worked at Caltech and Harvard, and she has been a lecturer since 2015.)

Failure is a topic we've covered before in Smarter Living. Last August, the writer Oset Babur wrote a guide to failing the right way. In it, Ms. Babur wrote that to turn even our most public failures into advantages, we need to be critical, mindful, honest and, most important, kind about what went wrong.

Keeping a failure résumé — or Anti-Portfolio or CV of Failures or whatever you'd like to call it — is simple: When you fail, write it down. But instead of focusing on how that failure makes you feel, take the time to step back and analyze the practical, operational reasons that you failed. Did you wait until the last minute to work on it? Were you too casual in your preparation? Were you simply out of your depth?

There are countless things that can go wrong when we're trying accomplish our goals or advance our careers. But those things are opportunities, not derailments.

"Even people who, on paper, have had extremely successful careers have struggled along the way, and failure is part of a career," Dr. Stefan said. "Everyone has to go through it if you want to be successful."