Option B. Book Review:

The Up Side of Down: Why Failing Well is the Key to Success

EDUC-R546

Instructional Strategies for Thinking, Collaboration, and Motivation

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There is a famous Korean proverb that talks about failure and success, called “failure is the mother of success.” This proverb originated from one of famous quotes of Thomas Edison, “Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up” (Edison Innovation Foundation, 2014). The proverb has written to encourage and to challenge people from failure so that they can move forward. Since the proverb is one of my favorite quotes of to motivate myself and push forward, a book, *The Up Side of Down: Why Failing Well is the Key to Success*, written by Megan McArdle (2014), strongly attracted me with its messages on both front and back of the book cover. When I picked up and read the McArdle’s (2014) book, I automatically made a connection between the Korean proverb and the book by making an assumption on finding similarities on what the book would be talking about with the proverb.

Also, there is another Korean book came out this year called *Question Like a Leader* written by Kyungmok No and Bora Kim (2014) that I made a connection with McArdle’s (2014) book. This No and Kim’s (2014) book is targeting many business leaders as its reader, the two authors share examples of many famous business professionals finding resolutions when they face problems. The book is divided into three different chapters; Start, Think, and Execute. Throughout the three chapters, the authors share a lot of famous quotes of worldwide well-known business people who went through many difficulties and failures by considering those challenges as a ‘secret of success’ to help business leaders shifting their professional mindset to be more positive. Among those chapters, the Execute chapter was closely connected to McArdle’s (2014) book. The main reason is that this third chapter mostly talks about “Brainstorm about how to fail” (p.198). They insist that it is important to fail well to success in the future. To be a better leader, people need to first brainstorm how to fail well rather than how to succeed (No and Kim, 2014, p. 200).

Since there were some previous materials I had knowledge about this topic, the expectations I had on McArdle’s (2014) book before starting to read it was quite higher. I was looking for deeper and critical perspective and evidences that McArdle (2014) brings into the table on dealing with failures. Especially, since the book started with the narrative writing style, I was expecting some inspirational examples that shift readers’ mindset that could be applied into their daily life. Also, I was expecting some quantitative data set analyzed in the text to support McArdle’s idea more so that I can professionally and scholarly apply them. However, overall response to this book was rather a disappointment than a satisfaction.

Prior to listing the several disappointments I had with this book, here is a quick overall review of the book. First of all, McArdle’s (2014) narrative writing style is appropriate as she was giving advices to readers and sharing many examples throughout the book. Narrative writing is a type of writing tells a story or event at the same time “lacks the higher order thinking” (Narrative Essay, n.d.) The narrative writing style can be helpful to general readers feeling more attached to her book and easier to understand. Most of examples used in this book intentionally stated to express that failure is not always a despondent result. Her examples are various from small matters to big matters that some are related to her daily life challenges, but others are related to political and economic issues across the world. One of small matter examples she used to explain how her failure paid her back with better result is that the story of her gaining a job at *The Economist*. She stated that “my crushing failure to find work in a “traditional MBA” field had opened up space in my life for something completely different – and for me, much better suited” (McArdle, 2014, p. 166). Additionally, one of the bigger matter examples she used is an issue on Memphis that it has been considered to be the bankruptcy capital of the world. While McArdle figuring out about why Memphis is suffering under the terrible bankruptcy, she met some bankruptcy attorneys and one of them told her that the bankruptcy is continued because people is not learning from their failures and only aiming for immediate response from the government and economic status (p.256).

Nevertheless McArdle (2014) tried her best on sharing both small and big examples to advise readers shifting their mindset to be more challenged and motivated from their failures, there were so many shortages of this book that was not meeting with my expectations. First of all, even though I knew that this book was not an academic journal article that researched on either quantitative or qualitative data, I was hoping to see some deeper critical examples and evidences that academically supported. I shared this thought with my classmate about difficulty of applying this book into either my academic or professional fields, they all agreed that this book may not been written for those purposes. Maybe because I approached this book from the academic standpoint as I picked up this book for academic assignment, however, I was not able to apply this book into my field as a higher education and student affairs practitioner.

Another shortage I found with McArdle’s (2014) book is that she uses too many self-centered examples throughout the book. For example, there were examples of her procrastination as a writer, her terrible dating experience, her struggling with unemployment and miracle story of finding new job, house-buying journeys, and so on. Since this book is written to inspire general readers, it would have been better if it provides less her own experience and more on generalizable examples. Her experiences was amazing like getting a call from the editor in chief of *The Economist* and hired by getting enormous amount of money, however, it is difficult to picture myself into the similar situation.

Not because it was written with narrative writing style or example was focused on her own life story, the overall contexts of the book are not well connected to the main topic she wanted to bring into the table. While reading the book, I had to frequently go back to the table of contents and the book cover to check what she really wants to talk about with each example. There were so many ambiguous examples that written over few pages then lost in the paragraph of what McArdle (2014) really trying to emphasize with those examples.

**Conclusion**

Failure is a steppingstone of later success. As a higher education and student affairs practitioner, I am very open to failures and mistakes. It is natural to feel a little depression or frustration even a discouragement when we experience mistakes or failures in our life, however, we need to remind ourselves that it is not the end of the world. Although I was not able to receive a great inspiration from McArdle’s (2014) book as I was approaching this book with academic viewpoint and expecting more than what the general readers that McArdle aimed for, it was helpful to remind myself that failure will not ruin everything. I would not suggest this book to any business professional or academic scholar who is looking for critical and professional inspiration, however, to some friends who are struggling from making mistakes and feeling a failure in their life.

Citation

Edison Innovation Foundation (2014). Famous Quotations from Thomas Edison.

Retrieved from <http://www.thomasedison.org/index.php/education/edison-quotes/>

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