

WHAT WOULD YOU DO  
IF YOU KNEW IT WAS  
**IMPOSSIBLE**  
**TO FAIL?**

**WAKE UP**   
**LIVE!**

{ A FORMULA FOR **SUCCESS** THAT REALLY **WORKS!** }

DOROTHEA BRANDE



Wake Up  
*and*  
Live!

*Dorothea Brande*



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## *A Personal Word from the Author*



Any book which has been found helpful is likely to be read more than once. If, sooner or later, you re-read this one, you might take that opportunity to make it still more useful to you every time you turn back to it. Perhaps some passages clarified an idea in your mind, or resolved some doubt. Perhaps you found other things which you felt you already knew but tend, somehow, to forget. Here and there you may find a sentence that might have been written with your case directly in mind.

Don't let respect for the printed page keep you from turning just *a* book into *your* book. Read with a pencil in hand. When you come to a passage you believe you may consult often, or may need to refresh your memory upon later, draw a long line down the margin of the page. Sentences or paragraphs which are personally useful to you should be underlined. Then, in the back of the book, write down the numbers of the pages on which such markings occur, with perhaps a word or two as clue to what may be found there. You can cross out with a large X any page with which you disagree, or strike out any sentence not applicable to your life. If you have a comment or extension of your own to make, write it into the margin.

All handbooks are much more satisfactory when privately edited in this way. The more personally serviceable they are the nearer they come to fulfilling their author's intention. Make what you need stand out at a glance; save yourself wasted motion by eliminating superfluous pages. In this way

you can collaborate with any handbook's author in doing what he most hopes to do: to make a book which is personal, practical, helpful, for every individual reader.

# Introduction



*Two years ago I came across a formula for success which has revolutionized my life. It was so simple, and so obvious once I had seen it, that I could hardly believe it was responsible for the magical results which followed my putting it into practice.*

*The first thing to confess is that two years ago I was a failure. Oh, nobody knew it except me and those who knew me well enough to see that I was not doing a tenth of what could be expected of me. I held an interesting position, lived not too dull a life—yet there was no doubt in my own mind, at least, that I had failed. What I was doing was a substitute activity for what I had planned to do; and no matter how ingenious and neat the theories were which I presented to myself to account for my lack of success, I knew very well that there was more work that I should be doing, and better work, and work more demonstrably my own.*

*Of course I was always looking for a way out of my impasse. But when I actually had the good fortune to find it, I hardly believed in my own luck. At first I did not try to analyze or explain it. For one thing, the effects of using the formula were so remarkable that I was almost on the verge of being superstitious about the matter; it seemed like magic, and it doesn't do to inquire too closely into the reasons for a spell or incantation! More realistic than that, there was—at that time—still a trace of wariness about my attitude. I had tried to get out of my difficulties many times before, had*

*often seemed to be about to do so, and then had found them closing in around me again as relentlessly as ever. But the main reason for my taking so little time to analyze or explain the effects of the formula after I once began to use it consistently was that I was much too busy and having far too much fun. It was enough to revel in the ease with which I did work hitherto impossible for me, to see barriers I had thought impenetrable melt away, to feel the inertia and timidity which had bound me for years dropping off like unlocked fetters.*

*For I had been years in my deadlock; I had known what I wanted to do, had equipped myself for my profession—and got nowhere. Yet I had chosen my life-work, which was writing, early, and had started out with high hopes. Most of the work I had finished had met a friendly reception. But then when I tried to take the next step and go on to a more mature phase it was as though I had been turned to stone. I felt as if I could not start.*

*Of course it goes without saying that I was unhappy. Not miserably and painfully unhappy, but just nagged at and depressed by my own ineffectuality. I busied myself at editing, since I seemed doomed to fail at the more creative side of literature; and I never ceased harrying myself, consulting teachers and analysts and psychologists and physicians for advice as to how to get out of my pit. I read and inquired and thought and worried; I tried every suggestion for relief. Nothing worked more than temporarily. For a while I might engage in feverish activity, but never for more than a week or two. Then the period of action would suddenly end, leaving me as far from my goal as ever, and each time more deeply discouraged.*

*Then, between one minute and the next, I found the idea which set me free. This time I was not consciously looking for it; I was engaged on a piece of research in quite another field. But I came across a sentence in the book I was reading, HUMAN PERSONALITY, by F. W. H. Myers, which was so illuminating that I put the book aside to consider all the ideas suggested in*

*that one penetrating hypothesis. When I picked up the book again I was a different person.*

*Every aspect, attitude, relation of my life was altered. At first, as I say, I did not realize that. I only knew, with increasing certainty from day to day, that at last I had found a talisman for counteracting failure and inertia and discouragement and that it worked. That was quite enough for me! My hands and my days were so full that there was no time for introspection. I did sometimes drop off to sleep, after doing in a short while what once would have seemed to me a gigantic task, thinking, like the old lady of the nursery rhyme, "This is none of I!" But "I" was reaping the rewards, beyond doubt: the books I had wanted to write for so long and had so agonizingly failed to write were flowing, now, as fast as the words would go on paper, and so far from feeling drained by the activity, I was continually finding new ideas which had been hidden, as it were, behind the work that had "backed up" in my mind and made a barrier.*

*Here is the total amount of writing I was able to do in the twenty years before I found my formula—the little writing which I was painfully, laboriously, protestingly able to do. For safety's sake I have overestimated the items in each classification, so a generous estimate of it comes to this: Seventeen short stories, twenty book-reviews, half a dozen newspaper items, one attempt at a novel, abandoned less than a third of the way through. An average of less than two completed pieces of work per year!*

*For the two years after my moment of illumination, this is the record: Three books (the first two in just two weeks less than the first year, and both successful in their different fields), twenty-four articles, four short stories, seventy-two lectures, the scaffolding of three more books; and innumerable letters of consultation and professional advice sent to all parts of the country.*

*Nor are those by any means the only results of applying my formula. As soon as I discovered how it worked in the one matter of releasing my energy for writing, I began to be curious as to what else it might do for me, and to try acting upon it in other fields where I had had trouble. The*

*tentativeness and timidity which had crippled me in almost every aspect of my life dropped away. Interviews, lectures, engagements which I had driven myself to, going against the grain every minute, became pleasurable experiences. On the other hand, a dozen stupid little exploitations of myself which I had allowed—almost in a penitential spirit—so long as I was in my deadlock were ended then and there. I was on good terms with myself at last, no longer punishing and exhorting and ruthlessly driving myself, and so no longer allowing myself to be unnecessarily bored and tired.*

*Although my formula had worked with such striking consequences for me, I told very few of my friends about it. In the almost fatuous egotism which I seem to share with ninety-nine one-hundredths of my fellows, I thought my case was unique: that no one had ever got into quite such a state of ineffectiveness before, nor would be able to apply the formula I used so successfully on his own difficulties. From time to time, now that I was no longer living in such a state of siege as made me blind to all outside happenings, I did see indications here and there that another was wasting his life in much the same way that I had wasted mine; but I had had the good fortune to emerge and so, I thought, would he, in good time. Except for chance I would never have thought of publicly offering the simple program which had helped me so; I might, indeed, never have realized that to a greater or less extent most adults are living inadequate lives and suffering in consequence.*

*But some months ago I was asked to lecture to a group of book-sellers, and the subject which was tentatively given me was “The Difficulties of Becoming a Writer.” Now in my first book I had gone into those difficulties pretty thoroughly; I had no desire to read a chapter from an already published book to an audience the members of which were in a little better way to have read the chapter than almost any other group would have been. Beginning to prepare the lecture I could think of nothing further to add to the subject than to say frankly that the most difficult of all tasks for a writer was learning to counteract his own inertia and cowardice. So, fearing at first that my talk would have somewhat the sound of “testifying*

to grace” in an old-fashioned prayer-meeting, I began to consider the subject and prepare my speech.

*The conclusions I came to are in this book: that we are victims to a Will to Fail; that unless we see this in time and take action against it we die without accomplishing our intentions; that there is a way of counteracting that Will which gives results that seem like magic. I gave my lecture. What was really startling to me was to see how it was received. Until the notes, the letters, the telephone-calls began to come in, I had thought the report of how one person overcame a dilemma might interest many of the audience mildly and help two or three hearers who found themselves in somewhat the same plight.*

*But it seemed that my audience, almost to a man, was in the state I had described, that they all were looking for help to get out of it. I gave the lecture twice more; the results were the same. I was flooded with messages, questions, and requests for interviews. Best of all were three reports which came to me within two weeks. Three of my hearers had not waited for a fuller exposition, or taken it for granted that the formula would not work for them, but had put it into immediate practice. One had written and sold a story which had haunted her for years, but which had seemed too “extraordinary” to be likely to sell. A man had gone home and quietly ended the exploitation of himself by a temperamental sister, and had made arrangements to resume evening work in a line that he had abandoned at his sister’s insistence; to his astonishment, his sister, once she thoroughly understood that he refused to be handicapped longer, had seemed to wake from a long period of peevish hypochondria and was happier than she had been in years. The third case was too long and too personal to recount here, but in many ways it was the best of them all. Well, there were three persons, at least, who found the formula efficacious; and, like me, each of them found something rather awe-inspiring about the results.*

*We all live so far below the possible level for our lives that when we are set free from the things which hamper us so that we merely approach the potentialities in ourselves, we seem to have been entirely transfigured. It is*

*in comparison with the halting, tentative, hesitant lives we let ourselves live that the full, normal life that is ours by right seems to partake of the definitely supernormal. When that is seen, it is easy to discover that all men and women of effective lives, whether statesmen, philosophers, artists or men of business, use, sometimes entirely unconsciously, the same mental attitude in which to do their work that their less fortunate fellows must either find for themselves or die without discovering. Occasionally, as the reading of biographies and autobiographies shows, enlightenment comes through religion, philosophy, or whole-hearted admiration for another; and the individual, although often feeling still weak in himself, is sustained by his devotion, is often capable of feats of endurance, effectiveness or genius which cause us to marvel at him. But those who are not born with this knowledge of the way to induce the state in which successful work is done, who do not learn it so early that they cannot remember a time when they did not know it, or who for some reason cannot find in religion or philosophy the strength that they need to counteract their own ineffectiveness, can still teach themselves by conscious effort to get the best from their lives. As they do so, many other things which have puzzled them become clear. But this book is not the history of the growth of an idea. It is intended to be a practical handbook for those who would like to escape from futility and begin to live happily and well.*



## CHAPTER I

# Why Do We Fail?

With the time and energy we spend in making failure a certainty we might have certain success.

A nonsensical paradox? No; fortunately it is a sober, literal truth, one which holds a great deal of promise.

W Suppose a man had an appointment a hundred miles north of his home, and that if he kept it he would be sure of having health, much happiness, fair prosperity, for the rest of his life. He has just time enough to get there, just enough gas in his car. He drives out, but decides that it would be more fun to go twenty-five miles south before starting out in earnest.

That is nonsense! Yes, isn't it? The gas had nothing to do with it; Time had no preference as to how it would be spent; the road ran north as well as south, yet he missed his appointment. Now, if that man told us that, after all, he had quite enjoyed the drive in the wrong direction, that in some ways he found it pleasanter to drive with no objective than to try to keep a date, that he had had a touching glimpse of his old home by driving south, should we praise him for being properly philosophical about having lost his opportunity?

No, we should think he had acted like an imbecile. Even if he had missed his appointment by getting into a day-dream in which he drove automatically past a road-sign or two, we should still not absolve him. Or if he had arrived too late from having lost his way when he might have looked up his route on a good map and failed to do so before starting, we might commiserate with him, but we should indict him for bad judgment.

Yet when it comes to going straight to the appointments we make with ourselves and our own fulfillment, we all act very much like the hero of this silly fable: we drive the wrong way. We fail where we might have succeeded by spending the same power and time.

Failure indicates that energy has been poured into the wrong channel. *It takes energy to fail.*

Now this is something which we seldom see at once. Because we commonly think of failure as the conventional opposite of success, we continue to make false antitheses of the qualities which attend success and failure. Success is bracing, active, alert; so the typical attitude of failure, we believe, must be lethargy, inertia, a supine position. True enough; but that does not mean that no energy is being used. Let any psychologist tell you how much energy a mature man must expend to resist motion. A powerful struggle must be waged against the forces of life and movement in order to remain inert, although this struggle takes place so far beneath the surface of our lives that we do not always become aware of it. Physical inaction is no true sign that life-force is not being burned away. So even the idler is using fuel while he dreams.

When failure comes about through devoting precious hours to time-killing pursuits, we can all see that energy is being diverted from its proper channel. But there are ways of killing time which do not look like dissipation. They can seem, on the contrary, like conscientious and dutiful hard work, they often draw praise and approval from onlookers, and arouse a sense of complacency in us. It is only by looking more closely, by discovering that this work gets us nowhere, that it both tires us and leaves us unsatisfied, that we see here again energy is being devoted to the pursuit of failure.

But why should this be so? Why, if, with the same energy we must use in any case, we might be succeeding, do we so seldom live the lives we hoped and planned to live? Why do we accomplish so little, and thwart ourselves senselessly? Why, when we start late, or run out of gas because of carelessness, or miss road-signs through day-dreaming, do we think we are being properly philosophical when we give ourselves and others excuses for failure which will not hold water? No one truly consoles himself by considering that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, that to travel hopefully is better than to arrive, that half-a-loaf is better than no bread. Such proverbs are the cynical distillation of experience, but they are nothing to live by. We deceive no one, although our compromises and excuses are accepted by our fellows as long as they are in the same boat. The successful man or woman listens to such whistling in the dark with amusement and incredulity, privately concluding that there is a great deal of hypocrisy loose in the world. He has the best of evidence that the rewards of well-directed activity far surpass all the by-products of failure, that one infinitesimal accomplishment in reality is worth a mountain of dreams.

Even as we tell of the compensations of failure we are not quite comfortable. We do not truly believe—although our proverbs sound as though we did—that one must choose either success *or* the good life. We know that those who succeed see the same sunsets, breathe the same air, love and are loved no less than failures; and in addition they have something more: the knowledge that they have chosen to move in the direction of life and growth instead of acquiescing in death and decay. However we may talk, we know that Emerson was right when he wrote: “Success is constitutional; depends on a *plus* condition of mind and body, on power of work, on courage.”

Then why do we fail? Especially, why do *we work hard* at failure?

Because, beside being creatures subject to the Will to Live and the Will to Power, we are driven by another will, the Will to Fail, or Die.

This is to many of us a novel idea. Of the Will to Live and the Will to Power we hear a great deal; our psychologies and philosophies make much

of them. But the Will to Fail is more obscure, harder to observe at work. It takes as many forms as the Old Man of the Sea, and there are as many individual ways of failing—and failing “honorably” and successfully—as there are subdivisions of the psychological types. So it takes us unawares. We are not braced against it, being more used to thinking of failure as a shadow or phantom than a reality to be met and conquered, yet going in mortal fear of it all our lives.

To realize that there is this Will to Fail, or—which amounts to the same thing—this Will to Death, operative in our lives, that there is a down-dragging, devitalizing, frustrating current running counter to all the forces of health and growth in us, is the first step in turning from failure to success. We cannot begin by ignoring it, for then it can get in its subversive work most subtly. We must face it first, and then turn ourselves away from it.

It is possible to get back the energy that is now going into failure and use it to healthy ends. There are certain facts—plain, universal, psychological truths—which, when once seen, bring us to definite conclusions. From those conclusions we can make a formula on which to act. There is a simple, practical procedure which will turn us around and set our faces in the right direction. It is the formula, as we have said, on which, consciously or unconsciously, every successful person acts.

The procedure is simple, the first steps of putting it into practice so easy that those who prefer to dramatize their difficulties may refuse to believe that anything so uncomplicated could possibly help them. On the other hand, since it takes little time and soon brings its own evidence that, simple or not, its consequences are frequently amazing, it should be worth trying. A richer life, better work, the experience of success and its rewards: those ends are surely worth one experiment in procedure. All the equipment needed is imagination and the willingness to disturb old habit-patterns for a while, to act after a novel fashion long enough to finish one piece of work. How long that period is will vary, of course, with the work to be accomplished, and whether it is all dependent on oneself or of the unwieldier type which the executive and administrator know, where the factor of other human

temperaments must be taken into account. In any case, some results from the experiment will be seen at once. Often these first results are so astonishing that to enumerate them here might alienate readers of a sober habit of mind. To hear of them before coming to them normally would be like hearing of miracles, and some of the effectiveness of the program might be lost by the intrusion of the very doubts we are out to banish.

Once more: however remarkable the results, the process is straightforward and uncomplicated. It is worth trying, for it has worked in hundreds of lives. It can work in any life that is not more truly dedicated to failure than to success.



## CHAPTER II

# The Will to Fail

From the disciples of Schopenhauer and Freud, of Nietzsche and Adler, we have all become conversant with such phrases as the Will to Live and the Will to Power. These phrases, representing—sometimes to the verge of overstatement—drives of the organism towards fulfillment and growth, correspond to truths of experience with which each of us is familiar. We have seen children struggle to make themselves and their personalities felt; as young people we have contended for a chance to try our own emerging forces; after long illness we have felt the tide of returning strength in our veins. We know that any average man caught in unfortunate circumstances will put up with poverty, distress, humiliation, with conditions which an onlooker will sometimes consider as much worse than death; and that only the presence of a will to continue living can account for the tenacity with which a man in such circumstances clings to the mere right to breathe and exist.

Furthermore, we first experience and then later turn to realize the process of growth in ourselves. The individual emerges from childhood into adolescence, from adolescence into maturity; and at each of these crises we find that the activities and interests of the old period are being replaced by