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The Unexpected Upside of Failure

*Lost your way? Good news! That
major life detour could be a blessing*

By Christina Larmer



He was my first love and, I thought, my soul mate for life. He was charming and funny, and I was willing to give up everything to be with him. So when I was unceremoniously dumped a few years into our relationship, I was devastated. Afterwards, I felt like a loser in love for months—until I finally picked myself up and threw myself into my career. Looking back? It was the best thing that ever happened to me. Not only did I end up scoring a great job in the US, it was stateside that I met my real true love; the man to whom I've now been married for 12 happy years.

The upshot? Sometimes experiencing a loss can have unexpected gains which can deeply enrich your life, according to Sydney-based psychotherapist Marie Rowland (*talking-matters.com*). “Dealing with ‘failure’ is an incredibly important part of how we build up our sense of self and resilience,” she says. “Managing disappointment or wrong turns can become the most liberating thing we can do. There’s also the opportunity for introspection, to recalibrate and ask yourself questions you might not have asked for years about what you really want out of life.” Not only do we learn from loss, it makes us stronger. Want proof? Here are the silver linings to some of the dark clouds that come your way ...

The Cloud: You didn’t get that promotion you were after

The Silver Lining: Of course you should aim high, but not scoring a promotion is merely an important lesson in realising there is more than one route to your final destination. The good news? You’ve just been given a golden opportunity to assess where you’re at and where you’d like to be, says executive life strategist and author of *Simplify Structure Succeed* (\$39.95, The Messenger Group), Shannah Kennedy. “Ask yourself, ‘Do I enjoy what I’m doing? Do I want to invest more time in this industry?’” You may well end up concluding that a career switch is just what you need—or perhaps that you simply need to boost your skill set to succeed. “The answers you come up with will highlight which areas you can go away and work on, whether it’s specific skills like time management and leadership—or simply time to start heading in a different direction.” There may also be an upside for your health and wellbeing: British research shows that a promotion at work can increase mental strain, while long hours in a stressful job have been found to boost your risk of heart disease. In fact, a recent study found that women who experience high job stress have a 38% higher risk of cardiovascular disease. Yikes! If not getting a promotion means less responsibility and more hospitable work hours, you’ll also have more time to enjoy the important things like spending time with family, indulging your hobbies or finding your true calling. “You may discover that something else comes along which is far more suited to your personality and the lifestyle you want to lead,” adds Rowland.

The Cloud: You’re struggling under a pile of credit card debt

The Silver lining: In the bestselling book *Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough* (\$24.95, Allen & Unwin), co-author Clive Hamilton writes that people “permanently in debt exist in a ‘money coma’—a state of vagueness and confusion about their financial circumstances.” What does that mean? It’s time to wake up and become a more conscious consumer (think: how necessary is that extra TV set or shopping spree?) while holding a mirror to what’s not working in your life. “Figure out the triggers that got you into debt, then ask yourself what you need to do differently,” says Adelaide-based organisational psychologist Dr Darryl Cross. “There’s no point complaining about your situation—take action!” In the process, you’ll learn to make changes that will secure your financial future—whether you seek the guidance of a financial adviser, chop up credit cards or avoid sales, they’re all small changes that will make a big long-term impact. Also, implement a budget, so you can track your incomings and outgoings each month. There are a bunch of nifty apps to help you budget on the go. Try MoneyBook (\$2.99), iReconcile (\$2.99) or Pennies (\$2.99).

The Cloud: You’ve experienced a nasty relationship breakdown

The Silver Lining: It’s devastating at the time, but the dissolution of a marriage or relationship can also bring enormous opportunity, insists Tonja Evetts Weimer in *Thriving After Divorce* (\$24.99, Atria Books/Beyond Words). “By embracing this time of change, and the significant alterations to your life it requires, you’re letting go of what has come to an end and allowing the mystery of your future to unfold.” That mystery can be exciting, opening up the chance for you to travel, renew friendships, meet someone more compatible, or simply allow you to rediscover your true self. “It’s the perfect time to reassess all the positive relationships in your life and focus on those that really matter,” says Rowland. There’s another benefit to walking away: A recent study published in the *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* journal found unhappy relationships are linked to impaired health, such as raised blood pressure, high blood sugar, obesity and depression. As for contentment, it’s a no brainer. “Studies show women are happier after leaving a toxic relationship,” adds Rowland. “It’s an emancipation of sorts, and with it, comes a new sense of autonomy and freedom.”






65%

How much better
you'll sleep with 150
minutes of moderate
to brisk activity
a week

The Cloud: You're struggling to juggle motherhood and work

The Silver Lining: For years, women have placed unrealistic pressure on themselves to do *everything*; from bringing up kids and tending to their home (and husbands)—all while simultaneously trying to juggle a career. If that's not enough, Rowland says too many of us are gripped with guilt that we're not doing enough in the continuing quest to 'have it all'. The truth? It's not realistic. "When you come to the realisation that the whole Superwoman notion is a myth, you become more aware of what you're capable of," says Rowland. "Once you've dismantled this idea of who you *should* be, focus on being who you *want* to be." Need some help prioritising your life? Seek the advice of a lifecoach or therapist who can give you a push in the right direction, or download the Prioritise app (\$2.99). It allows you to organise your life into categories and list them in order of importance. Number one? You!

The Cloud: You've lost fitness motivation and piled on weight

The Silver Lining: As surprising as it sounds, finding yourself overweight and unfit can have positive consequences says Kennedy. "It's the opportunity to ask yourself, 'Do I really like what I see?'" If the answer is no, here's the chance to change. Something else to consider: the more weight you lose, the more money you'll save. Economists at The George Washington University in the US discovered the more overweight you are, the more expensive life is. Talk to family and friends about your goals, join a gym, hire a trainer or go for a jog (it's free and those endorphins work wonders). "You have the ultimate opportunity to increase your confidence as well as improve your health, which will benefit all aspects of your life," says Kennedy. The other upside? Good eating and exercise reboots your mental health, relationships, sleep patterns and sex life. And that's a win-win for everyone! 



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