



# Challenge

## Ethos of Learning

“Being “stuck” provides the challenge Let them wrestle themselves free first; it’s a lot more rewarding for all of us!”

Alex Wallace , Assistant Head

### Great Expectations

You've heard it before: “If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.” Vincent Van Gogh, JK Rowling, Jay-Z and Thomas Edison, all these people experienced numerous failures but ultimately came out on top. Their stories highlight one of the most important life lessons of all: never ever give up.

It is well known that Thomas Edison tried and failed numerous times before he successfully created the light bulb. His response to his repeated failures? *“I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.”*

Van Gogh is considered one of the greatest artists of all time, yet he only sold one of his 900 paintings in his lifetime. Though his persistence went unnoticed when he was alive, Van Gogh proves you don't need external endorsement to persevere in doing what you love.

No one can stop Jay-Z. He came from a rough Brooklyn neighbourhood and had big dreams to become a successful rapper. Unfortunately, not one record label would sign him. Yet that didn't stop him from creating the lucrative Roc-A-Fella Records. In 2015, Forbes estimated his net worth at \$550 million, and TIME ranked him as one of their 2013 *Most Influential People in The World*. Let's not forget he's also married to Beyoncé!

## Do we really need challenges to be successful in life?

There are many reasons why it can be hard to develop new skills or overcome challenges. More often than not the biggest obstacle is mind-set.

*“Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm.”* Winston Churchill

Stanford psychology professor Carol Dweck is well-known for her work on the fixed mind-set versus the growth mind-set. This is how she describes the difference between these two mind-sets and how they impact performance.

*“In a fixed mind-set students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that’s that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. In a growth mind-set students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence. They don’t necessarily think everyone’s the same or anyone can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it.”*

The benefits of a growth mind-set might seem obvious, but most of us are guilty of having a fixed mind-set in the majority of situations. Having a fixed mind-set can often prevent learning important life skills which in turn can hinder reaching our full potential.

For example, if you say “I’m not good at maths”, that belief becomes a default position with the consequent avoidance of any activities involving numbers. The fixed mind-set avoids failure in the short term, but in the long-run it prevents learning, growth and the development of new skills.

*“Don’t spend so much time trying to choose the perfect opportunity, that you miss the right opportunity. Recognize that there will be failures, and acknowledge that there will be obstacles. But you will learn from your mistakes and the mistakes of others, for there is very little learning in success.”* Michael Dell, owner of Dell

Contrast this with someone with a growth mind-set who would be willing to try maths problems even if they failed at first. They see failure and setbacks as an indication that they should continue developing their skills to overcome such failures, rather than a signal that indicates that they are not good at it and should therefore not try.

As a result, people who have a growth mind-set are more likely to maximise their potential. They tend to learn from criticism rather than ignoring it, to overcome challenges rather than avoiding them, and to find inspiration in the success of others rather than feeling threatened.

### **Do I have to?**

Humans are hardwired to fear change. Change invites risk and risk invites the potential for anxiety and loss of self-confidence. As a result, we tend to resist stepping out of our comfort zone and this is why so many people start a project but never finish.

*“You might never fail on the scale I did. But some failure in life is inevitable. It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all. In which case, you fail by default.” JK Rowling*

Your son is going to find himself in uncomfortable situations, faced with things he’s never attempted or even encountered before. Achieving success requires talking to new people, doing new things, going to new places, thinking new thoughts. All of this ‘newness’ could drive your son back into his comfort zone. Teenagers need someone to hold them accountable, to check on progress and push them forward when fear gets in the way. No one is in a better position to offer that service than you.

### **Celebrate Success, Learn from Setbacks**

Most people believe that striving to reach their potential is choosing the outcome, laying out the plan, and launching into action. Those steps may prove challenging, but the true test comes when our dreams are dashed and reality hits. From the smallest goal to the grandest vision, setbacks, mistakes and failures are inevitable. The right way is to learn from these knock backs and strive to overcome them; the wrong way is to retreat, revert to the default fixed mind set and never try anything new again. If teenagers can learn this at an early stage in life, it will serve them well in the future.

*“I think it is often easier to make progress on mega-ambitious dreams. I know that sounds completely nuts. But, since no one else is crazy enough to do it, you have little competition. There are so few people this crazy that I feel like I know them all by first name. They all travel as if they are pack dogs and stick to each other like glue. The best people want to work the big challenges.” Larry Page, co-founder of Google*

As parents, we need to explain to our children that even the most successful people fail more often than they succeed and that failure is a blessing in disguise. How many top sportsmen and women say that only from losing do they learn anything and improve their performances! This simple mantra will encourage them to try and try again and understand that failure is only ever a temporary blip on the path to success.

So how do we confront the fear of failure? Easy, we expect it, prepare for it, accept it, and most importantly, learn from it. Failures truly are stepping stones to excellence.

It's not going to happen overnight, it's going to be a lot of work, and there will be highs and many more lows. But following a few simple steps can help put your son on his path to achievement.

### **Ethos of Learning**

Failure at challenges is something we all experience at RGS, whether that be students or teachers. Already this term I am aware of errors I have made. More importantly, I am aware of what I need to do next time. Last week I conducted the 4<sup>th</sup> Ethos of Learning Training for staff. The difference between how I conducted the first training session compared to the most recent one is vast. This is because there were things which didn't go well at first and needed to be changed for the subsequent sessions.

Challenges, as the name suggests, are not meant to be easy. As staff we want our students to feel challenged. However, it is difficult for them to fully accept and embrace a challenge unless they have no fear of making a mistake. We encourage staff here to speak to students about making "good mistakes". What this means is that the student has developed and used his thinking skills to come to his conclusion or part of a conclusion.

It is very easy for you as parents and us as staff to help our students/children too quickly. We don't like to see them struggle or we want to move things on. However, if we continually do this we are removing the challenge and increasing their dependency on us. We encourage staff to allow students more think and reflection time to work things out for themselves. Being 'stuck' provides the challenge, let them wrestle themselves free first, it's a lot more rewarding!

*For further information on the Ethos of Learning please refer to the RGS website: [rgshw.com](http://rgshw.com) or Alex Wallace, Assistant Head, [arw@rgshw.com](mailto:arw@rgshw.com)*