

COACHING *for* LEADERS

You Are Awesome: How to Navigate Change, Wrestle with Failure, and Live an Intentional Life

by Neil Pasricha

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Dave's Reading Highlights

The farmer has come to understand that every skyrocketing pleasure or stomach-churning defeat defines not who he is but simply where he is. The farmer knows that what happens in life only serves to help him see where he is and decide which way to go next. The farmer knows every end is a beginning. Whenever I read the fable of the farmer with one horse I sort of picture one of those inflatable clown punching bags that stands in the corner at a five-year-old's birthday party.

A period means giving in to life's circumstances, relenting in the face of things that look immovable, things that look impossible, things that look too painful. A period is giving in. What we need to hold on to in our hearts is the quiet courage to change the punctuation. What we need to hold on to is the idea that resilience means seeing the free will that exists just past the period. We need to hold on to a desire to see past that full stop. To see past the period. And add a dot-dot-dot.

So my mom fled to England with her mother and lived with her in London as her older siblings scattered and settled into their own married lives. And then my dad visited from Canada on summer vacation, the families introduced them, they had one date (one!) and

then an arranged marriage a couple weeks (weeks!) later. Then? He moved my mom back to his home in a small, dusty suburb an hour east of Toronto, Canada. And it suddenly felt like another period. My mom's global migration happened so quickly. She landed with a thud in that dusty suburb, with no Indian people around, suddenly married to a guy she'd met twice—including at their wedding—with her parents, siblings, and friends all an ocean away.

My mom never added a period in the brand new continent she found herself living in in her midtwenties. "This doesn't feel like home . . . yet." She never added a period in the arranged marriage her family ushered her into. "I don't know this man . . . yet." She never added a period at the boarding school where she was asked to pray to a new God in a new religion in a new language. "I'm not confident at this school . . . yet." She never added a period when she was born the fifth girl in a family praying for a fourth boy. "I don't know what I'll do . . . yet." Setbacks didn't kill her spirit. She just saw that sliver of light. So when you feel like you're falling, don't just end the sentence. Add a dot-dot-dot instead . . .

Your image of yourself may be projecting outward in your actions in potentially nonsensical ways.

Within a couple more months at P&G, I was placed on a Performance Improvement Plan, also known as a PIP. This is an elaborate document essentially saying "We want to fire you, but we don't have enough of a paper trail, so let's build one together!" I responded poorly to being PIPed. I was angry, feisty, and pouty about the whole thing. I acted in ways I regret, like speaking poorly about my boss, becoming snippy in email exchanges, and exchanging dramatic quitting scenarios with friends over Instant Messenger. "Kick over all the filing cabinets," my friend Joey advised me. "Toss someone's plant through the glass window." I see now that my anger stemmed from my deep disappointment in myself. That was the root emotion. I thought I sucked. And I didn't like sucking. So I lashed out. Blamed others. And that greased the wheels for my downward spiral, because now in addition to producing lame results, I became a giant pain in the ass to work with.

No one really cares that much about what you're doing. People are highly self-absorbed." We believe there's a spotlight on us. But there isn't. When we fail, we think all eyes are on us. We think it's all about us! Sucking at a job means being publicly humiliated and sleeping with a tray of club sandwiches or living in a box on the street. A bad breakup means no more relationships ever. One rejected college application means you're clearly an airhead whose life is about to get stuck in a world of grueling, minimum-wage pain.

We take tiny strings of trouble and extrapolate them into huge problems with our entire identities always on the line. And the younger we are, the more we do this since we have less experience to help us understand that things usually work out okay in the end. Once you get through one tough breakup, you're a little better on the next one. Once you get through three, you're a lot better. Once you suck at one job, you're a little stronger the next time. But that first failure really is terrible.

Single-celled organisms never went away. They didn't die off. They weren't rendered obsolete. Plants, animals, and our own bodies have hundreds of millions of single-celled organisms living on us and inside us. Our body is their home. What about multicelled organisms? Well, importantly, they are built of single-celled organisms. And, also importantly, they didn't die off but rather became part of newer, greater wholes. There are multicelled organisms in trees. In you. In me. In Oprah. What's my point? What we often think of as evolution "destroying and replacing" the past is actually "transcending and including."

The researcher and author Brené Brown calls shame "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection." We're getting even closer now. Can you expand on that, Brené? "When you walk up to that arena and you put your hand on the door, and you think, 'I'm going in and I'm going to try this,' shame is the gremlin who says, 'Uh, uh. You're not good enough. You never

finished that MBA. Your wife left you. . . . I know those things that happened to you growing up. I know you don't think that you're pretty, smart, talented or powerful enough. I know your dad never paid attention, even when you made CFO.' Shame is that thing." Swamplands of the soul, indeed.

How can we learn to see the shame stories we're telling ourselves and change them into something better? We have to learn to tilt the lens. You need to tell yourself a different story. You tell yourself so many stories about yourself. You need to learn how to see the stories you're telling yourself from a new perspective. Through a new lens.

Will this matter on my deathbed? I find this question helpful no matter what story I'm telling myself. And it's such an easy question to ask because the answer is almost always "No!"

Secret #4 can do about it: therapy, counseling, journaling, talking to a friend, sitting down to talk to your parents about it. Get it out of your system.