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## Wisdom From The (Not So Secret) Order of The Titanides: Vol. 3



### The Only Life You Can Save Is Your Own

*What a room full of recovering drunks taught me about overcoming my need to be perfect*

#### What a Recovering Drunk Can Teach You About Failing and Succeeding

I've been thinking a lot about my fear of failure lately and where that fear comes from. Because I believe it is my fear of failure that stops me from taking risks or trying new things. It is my fear of failure that keeps me playing small and safe in my business instead of growing. It is my fear of failure that disguises itself as self-blame and criticism anytime I'm less than perfect.

But I'm tired of this script, and I want to change it. And if you're tired of being held hostage to your fear, then I hope you'll find help and inspiration here, too.

For me, the fear of failure is deeply connected to my fear of being embarrassed, of being ashamed, and of being publicly humiliated.

You see, when I was in high school in the early 80s, my dad drank beer by the gallon. You could find him almost every weekend holding court on a bar stool at the Little Owl uptown.

Back then, Geneva was a small farm town on the outskirts of Chicago. There were only 77 kids in my high school class. It was a fishbowl. And I lived in constant fear that someone would find out that my dad was less than perfect, that our family was less than perfect.

In my mind, I was convinced that everyone else had these perfect Hollywood sitcom homes with the perfect dad and the perfect mom and the perfect kids. Where nobody was drinking and nobody was yelling at each other.

I was absolutely terrified that someone in high school would find out what my home was really like. And so I stayed silent. I never spoke about it.

Then one night, during what must have been my senior year in high school, my dad brought home a bunch of drunks from the bar to cook them dinner at our house. Now, as an adult looking back, I can see it as actually a gift of charity. Most of these men had no place to go and no families, and my father had invited them home for a meal that he was cooking for them.

But back then, I couldn't have cared less. I didn't want them in my house. I didn't want to deal with a bunch of drunks. My dad had already been drinking, and I knew that when the rest of the guys showed up, there would be a lot more drinking.

I didn't want to be there, but I didn't have a car, and I was trapped.

Then, something in me just snapped. I called my friend Andy and said, "Come pick me up. My dad is drunk. I don't want to be here. Come get me." He never even questioned it. He just drove over and picked me up. We went over to a friend's house and played Monopoly.

When I told my friends, they didn't say, "Oh, my God. I can't believe your dad is drunk." They just came and picked me up. They supported me. They were there for me.

And I felt this huge relief, this huge freedom in admitting that my family was not perfect. I was free from my fear of not being good enough, of not being perfect. That was the first time I realized that the secret to overcoming fear is vulnerability.

**And if you want to overcome your fear of failure and take more risks in your business, then you're going to have to get comfortable with vulnerability too.**

This isn't some new age mumbo jumbo. It's backed by reams of research by one of my favorite social scientists, Dr. Brené Brown. As Dr. Brown explains, shame is what keeps us trapped and held hostage to our fear. Shame is what tells us that we're not good enough. Shame is the most powerful master emotion. As long as we're ashamed of our failures, we're never going to take more risks.

But as Dr. Brown so eloquently put it, "There is no innovation and creativity without failure. Period."

**If you want to grow and succeed, you've got to take the shame out of failure.**

And the only way I know how to do that is to risk telling the truth about my failure to someone I love and trust. In other words, I have to be vulnerable enough to admit my failures.

When my oldest son went off to college, instead of succeeding during his freshman

year, he suffered a major psychotic break. We brought him home in April and he was in and out of rehab centers and psychiatric facilities for months. That summer, the other moms would see me at the pool or the grocery store and ask, "How is Jake doing?"

I didn't want to be a failure as a mom. I didn't want to say that my kid wasn't succeeding. So I would hedge. I would say things like, "Oh you know, freshman year is a challenge for all of us." Or I would just change the topic. Or I would lie and say, "He's great," with no details.

Then just like with my dad, one day, I reached the breaking point where so much trauma was going on in our life, I could not even drag up another lie. I just turned to these moms who seemed like they all had it together and I said, "Actually, Jake had a psychotic break in April. He's in the psychiatric hospital and rehab right now. I don't know if he's ever coming back."

Instead of judging me or looking down their noses at me, these moms would all of a sudden get vulnerable and real. It turned out that many of their children were not perfect either. Some were really struggling. When I admitted that I was less than perfect, these moms could finally drop their façade of being the perfect mom, and they could share with me what was really going on with their children.

It became this moment of connection and vulnerability instead of a moment of shame and fear. I was accepted for who I was, and that fear of not being the perfect mother vanished. And I learned a lot of other mothers are not perfect either.

### **When you are vulnerable and accepting of yourself, it allows others to be vulnerable too.**

When it comes to being vulnerable and overcoming a fear of failure, there is no better teacher in my opinion than the men and women of Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm in awe of their ability to be honest with each other and to support each other as they struggle to stay sober one day at a time. And I think they can teach us a lot about bravery and courage and taking risks.

This year, about a week before Christmas, my husband asked me if I wanted to go to what is called an open AA meeting. An open AA meeting means people who are not addicts or alcoholics are welcome to attend. At this meeting, a woman shared her story, and it was incredibly brave and vulnerable and real. And I could not stop crying. It's what inspired me to write this newsletter this month.

Almost all AA leads follow a very simple formula, which is actually very similar to a formula that we also use in copywriting. It's a hero's journey story. The person giving the lead begins by talking about what their life was like *before* they found recovery,

while they were still drinking and using. Then they share the turning point, the moment when they finally decided to reach out for help, when they found AA. And they end by talking about what their life is like now.

What amazes me is the love and support of the community and the self-love and acceptance of the person giving the lead. When the alcoholic is talking about their life before, it doesn't matter how bad it is. There is no shame. I swear, they could tell you that they drank 70 bottles of bourbon, shot 30 people, fell off a mountain, got divorced, lost their job... and the whole room would just nod their head in acceptance.

It doesn't matter because the person telling the story owns their failures, all of them. They reveal their most vulnerable, shameful secrets and then talk about how they decided to make a change and how their life is different now.

It is the most uplifting, powerful experience ever. You literally want to stand on your chair and scream and cheer for them because the hell that some of these people have been through is nothing I could personally ever imagine surviving. And yet they're sitting up there revealing this to a roomful of strangers and then talking about how they changed their lives, how they found AA, and what their life is like now.

They are vulnerable enough to share their very worst public failures and events that most of us would consider so shameful that we would want to lock them away in a dark closet forever. But they have the courage to publicly admit their failures. Not only that, but they are telling their stories with joy and laughter and humor and a massive amount of compassion for themselves. And everyone in the room loves them all the more for it. That is the secret to removing shame.

**Because only when you can own your failures and accept them can you begin to learn from them and change the future.**

## **Show Me Your Failures and I'll Show You Mine**

Now some of you may know that the wonderful Brit McGinnis is leading the Titanides in a **100 Days of Failure** challenge right now.

It's not too late to join us, if you want to. We're just using WhatsApp (a simple, free private messaging app) on our phones. Just private message Brit through Facebook Messenger or reach out to her in the Titanides Facebook community. There's no charge to join in... it's just another one of the benefits of being a Titanide.

Every day, we message each other and admit to a failure. It's that simple. And you would think, "Really? Doesn't that just encourage you to fail more? How is that helpful?"

It is so powerful to own your failures, to be vulnerable enough to admit them publicly to a safe and supportive group. This group is not going to judge you. This group is going to support you and say, "You've got this. Get back up on that horse and try again."

We have compassion for each other, and we are showing vulnerability. It takes away the shame and the fear of failure because you know you can admit it. You can try. You can fail. You can be human.

As one of the participants said recently, "I'm continually amazed at the resilience of everyone in this group. Everybody has 'stuff' and yet generously offers help and support to anyone else without blinking."

I promise you, there will be other women there to accept you, failures and all. You see, I think our fear of failure comes from the fear of someone finding out that we failed, our fear of being publicly shamed and embarrassed. At least that is what is true for me.

If I can take away that fear, if I can make it safe to fail, if I can talk about my failures with humor and kindness toward myself instead of that harsh, judging, critical bitch, then the fear lessens. It never goes away completely. Every time I try something new, like launching the Titanides, I am terrified, still, of publicly failing. I am still that high school girl who's terrified that you'll find out that my dad is sitting on a bar stool up at the Little Owl instead of being at home looking like a Norman Rockwell portrait.

But knowing that you all are here, knowing that you can forgive my failures, knowing that you can accept me despite my failures, gives me the courage to try things that I have never tried before. It gives me the courage to try writing a newsletter or doing video blogs or launching an organization of women in the direct response industry. You all give me the courage to fail over and over again.

## **Just Do It Scared.**

This weekend, I was on Facebook briefly trying to catch up with messages from you all in the group. I came across a live video from one of our Titanides, Pam Murrell Crowder. She too was talking about this fear of failure, and she had this great line, which I loved. She said, "Just do it scared."

You know, Nike's "Just do it" ad drives me nuts! As if I'm just supposed to haul myself up by my bootstraps and go run a marathon or something. But what I love about the motto "Just do it scared" is that it acknowledges the fear of trying something new. Taking a risk is scary. It's never not going to be scary. But the truth is, we can just do

it scared. We can make a decision to be scared and to do it anyway.

And then know that on the other side, if you fail, you can come sit down and tell us your lead. Tell us what you tried. Tell us how you failed. Then tell us what you learned from it and how you are growing from it and how your life is different because of that failure.

That, to me, is the very definition of resilience. That is what I want for myself, and that is what I want for all of you.

The truth is, half the time, I have absolutely no idea what I am doing with the Titanides. I have never built anything like this before, and yet every day, I get up and I try again because you all have my back. You all are here with me trying and failing every single day.

Please, share your failures with each other. Be vulnerable with each other. Be gracious and accepting with each other. More importantly, be gentle and kind with yourself.

There is no shame in failure. There is no shame in trying and failing over and over again. It is our failures that lead to our successes, and it is our failures that make us human. I hope you will trust me to be vulnerable enough to share your failures with me.

Love,  
Marcella

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