

# The 'failosophy' of coping when things go wrong

From **Afternoons with Jesse Mulligan**

3:10 pm on 18 January 2021

2020 may go in the record books as an epic fail for all the challenges it gave us.

**Elizabeth Day** prefers to think of it as the year we got a lot of opportunities to learn about what to do when life doesn't go to plan. She's a writer and host of the podcast, How To Fail.

Her new book brings together the lessons she's learned not from success but failure. It's called *Failosophy: A Handbook For When Things Go Wrong*.

Elizabeth Day Photo: Facebook



**Listen to the full interview with Elizabeth Day**

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/afternoons/audio/2018780162/the-failosophy-of-coping-when-things-go-wrong>

Day tells *Afternoons* she never intended for her book to come out in a year where a global pandemic raged, but the timing is auspicious because there's a sense that the feeling of control we had over our lives has been taken from us.

"Within that, it feels very disempowering. I, like many people, felt during the first national lockdown here in the UK that I was failing in small ways every single day. I started the lockdown full of good intentions, I was going to learn Italian, I was going to bake sourdough loaves, I was finally going to watch *The Wire* and I did none of those things.

"I just concentrated on getting through the days, and that's really what I want to say to people; if you've got through the year 2020, that itself is a success, you don't need to have done anything else."

Day says failure is both an objective and subjective thing. For instance, by failing a driving test we've objectively failed, but internally we might think we're a failure as a driver, which is subjective.

"The point that I make in failosophy is that not every failure will be easily assimilated, not every failure is easy to learn from. A lot of failures will require a necessary period of mourning.

"Once you come to terms with it, my belief is you don't have to live in a place of perpetual sadness where you're reliving the pain that that experience caused you. You can choose to be at peace with that sadness."

Pain, Day says, is inevitable and there's nothing we can do to avoid it in our lives. However, suffering is optional.

"We can choose how we respond to it and there's no doubt that's a hard thing to do, but there are ways you can do it."

One positive outcome of failure is learning and eventual success. For instance, we're likely to sit the driving test again with more knowledge and succeeded in passing. And in relationships, we learn who we want in a partner from failed couplings.

"The necessity of failure makes success not only taste sweeter but feel ultimately more nourishing and you can recognise it when you see it. Success for me is now about fulfilment and authenticity. It's about being able to be who I truly am in all areas of my life."

Day says one of the positives of the previous year is that a lot of people got more open and honest about their mental health. She says the 'leave-your-troubles-at-the-door' positivity expected of people can make people feel worse about the fact that they already feel down or anxious.

"A lot more people were experiencing what that was like and I'm all about that, I really think people should be enabled to bring their true self into every situation whether that be into an office, into a friendship, or into a relationship."

**Reference:** Radio NZ

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