

6-1-2015

The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure and the Search for Mastery—A Book Review

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Recommended Citation

Gwin, T. (2015). *The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure and the Search for Mastery—A Book Review*. *The Journal of Extension*, 53(3), Article 30. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol53/iss3/30>

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Abstract

Sara Lewis's *The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure and the Search for Mastery* will have you reflecting and reassessing experiences around failure and reevaluating volunteer training. The book gives us a look at how creativity, persistence, and failure combine to help a person master concepts, skills, and/or processes. Sarah Lewis, on the faculty of the Yale School of Art, was named to *O, The Oprah Magazine's* 2010 "O Power List." Her book is an intellectually challenging read. Upon completion, you have personally gone through the search for mastery concepts outlined in the book.

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The Issue

We spend time helping people master concepts, processes, and skills. Mastery is one the 4-H program's essential elements of positive youth development. How does a person obtain mastery? Do we really understand the difference between success and mastery? *The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure and the Search for Mastery* by Sarah Lewis is an in-depth, research driven look at how we attain mastery through a combination of creativity, persistence, and failure.

The Process (as Seen in Our Programs)

In Extension trainings we learn that mastery is the building of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. We think about mastery as full engagement in learning. We know it when we see the competent use of knowledge and skills by a proficient individual. The level of mastery is dependent on the developmental ability of the individual or youth. The development of mastery is a process over time.

To the Extension professional it looks like the engaged volunteer, a blue ribbon 4-H member, or absorbed customer who is informing a subject area, while building relationships and connections in order to increase understanding. Using self-reflection these learners have the ability to self-correct and learn from experience. Sarah Lewis challenges us to examine how creativity, persistence, and especially failure combine to help a person reach mastery. The examples in the book help us to understand that success is acceptable but that mastery is what really makes a difference.

She recommends teaching youth to embrace failure and strive for mastery. This makes it easier for individuals to:

- Recover from failure,
- Resist the reflex to blame others,
- Err on the side of forgiveness,
- Shed biases that keep us from perceiving our mistakes, and
- Distinguish between novice errors and senseless ones

The Impact

After reading *The Rise*, I now spend more time asking and listening to clients at the Extension office counter talking about their food preserving failures, at the fair to 4-H members who earn their first white ribbon, and in meetings to volunteers who lost control of a project. I ask more questions about what was done in the past. I help them to see that these failures are part of their path to learning. We take a breath and talk about what we learned last year and what we need to learn next. In leaders trainings we plan how to give them space to take risks without the stigma of failure. I am seeing growth. I celebrate the learning of Extension families who didn't get their project on the truck but learn from it. They are on their way to a grand champion ribbon.

Reference

Lewis, S. (2014) *The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery*. Illustrated. Simon & Schuster, NY, 259pp.

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