



Self-belief, a way to manage failure

Your preparations should match your goals. In case of disappointing results, remember it is just a minor setback, writes **V Pradeep Kumar**

Rohit, a Class 12 student, is preparing for JEE Main exam scheduled to be held in January 2020. He is keen to do B.Tech in one of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), and is willing to take a year-long break after the board exam to prepare exclusively for JEE. Although not all students might be as determined as Rohit, there is an important lesson to learn.

If you have a well-prepared career plan and are determined to achieve, then nothing can really stop you. However, most roads to success include curves, bumps and even slight detours. Therefore, learn to take disappointments and small failures in stride and don't allow such challenges to blow you off course.

Firstly, if you don't perform well in your qualifying exam or competitive exams like NEET, JEE, KCET etc., refrain from terming it as a failure. It is more appropriate to term it as a disappointment or a temporary setback, which you can overcome.

Generally, the causes of disappointments are:

■ **Poor preparation:** To get into top colleges or universities for any course, you have to prepare well. To pursue professional courses such as medicine, one has to score around 95% in Class 12 board exam, even Commerce and Science streams in top colleges have cut-offs above 90%. Hence, preparation has to be comprehensive and flawless, irrespective of your course goals.

■ **Unable to focus:** Many students find it difficult to identify which is more important of the two — qualifying exam or competitive exams, and eventually lose focus

on both. The eligibility criteria differ for courses and the ranking is calculated differently. Hence, your strategy for both the exams has to be carefully drawn depending on which stream you are opting after the qualifying exam such as Class 12 or II PUC. Also, limit the number of competitive exams you plan to write as per your capacity and need.

■ **Overambitious goals:** Ever heard of SMART goals? Smart goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. In the race to compete, don't try overstretching yourself and fix overambitious goals only to be disappointed eventually. Do remember, there are innumerable career options other than medicine and engineering and you must consider all of them. Importantly, follow your dreams and pursue careers as per your inherent talent and passion.

■ **Lack of determination:** Students from humble backgrounds have made it to premium institutions like IITs and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), with strong determination. The common factors in students who make it to such top institutes are their strong passion and determination to succeed despite all the hurdles. Therefore, sustain the focus and rigour needed to get into such institutions of eminence.

■ **Unforeseen circumstances:** If you or someone in the family fall sick around the exam time, it can affect your performance, which is just bad luck and not a failure. Such developments are unforeseen and you may consider alternative institutions for the same course and in the worst scenario, take a break to redo the exams.

Take corrective steps

It is vital to take some measures to improve your performance such as:

■ **Study the impact:** When a board or competitive exam result is disappointing, first study the impact before jumping to any conclusion. Evaluate the extent to which the actual performance affects your career plan. For example, if you had planned for an MBBS course in a particular city or college, assess whether you can still get an admission into the same course at another institution of repute. In other words, whether an exam disappointment can be managed with a slight change in the selection of the institute. However, if the impact is such that you can't get admission into MBBS, then you have to review further.

■ **Review your career plan:** When there is a major disappointment in the exam results, review the career plan. Do check if your career plans can be met by selecting the same course but by changing the stream. For example, if you wanted to do Computer Science Engineering, see whether your career plans can also be met by selecting engineering in Information Technology or Information Science. All the three are substantially different although there is some overlapping. In fact, it is strongly recommended to identify two courses while making a career plan, so that you have a plan B if plan A doesn't materialise.

■ **Consider other alternatives:** If you are firm about the career choice and if the disappointment is due to your poor performance, then consider taking a break to take the respective exam once again. Sometimes, it might mean loss of a year which doesn't matter in the long run. Instead of feeling disappointed, convert this into an opportunity by utilising the free time. Depending on your career choice, consider a short-time course in communication skills, personality development or a career-related additional course. Doing an internship or part-time work can be very helpful too. Another interesting option is to use the free time judiciously and nurture an existing or a new hobby.

An exam disappointment is just a minor setback and it is sad some students take it too seriously and take extreme steps. If things don't go as planned, have patience, evaluate the causes, identify the lessons and take corrective steps. Change your vocabulary replacing all negative words with positive or neutral words. For example, instead of saying "I failed to perform as planned", you must say "I should have performed better."

Communicate with yourself positively that your potential is beyond your current performance and you can do better by just stretching a little more. In case you need help or want to talk to someone, contact helplines and professional agencies.

Remember, failure is not fatal nor success is final. The real failure is if we fail to draw the lessons from our mistakes. Trust your ability and convince your parents to build a stress-free, healthy environment at home. Choose a career that motivates you from within ensuring minor hurdles don't deter you from pursuing your goals.

(The writer is a management and career consultant, based in Bengaluru)

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