

Failing Forward's CVs

The Young Academy Groningen CV of Failures

A project of the [2021 cohort](#) of the [Young Academy Groningen](#)

Prologue

In a society that thrives from the celebration of success, we may start forgetting our humanity and our limits. A constant confrontation with the perfect Instagram lives of other people and the constant reminders of other peer's incredible CV and results is increasingly feeding our fear of losing face and pushes us to hide our many failures. This feedback loop distorts reality further by giving the wrong impression that our success is derived from a never ending succession of wins.

In 2016, Johannes Haushofer, at the time professor at Princeton, had the bold idea of [publishing an unconventional CV](#), [Hausofer's CV of Failures](#). The meaning of this idea, inspired by a [Nature commentary](#) published six years earlier by Melanie Stefan, is wonderfully explained in Haushofer's preface:

"Most of what I try fails, but these failures are often invisible, while the successes are visible. I have noticed that this sometimes gives others the impression that most things work out for me. As a result, they are more likely to attribute their own failures to themselves, rather than the fact that the world is stochastic, applications are crapshoots, and selection committees and referees have bad days. This CV of Failures is an attempt to balance the record and provide some perspective."

It is not just okay to fail, it is an integral part of growth both as people and as academic researchers. The [Young Academy Groningen](#) is described as a group of talented, enthusiastic and ambitious early-career researchers from various disciplines. We feel that this may make people look at us sometimes as examples of a meter of comparison and this puts us in a privileged position to expose ourselves and show our limits to balance the record: behind the outward image of success, we are individuals, with our own story of struggles and failures.

This brief booklet joins the CV of Failures chorus by presenting a collective CV of failure from YAG members and other established academics at the University of Groningen. The former provides a summary of the collective failures of most members of YAG, including the ones that did not openly share their CV.

It can be hard at times to see that we are not failures ourselves but we are in the hands of circumstances. We hoped that this booklet, alongside [Human's of the RUG's](#) discussion and the rest of Failing Forward's project, will help to provide some perspective and encourage colleagues and aspiring scientists to keep trying in the face of recurring rejections and disappointments.

As also Haushofer mentions [in an interview with Mashable](#), *"This CV is unlikely to be complete – it was written from memory and probably omits a lot of stuff, so if it's shorter*

than yours, it's likely because you have better memory, or because you're better at trying things [...]".

As you can see this CV is not just incomplete, but it failed to receive the attention it would have needed from the community. Only 10 people replied overall, and of these only four agreed to have their personal CV of Failures presented with their names attached. Due to such a low amount of responses, we decided to only create the collective CV.

Interestingly, many colleagues reached out to us praising the initiative but acknowledging how hard it has been for them to even think of opening the Pandora's box of their academic failures. To us this is an important symptom of the fact that while the discussion is opening up and slowly percolating through the academic ladders, it still has a long way to go before we can shift universities' obsession for success. We decided to nevertheless publish this CV of Failure as an important reminder of this fact, and as an opportunity to raise awareness and keep the discussion alive.

An expert view

Since none of us is an expert on the subject of failure, we reached out to some experts to hear their informed thoughts and experiences around the topic and this booklet.

Failure is an essential part of science. Embrace it!

When I heard of the initiative by young researchers of our university to publish their 'failure CV's', I smiled. Good idea!



Keeping up appearances

Fear of failing, falling short of expectations, feeling like the university made a mistake in giving you this position (and they will find out!) is something that every young (and older) researcher feels at some point. Many of the young researchers I see, struggle with feeling like an imposter at some point (or all the time). This can be paralyzing. It can lead to procrastinating work and avoiding contact with colleagues. It can also lead to working too hard and perfectionism with high stress levels.

This takes a lot of energy.

Energy to deal with the stress itself, but even more to pretend you're okay and confident, energy to come up with excuses why you are not working as you wanted to (too tired, no inspiration, not feeling well) and in general keeping up appearances.



Keeping up appearances is tiring, makes it hard to ask for help (because obviously you are doing fine) and makes you feel alone. If you are not yourself, you create a distance between you and other people, making it hard to really connect.

Also, if you avoid being open about things you (think) you are not yet able to do, or things you don't know, you rob yourself of learning opportunities.

The solution?

Be open about it.

Connecting with others is the key to come out of loneliness, to create space to grow and breathe and to put things in perspective.





Because you will find that most people feel the same way.

It also helps to accept that it takes time to become more confident and knowledgeable. A learning attitude is about questioning your views, being curious, giving room to insecurity, asking a lot of questions to others to gain knowledge and...

willingness to fail over and over again:

[How to overcome your fear of failure](#)

Another way out of this paralyzing fear is to be compassionate with yourself (like you would be with a good friend). Imagine your best friend called you and said: 'I feel like a complete imposter and I have been watching Netflix for days...I can't get myself to start writing, because I know I will fail.'

Would you say: 'Come on! Don't be such a loser! Start writing now, at this moment!'

Probably not. ;) You would be kind and understanding, offer some support and try to meet up to have a nice dinner. Do that to yourself too, if you have a period where things are not working out as you would like them to. Watch this video by Brené Brown about connection and vulnerability (even if it is 20 minutes):

[The power of vulnerability](#)

Karen Huizing, PhD psychologist, University of Groningen

The YAG Collective CV of Failures (Summer 2023)

The collective CV of failure assembles information on the failure of YAG members as a whole, without distinguishing the specific names and failures of the respective members. This includes contributions that are not present in the individual CV of failures page.

Total number of contributions: 10

Failed graduate programs applications: 21

Failed academic job applications: > 100 (hard to keep track of the numbers)

Failed grant applications: 60

Failed journal submissions: > 100 (hard to keep track of the numbers)

Failed conference participations: 1

Other failures: *failed to finish high school at all or in time, failed to get a non-academic job before the phd or the tenure-track, wanted to do something else but turned out to be better at this, failed to get into YAG or de Jonge Akademie, too many to list but luckily I am good in [self-compassion](#), first peer-reviewed article was rejected from 5 different journals before it was finally published, ...*