

# Families That Thrive

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## Two Steps Forward

I nailed it. I thought, “I can do this. This is a piece of cake.” So I did it again. This time, I bombed. You’d think I was trying it for the first time.

What I was doing was playing a piano duet with a faculty colleague. Her name is Professor Diaz. She is eighty years old, a wonderful friend of our family, and a more accomplished pianist than I am. Since it’s summer, we have more time to practice the piano than we do during the Fall and Spring semesters.

One of the things I love about piano duets is that I have to listen and follow. Duets involve pure teamwork. Most of the time, I play second. I like second. For the most part, Professor Diaz takes the lead. I play the supporting role. To be successful, I have to learn to anticipate what she’s going to do. I have to listen to her dynamics, to her interpretation. I actually prefer duets to solos. At times, the whole takes on a life of its own.

Every once in a while, we do something well. I’m not interested in playing for others. I am only interested in the experience of learning the music and playing it well. I am interested in the total ensemble. When we get it right, it is pure joy.

Yesterday, we got it right. Our performance was 90% of what we hoped it would be. That’s when I thought, “I can do this!” So we played it again. I bombed. If our first run through was deeply satisfying, this time I was pathetic.

The lesson? I still have a lot to learn, and learning takes time—lots of it. A friend of mine who is an educator by profession says that effective learning always involves two steps forward and one backward. When it comes to playing the piano, this is certainly true of me. When I get something right, I can find it quite difficult to repeat the performance with equal effectiveness. Learning not only takes time, but it also takes the greatest of patience.

I find this to be true with anything that is important. Frustrating? It certainly can be. When a success or two is followed by a failure, I find Brother Lawrence to be instructive. One of the most important lessons he learned was to acknowledge his mistake, to refrain from beating up on himself, and to try again. By refusing to beat up on himself, he didn't get stuck. This reduced his fear and anxiety. It also allowed him to learn from his mistake.

I've noticed this with both athletes and musicians here at the university. All of them make mistakes. The best are the ones who accept that they make a mistake, learn from it, and leave the mistake in the past. Those who beat up on themselves are more in danger of repeating the mistake. Those who acknowledge the mistake, learn, let it go, and move forward are the ones who thrive.

This is true for our relationships as well. The relationships that struggle the most are the ones where one person constantly reminds the other of mistakes that he or she has made. The ones that thrive involve people who recognize that being human, we will make mistakes. They are inevitable. What we need is a climate of acceptance in which we can acknowledge our mistakes, learn from them, let them go, and implement what we have learned.