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NEXT STEP

Behind the scenes

The role grades play while pursuing your dream career

Grades open up doors, yes. Doors to more academics. Good grades allow you to pass from school to a better school, to a good university, and a great university for post-graduate studies. But the increasing trend amongst employers is seeking out candidates who have made the most of the opportunities they have been given. Where DO grades matter, then?



Kids. You can't make them understand the gravity of a situation without threatening them with the boogie monster, or worse, the prospect of cartoons being banned at dinnertime. We never really grow out of it, and hands on parenting can take increasingly repressive measures to ensure the best for their child as they become older.

Grades and exam results (or the lack of good ones) dictate the course of the regular teenager's journey to adulthood. With the severe burden of "success" hanging over their shoulders, fifteen and sixteen year olds are asked to have a clear vision of what they want in life and work towards that goal.

We talked to Bilquis Jahan, Deputy General Manager and Head of Human Resources at IDLC Finance Ltd., about the importance of academic qualifications to job seekers and job givers. "For fresh graduates with little to no experience, we obviously place the utmost importance on the academic qualifications of the candidates. Academic performance is used to sort through the initial batch of CVs we receive, and the strength of a candidate's academics can get him or her

an interview. At the interview we look at the other aspects which define a well-rounded candidate, including any internship experience, which gives the candidate an edge over the others. The large number of CVs dropped at our institution makes it difficult for us to judge a candidate on any other initial criteria other than academics, so yes, results are important in crossing that first hurdle."

For a job seeker fresh out of university with a degree, then, good grades can actually get you places. With that, the ability to present yourself properly with a high level of language proficiency can do wonders when you're facing an interview board and when you take the first steps in a professional environment. There is a need for the ability to cope with an office environment if you are to survive and climb the ladder to higher positions. So if you have very good grades and excellent academics, but have little practical knowledge of how the world outside a textbook works or how to deal with real life situations, you won't last very long.

This is where extra-curriculars and internships come in. While potential

employers will give little or no value to the amount of extra-curricular activities you list on your CV at the initial stage, taking part in extra-curricular activities, or ECAs for short, can give you a leg-up when it comes to real world skills of communication and presentation. Debating societies, Model United Nations, taking part in business competitions and any other activity outside the classroom which engages you in dialogue should be a big part of your development as a more well-rounded job seeker. It cannot be stressed enough how important communication and presentation is, especially in the service sector in Bangladesh.

The majority of the students finishing off their undergrad largely ignore the opportunities they have to develop these skills. The bigger universities have decent facilities with regard to extra-curriculars, with various student clubs and societies at the disposal of those interested in honing their practical skills.

When we asked Rubaiyat Alam, a third year straight A student of the Department Of Economics, University of Dhaka, whether he feels the student societies are

effective, he says, "Most of these clubs and student societies are run by senior students, who themselves are under pressure with studies, so they usually can't afford to be too active. It's difficult to find time for extra-curricular activities when you have to work so hard just to maintain a good CGPA."

His thoughts are echoed by Raiyan Kabir, a final year student at BRAC. "I've been involved in the BRAC House of Volunteers and I have a decent amount of ECA on my plate, but balancing it out with studies can get very hectic. I've managed so far, but many cannot." Like Rubaiyat, she is maintaining an above average CGPA.

It's imperative that people realize that grades will only get you so far. As far as career prospects go, learning to navigate the professional world before attempting to enter it will carry you a long way, long after your academic qualifications have stopped being useful. Start now, expand your world outside the textbook and the classroom, and pick up valuable pointers wherever you can.

SHAER REAZ

10 famous people who failed at first

Henry Ford

While Ford is today known for his innovative assembly line and American-made cars, he wasn't an instant success. In fact, his early businesses failed and left him broke five times before he founded the successful Ford Motor Company.



Jan



Koum

Jan Koum was turned down by Facebook in 2009. Today he runs the \$6.8 billion dollar messaging service WhatsApp, which was recently sold to Facebook. Koum, also a university dropout, is now on the board of partners for Facebook.

Harland David Sanders

Perhaps better known as Colonel Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame, Sanders had a hard time selling his chicken at first. In fact, his famous secret chicken recipe was rejected 1,009 times before a restaurant accepted it.

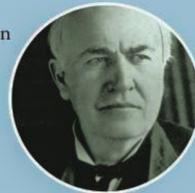


Walt Disney

Walt Disney had a bit of a rough start. He was fired by a newspaper editor because, "he lacked imagination and had no good ideas." After that, Disney started a number of businesses that didn't last too long and ended with bankruptcy and failure. He kept plugging along, however, and eventually recipe for success that worked.

Thomas Edison

In his early years, teachers told Edison he was "too stupid to learn anything." Edison was also fired from his first two jobs for not being productive enough. Even as an inventor, Edison made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light bulb. Of course, all those unsuccessful attempts finally resulted in the design that worked.



Abraham Lincoln



In his youth Lincoln went to war a captain and returned a private. Lincoln didn't stop failing there, however. He started numerous failed businesses and kept running for public office despite numerous defeats until he got it right.

Steven Spielberg

Spielberg was rejected from the University of Southern California School of Theater, Film and Television three times. He eventually attended school at another location, only to drop out to become a director before finishing.

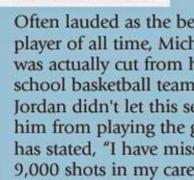


Elvis Presley



Back in 1954, Elvis was still a nobody, and Jimmy Denny, manager of the Grand Ole Opry, fired Elvis Presley after just one performance telling him, "You ain't going nowhere, son. You ought to go back to driving a truck."

Michael Jordan



Often lauded as the best basketball player of all time, Michael Jordan was actually cut from his high school basketball team. Luckily, Jordan didn't let this setback stop him from playing the game and he has stated, "I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."



Michael Madhusudan Dutt

Michael Madhusudan aspired to be an English poet and to travel to England to make his name. When his father, concerned by these trends, arranged his marriage, he rebelled and could not make the trip. Later on in his life, Dutt went to England to study law, but the weather and racism made it unbearable.

Madhusudan Dutt never got established in legal practice in Kolkata. But despite multiple failed ambitions, Madhusudan Dutt went on to become one of the most popular 19th century Bengali poets and dramatists.

RAISA ASHRAF

By all means, please fail

Ever wondered about what kept your idol going and eventually reach the height that they did? What sparked their drive to achieve greatness? Something that everyone will agree on is that anyone who has gone on to achieve 'greatness' has the will power to accomplish the things that they did. However, there is always something that gives the initial boost down the long road to greatness. This is where failure comes in.

For the sake of argument Failure is failure is failure is failure. Does it make sense to you? Maybe, if you are really good at keeping track of things. Otherwise this will simply spark troubling thoughts about life being a complete disaster. Maybe you've been told this before, but latching yourself to the past will not get you out of difficult situations. Get up, dust yourself off, and start again: make this the mantra you live by.

All the people whom we now admire and look up to have at some point in their long careers failed. The one thing anyone will learn from them is that it is okay if you fail. It should not by any means be embarrassing. Long gone are the days of your younger years when at school even a slight sign failure would result in you exiling yourself from the company of your friends and teachers. Did you know that Sir James Dyson, the inventor of the bagless vacuum, went through 5,126 failed prototypes of his invention before finally the 5,127th one worked? He did so over 15 years, licking clean all his savings. However, ever since then, his Dyson brand has become a bestseller in the US and now Mr. Dyson himself is worth an estimated \$4.5 billion dollars.

Stay true to your convictions Being able to combat failure and disappointment during ones career is a very important learning process in itself. It gives you the strength, resilience and more importantly patience that helps form the

persona that people need to eventually succeed in ones career. Between getting published for the very first time six years back and the time I finally became a contributor for this paper, I had an extremely unproductive five year long gap.

I did not stop getting published because I stopped writing. Rather no matter how much I tried to raise my standard of writing, it was never quite good



enough. Within those five years, I had had to deal with the gush of troubling thoughts and emotions going through my head, and people questioning my talent on a regular basis. If it had gone on for a bit longer, they might have started to look at me like one of those people who never quite lived up to the hype – or I might have started to do it myself. Over the past couple of years, I have managed to discover my true potential as a writer and of course my preferred writing style. I have questioned myself numerous times and rethought about what my actual priorities in terms of my career are. But at heart I knew this is the field that I belong to and I made it a point that I would get myself here.

Being able to come out of failure and establishing

yourself as a successful person and a person of ambition can be a very hard thing to achieve. One needs to have a fighting spirit to be able to come back a bigger and a better person. The one person I have been thinking about on a regular basis as I wrote this write up is our own national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. He had often been questioned, demeaned, and at times even frowned upon because of the things he wrote and the personality he maintained. But look at where that got him in the end! He was given the highest status a literary personality can attain within a country – he is the national poet, and his name itself is synonymous to the spirit of rebellion.

But it's okay to change your course

When things do not go the way you expect them to go, please do not be disheartened. Sometimes it is okay to rest your brain and take some time for introspection. Failure often forces people to think out of the box and be innovative—and that is not always a bad thing. Vera Wang, the editor-in-chief of Vogue, was initially part of the US National figure-skating team, but when she did not make it to the Olympics she ended up shifting careers altogether. She started designing a long way down. She made her first wedding-gown at the age of 40 and now she is one of the best designers in the industry, with her business being worth over a billion dollars.

Your life WILL be one of ups and downs. Nonetheless, remember, failure is only a part of it. You will need to focus on being better, rather than being just good – because the world would never have remembered Alexander the Good, would they? Be very specific about what kind of success you want to achieve and focus yourself in it. Start being comfortable with the uncomfortable because that is how most things in life are. And try to be more respectful of your surroundings and realistically optimistic at the same time because that is the kind of people the world seems to be in need of right now. As I sign off I suddenly stumble upon an Ellen DeGeneres quote, "When you take risks you learn that there will be times when you succeed and there will be times when you fail, and both are equally important."

RAISA ASHRAF