

ARE SOME PROBLEMS TOO COMPLICATED TO BE RESOLVED?

*Over breakfast with Franka Philip,
I asked a simple question about
failure—her response led me down
a path of knots, clarity, and the art
of creative perseverance.*

I had just asked Franka Philip (fondly known as FP)...”How has failure set you up for later success?”

Failure is like a Gordian knot. You must always take a closer look at why you failed, how you could re-do or do better. Failing is traumatic however if you don’t beat up, refuse to blame, it can inspire hunger...fuel an anxiousness to create.

The phrase “Gordian knot” refers to any problem that seems too complicated to resolve. Franka sent me in search of the story because up until that morning at Adam’s, I had never heard of it before.

The story goes like this. One day, a poor peasant called Gordius arrived with his wife in a public square of Phrygia in an ox cart. Unbeknownst to Gordus, an oracle had informed the populace that their future king would come into town riding in a wagon. Seeing Gordius, therefore, the people made him king.

In gratitude, Gordius dedicated his ox cart to Zeus, tying it up with a highly intricate knot – the Gordian knot. Another oracle – or maybe the same one, the legend is not specific – foretold that the person who untied the knot would rule Asia.

The problem of untying the Gordian knot resisted all solutions until the year 333 BC, when Alexander the Great cut through it with a sword.

Alexander’s method seems to go against the spirit of the challenge, which was supposed to be solved by manipulating the knot.

However this thinker, who sat across from me, methodically making her way through kibbis and fries, believes that if you “think things through” like Alexander, you can cut through the “knot” of any situation. After all failure occurs when we know an issue but not the steps to fix it. If we are paying attention we discover the missing steps, and as Maya Angelou said “when we know better we do better”.

The Hudson Spotlight Interview Series | Written in 2018



After leaving the Guardian in December of 2017, this journalist looked at the media landscape and set out to make a list of what she didn't want to do. After all, this was now her domain – a clean slate as it were – so she could create whatever she chose to.

Franka and her partner Ardene Sirjoo, chose to tell stories that don't get told and so [Trinigoodmedia](#) was born.

Trini Good Media's first project was the podcast Talk Bout Us, which features stories from the worlds of arts & entertainment, lifestyle and sport.

The Naparima Girl's Cookbook is the book Franka has given most as a gift and it's no surprise although this foodie admits that she just does not cook enough. She loves cooking meat and is particularly fascinated by the art of butchery although today, butchers are hard to come by and the art seems to be on the verge of dying.

Franka is particularly excited about goats. She feels that we don't use enough goat meat – and get enough value from goats – milk, cheese, mince etc.

She recently wrote about goats in her Cookbook column, for the Caribbean Airlines in-flight magazine, Caribbean Beat. She's also been chatting with James Whetlor who's written a book – Goat – Cooking and Eating and shares his view:

We should all be eating more goat. It's sustainable, ethical, highly nutritious and very delicious.

Why, then, does it remain so underused and misunderstood is the Gordian knot that she is intent on untying.

In the last 5 years, Franka's Buddhist practice has really helped her to always return to her centre – who she is at core. Having lost both parents, she is reminded to enjoy the moment, to be ever present and if she ever derails, to return to mindfulness.

The book The Buddha, Geoff and Me is the other book she gives as a gift.

It provides a great introduction to the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin.

It tells the story of Ed, a regular guy who is struggling in almost every area of his life, but primarily in his work and relationships. And then, purely by chance, he meets Geoff...

Geoff is a Buddhist who isn't anything like Ed thinks a Buddhist should be. He swears, smokes, enjoys a pint at his local pub and he even has the occasional meat pie, but there is something else about him that Ed finds fascinating. An unlikely friendship grows out of their chance meeting, with Geoff giving Ed advice on how to improve his life and Ed stubbornly resisting almost all of it, especially the 'Buddhist stuff'.

FP's most worthwhile investment was going to do her Masters in Digital Media in the U.K. A former content producer, for the BBC World Service Future Media, Franka is concerned about the lack of attention to detail in the media industry.

This is her advice for any smart driven student:

Get things right. Don't take shortcuts. Be thorough...

And for her colleagues...

Stop with the oversharing

Sometimes journalists would share notes after covering an event. Franka feels that this is not a good idea since you're sharing more than notes. You're sharing your take or perspective. What then would make your piece stand out? What then would make your piece unique?

Admittedly well-known and worn, if Franka could put a message to the world on a billboard – she'd opt for Just Do it. We need to have a bias for action particularly when there is more runway behind us than in front of us!

Whenever she feels overwhelmed, or experiences a WTF moment, FP returns to mindfulness, sees her feelings for what they

The Hudson Spotlight Interview Series | Written in 2018



are, and re-centres. This is on a good day. Many times during overwhelm she might however distract herself with her phone, take a nap, or completely shut down. Her Buddhist practice reminds her though of purpose and if she's absolutely losing it, she calls a friend!

As Franka grows, she recognizes that you can't please everyone and you need to be willing to say "no" to those things that you don't want to do. She's happy buying cookbooks, kitchen gadgets, and any app or gadget that is going to make life easier.

I see Franka, looking back at me, equal parts smiling and questioning, and I can almost see the creative cogs turning over in her brain. This quote by Daisaku Ikeda is an apt reflection for everything she shared on that wonderful Wednesday morning over breakfast:

"I feel most deeply I have done something creative when I have thrown myself wholeheartedly into a task and fought it through unstintingly to its conclusion and thus have won a struggle to enlarge myself. It is a matter of sweat and tears. The creative life demands constant effort to improve one's thoughts and actions. Perhaps the dynamism involved in the effort is the important thing. You will pass through storms, and you may suffer defeat. The essence of the creative life, however, is to persevere in the face of defeat and to follow the rainbow within your heart. Indulgence and indolence are not creative. Complaints and evasions are cowardly and corrupt life's natural tendency towards creation. The person who gives up the fight for creativeness is headed ultimately for the hell that destroys all life. You must never slacken in your efforts to build new lives for yourselves. Creativeness means pushing open the heavy door to life. This is not an easy struggle. Indeed, it may be the hardest task in the world. For opening the door to your own life is more difficult than opening the doors to the mysteries of the universe. But the act of opening your door vindicates your existence as a human being and makes

life worth living. No one is lonelier or unhappier than the person who does not know the pure joy of creating a life for him/herself. To be human is not merely to stand erect and manifest reason and intellect: to be human in the full sense of the word is to lead a creative life."

3 key takeaways from Franka's interview:

1 Failure is a Path to Clarity and Growth –

Like the Gordian knot, failure can seem impossible to untangle, but by analyzing what went wrong and adjusting accordingly, it becomes a catalyst for success.

2 Creativity and Innovation Require Bold

Action – Whether in media, business, or life, progress comes from thinking critically, cutting through obstacles like Alexander the Great, and taking decisive action rather than waiting for the perfect moment.

3 Mindfulness and Purpose Guide

Resilience – Franka's Buddhist practice and life experiences have reinforced the importance of staying present, learning from setbacks, and continuously shaping a life that aligns with her values and aspirations.