

Frustration, Rejection, Sylvester Stallone, and Rocky

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

A few weeks ago, I interviewed a guy for a job, and he has been e-mailing me every few days since the interview. He was highly qualified for the position and had great credentials. I have decided that I am not going to hire him and I will tell you why:

The day of the interview, he had apparently just walked off the job he had held for the past three years--because the company was going to make payroll later than usual. When he said this to me in the interview, I thought about it for some time, wondering if this was really an appropriate response to a *cash crunch* happening at his company. He was the Chief Executive Officer of the company and should have had some control over the money situation there.

I have determined that this fellow probably does not handle frustration or various problems very well. If he came to work at our company, how would he handle our problems? Life and work are not always a bed of roses, and one's ability to handle frustration and problems makes a huge difference in the outcome a person may achieve. *It is absolutely crucial to learn how to fail and how to deal with frustration.*

When Federal Express (now known as FedEx) was in its early days, there were a couple of times when it had its airplanes repossessed. The company needed to get enough package orders that day in order to get enough money to get its airplanes back, so it could deliver packages that evening and stay in business. When we think of a powerful company like FedEx today, it is hard to fathom a company that ever came this close to going out of business, but it is true.

One of the secrets of FedEx and anyone who is able to achieve outstanding success is the ability to handle frustration and the ability to deal with rejection. If you cannot deal with rejection and frustration, you might as well give up now. The most successful people out there generally deal with a tremendous amount of frustration and rejection until they reach their goals. Having the ability to maintain a positive attitude and stay disciplined in the face of frustration and rejection enables you to be strong and to achieve the goals you are seeking to achieve.

You need to become an expert in failing because the more you fail, the more you will learn. Also, the more times you fail, the more likely you are able to make the law of averages work for you. That is how it is in baseball. A hitter does not hit a home run every single time; he only hits a home run some of the time. You are not going to fail all the time, and the more times you try, the more likely it is that you will eventually end up hitting a home run. The more swings you make, the better off you are likely to become.

In the job search field, there is nothing more important than taking a lot of swings. Many job seekers fear rejection and do not apply to every possible [job opening](#). And they definitely do not apply to employers who are not advertising any open positions. My advice to you, however, is to apply to every single employer you can find--even those who do not have any apparent openings. This can make a tremendous difference for you, because you are going to hit a home run with some of these employers; it is a numbers game. Besides this, what is the worst thing that could happen? *You might get a letter or an e-mail saying that the employer does not have any openings?* This is an easy rejection to take. Who cares? Just keep moving along, and something else will inevitably work out.

When our company [advertises jobs](#), we typically receive a lot of applications. Around 95% of the applications we receive are completely appropriate for the job that has been advertised. However, many of the applications are not appropriate and are sent by people who have no business applying in the first place. For example, for an [attorney job](#), we may get an application from someone who is a landscaper down the street from our office, or a receptionist. *But guess what?* I often look at these applications, and in the past I have actually hired numerous people who have applied for jobs that were not being advertised. *Why?* It is easy: If we have a receptionist job open and I have not gotten around to advertising it yet, then I will bring the person in and interview him or her for the job. Since this person is the only applicant for the job so far, he or she typically has a much better chance of securing the job than if the person was competing with 100-plus other applicants for the same position. In return for risking almost certain rejection by applying inappropriately for a job, many people actually end up getting new jobs.

I failed algebra twice--once in middle school and a second time in high school. Had I not eventually passed this course, along with several other higher-level courses, I would not have gone to a good college and probably would not be where I am today. When I was told to stick to remedial math classes, I simply did not give up on algebra. I kept trying until I finally passed the class. I even ended up taking advanced calculus classes in college, which I never would have done had I given up.

One of the most inspiring stories regarding rejection and frustration is the story of Sylvester Stallone. From a young age, Stallone had wanted to star in movies. He had had a difficult childhood and had grown up in Hell's Kitchen, a rough neighborhood in New York City. He wanted to make movies because he felt that it was a way to inspire people about what they were capable of.

Stallone tried to get parts in movies and was rejected continually. He was told that he looked funny, that he talked out of the side of his mouth and sounded funny. Stallone's voice and the way he looks have to do with his head being pulled out with forceps when he was born. The forceps severed a nerve and caused paralysis in parts of Stallone's face, which caused his slurred speech and drooping lower lip. From birth, Stallone was handicapped to some extent. He attended a high school for problem children and after graduating, he enrolled in beauty school.

One of Stallone's first feature films was a soft-core pornography movie called "Party at Kitty and Stud's," which Stallone did in 1970. He was paid \$200 for two days of work.

As he tried to advance in the acting field, Stallone was told no by agents again and again. He was apparently thrown out of agency offices in New York more than 1,500 times. There were not even 1,500 agents in New York at the time, but Stallone had gone to many of the agents' offices multiple times--even after being thrown out.

Stallone got his first job by going to an agent's office and spending an entire night there. He arrived at 4:00 p.m. and the agent refused to see him. When the agent came back the next morning he saw that Stallone was still waiting there, and he gave him a job. Stallone's first gig was playing a thug that got beaten up. Despite landing this small role and a few others, the aspiring actor still did not have money to eat, and he could not even afford to heat his apartment during the cold New York winter.

Stallone's wife at the time kept telling him to go out and get a *real job*, something that did not involve acting; however, he refused to do so because he was afraid that if he took a normal job he would lose his hunger to succeed in acting. Stallone felt that this *hunger* gave him an edge and made him stronger. Stallone and his wife would have one horrible fight after another because he was so broke.

One day Stallone went to the New York Public Library, where it was warm. He had no plans to read anything; he just wanted to escape the chill of his apartment. He stumbled onto a book by Edgar Allan Poe and started reading it. According to Stallone, reading Poe's work inspired him right then and there to become a writer. Stallone believes that Poe helped him learn to emotionally influence others by not focusing on himself but by looking at people and the world around him.

Stallone went on to write a movie script called *Paradise Alley*, which he sold for only \$100. Meanwhile, he was so broke that he sold his wife's jewelry, which officially ended their relationship. The only thing that Stallone had left at this point in his life was his dog. He loved his dog for the unconditional love it provided him, even though he had no money; this was more than Stallone could say for his wife at the time.

Stallone one day stood in front of a liquor store, trying to sell his dog. He eventually located a man who wanted to make the purchase. Stallone had hoped to sell the dog for \$50, but the buyer refused to pay this much and only offered \$25. Stallone sold the dog at the lower price, and walked away crying. According to Stallone, this was the lowest point in his life.

A few weeks later Stallone watched Muhammad Ali fight Chuck Wepner. The fight inspired Stallone. That evening Stallone went home and, in three short days, wrote the script for *Rocky*. Stallone tried to sell the script and was rejected numerous times. Finally, he found two men, Robert Chartoff and Irwin Winkler, who really liked the script. They offered him \$125,000; but Stallone refused and stated that he would only accept this money if he could star in the movie. The producers did not want Stallone to star in the movie because he was an unknown actor. A couple of weeks later they offered him \$250,000 if he would not star in the movie, and once again he refused. Later the producers offered Stallone \$325,000, and he turned this down as well. Stallone felt that *Rocky* was his story and that it was incredibly important for him to play the lead role.

Eventually, the producers offered him \$35,000 and allowed him to play the part in the movie. They would also give Stallone a share of the profits. Ultimately the movie cost \$1 million to make and ended up grossing over \$200 million--and winning an Oscar. Stallone said that right before he received the Oscar, he had read every rejection he had ever received and all of the negative things that people had ever said about him, because he had written it all down. One of my favorite quotes is from Stallone: "I take rejection as someone blowing a bugle in my ear to wake me up and get going, rather than retreat."

Incredibly, the first thing Stallone did when he received the \$35,000 was go immediately to the liquor store, hoping to get his dog back. He stood in front of the liquor store for three days waiting for the man to appear. Stallone first offered \$100 and then more and more money until he offered to pay \$1,000. The man still refused to sell the dog back. Finally, Stallone offered the man \$15,000 of the \$35,000 he received, and he got his dog back. The dog that is featured in *Rocky* is Stallone's dog.

There is nothing wrong with failing. Stallone failed many times early on and has since left a legacy of one of the most inspiring and fantastic movies ever written and produced. If you do not succeed the first time, just look at what went wrong and change it. Frustration and rejection make you stronger. Doing something and failing is better than doing nothing. At least by trying you will learn a lesson. Learning a lesson is among the most valuable experiences you can have.

Rejection is a numbers game. The more you are rejected, the closer you are to success. Let the law of averages work on your behalf, and *never give up what you are doing*. You need to push through in order to succeed, and to not worry about all the no's you are receiving. Each *no* will bring you closer to a *yes*. Put your emotions and negative feelings about being rejected behind you.

Life is often frustrating, and the road to success is also often frustrating. Your ability to handle this frustration and rejection, however, will ultimately determine the level of success you will experience. Imagine if Stallone had stopped early on when he experienced frustration and rejection.

Work through frustration and rejection, and never stop moving forward.

THE LESSON

Your success will largely depend on the extent to which you can handle frustration and rejection. In fact, you need to become an expert at failure, because you can learn so much from the experience. The more you are rejected, the closer you bring yourself to eventual success. Never give up, remember that the law of averages is working in your favor, and keep pushing through towards success. Set aside your emotions and negative feelings about rejection.

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