



# **JIM HARSHAW JR**

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## *Revealing Failure as the Path to Success*

### **Success Through Failure Podcast**

Action Plan Episode #128

Ben Williams

The principal at Ron Brown College Preparatory High School in Washington DC, Ben's life has been anything but easy. At age 4, he and his younger brother, sons of a prostitute addicted to drugs, became wards of the state and entered the Nevada foster care system. At age 12 they were adopted and there was hope that their troubles were over. The reality was far from it. After just a couple of years, because of their father's failing health, they found themselves living with their aunt. Ben's brother Andre, struggling with behavior problems, found himself at a residential facility for troubled youth. In the ensuing years, Ben found his way successfully through high school and into one of the top public universities in the country, the University of Virginia. But just before Ben's third year in college, Andre was killed by a drunk driver while crossing a road. Despite so many obstacles in his path, Ben received three degrees from the University of Virginia including his doctorate in education and administration.

Ben's challenging road has positioned him well to take the lead of the all-boys college preparatory school that he now heads. What I want to explore and what I want you the listener to learn is how Ben faced adversity only to come out on top.

### **Quotes**

"Trauma impacts people in so many different ways."

"There was a moment I realized that everything that I had gone through, there was a bigger ask of me of being able to get through those and that my calling was much more than me and my brother."

"In order to give my offering, which is my experience, I can't run away from opportunities that people give me, whether it is impossible, difficult or extremely stressful."

### **About Finding the Reason Behind Adversity**

"I'm a man of faith. I'm a Christian. We talk about offerings. You have to offer your talent and your time. I think that's when I realized that my talent was my past and my experience is my ability to relate to young people. It was my responsibility to start giving back. Just because my brother was gone, it doesn't mean that I had to stop caring for others."

### **About Shaping your Mindset**

"Failure has never been something that sat well with me. I had an external motivator, which was my brother, for the first two years. In a weird way, he was the external motivator for the last two years as well. Once I survived first year, I walked away saying, 'I can do it. I can compete against the best of them. I just have to put in a different type of effort than others.' I think that's where it shifted for me. I just didn't know how long it was going to take me. But the UVA culture is that we play hard, we study hard and we graduate in four years. I refused to be that student who needed an extra summer or an extra semester to finish. I took advantage of every resource I could once I learn how to navigate that space and advocate for myself. By my fourth year, I had really learned the system of being a student at the university and I maximized the opportunity and took advantage of it the best I could."

### **About Writing Your Own Destiny**

"I present to my students that they have the power to write their own narrative, regardless of upbringing or situation. You can change the narrative to be written the way you want it to be written. You just have to be willing to put in the effort and work. And you have to believe in yourself, and if you are not believing in yourself, you have people here who are. I give them a little bit of back story. I use experiences to help them see the possibility."

### **About Taking Time to Channel Stress**

"I try to work out four to five times a week. I find it a place to decompress and it's very much a stress relief. Working out for me is playing basketball but for others, it might be something different. But to take an hour or two hours a day, it keeps a healthy spirit and a clear mind and release some of the pressure that may exist in your workspace, academic space, family space, whatever it may be."

## **Recommended Books**

*Good to Great by Jim Collins*

<https://www.amazon.com/Good-Great-Some-Companies-Others-ebook/dp/B0058DRUV6>

*Difficult Conversations by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen*

<https://www.amazon.com/Difficult-Conversations-Discuss-What-Matters/dp/0143118447>

## **Website and Social**

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