



JIM HARSHAW JR.

Revealing Failure as the Path to Success

Success Through Failure Podcast

Action Plan Episode #293

Jeff Bulington

Jeff Bulington grew up on the outskirts of Toledo, Ohio and in rural Monon, Indiana. He learned to move the chess pieces from his first grade teacher in 1972, but was introduced to tournament chess by a local farmer after moving to Indiana as a junior high student. He founded his school's first chess club. Fast forward a few decades and he's transforming the lives of the students who society has written off. Who am I talking about? The students of Franklin County, MS.

60 Minutes described Franklin County as "the buckle of the Bible belt. Seven thousand people live here and no one's in a hurry. There are only two stop lights in the entire county and one elementary school."

One local described Franklin County like this... "All the statistics, everything you look at, Mississippi is the poorest. It's the dumbest. It's the fattest. We know that the rest of the nation has that conception of us."

Why did Jeff Bulington show up here to teach this community a game that most had never played and presumably wouldn't have any interest in?

And how did he succeed in changing how young people on the fringes of society think about themselves?

Find out. Listen now...

Top Quotes From This Episode

"Failure is essential, as long as failure doesn't turn into some kind of a dead end or a cul-de-sac. There can be a real danger in failure, so it has to be handled properly."

"Losses tell you that whatever it is that you think you have figured out, isn't quite right. There's some other thing that you haven't done yet."

"I believe that most people are smart enough to become quite good at [chess], so where you were born doesn't really determine that. It's more about work and training and the quality of the feedback that the student gets—that's what's going to determine how far they get."

Show Notes

This episode touches on the following key topics and ideas:

- **Off to Franklin County! (5:21):** Jeff on going to Franklin County and his journey in starting the chess program in the community.
 - **Story of failure (9:13):** The value of failure and its proper handling especially when working with children.
 - **Meaningful losses (12:20):** The powerful lessons from losing.
 - **The good coach (19:03):** On normalizing losing—even for the strongest players—to bring out the best in every player.
 - **Environment of Excellence (23:13):** Create an Environment of Excellence where it's not just the coach coaching you, but there are other people who are helping you through your failures.
 - **Wastage in Education (25:57):** Jeff talks about how the preconceived notions of authorities silence the hidden qualities of children; On how he breaks these biases.
 - **When you believe (29:26):** Jeff believes that hard work, training, and the quality of feedback that one receives, determine their success. And the value of creating opportunities to prove oneself to develop a sense of their own power and strength.
 - **Dealing with the pressure to win (33:02):** The need for kids to redefine what counts as success to stay in the game.
 - **Success from the get-go (35:18):** Jeff recalls his first day as a consultant and how the students and principals got captivated by the "aesthetic beauty of the game (chess)."
- Tell me about a time when you failed. (37:31)**
- Jeff shares how underestimating people, for reasons that don't hold any water, resulted in failures he had in life.
 - **In memory of Bobby Poole (41:49):** Jeff talks about the life and works of his Assistant Coach, Bobby, in chess education.

List of Resources Mentioned in the Episode

60 Minutes episode: [Chess instills new dreams in kids from rural Mississippi county](#)

[Why I teach my children to fail | Jim Harshaw | TEDxCharlottesville](#)

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