

1. 86% FAILURE

"The average person puts about 25% of his energy and ability into his work. The world takes off its hat to those who put in more than 50% of their capacity, and stands on its head for those few and far between souls who devote 100%." -Andrew Carnegie

On October 15, 1999, underlying themes of rebellion were sparked inside of a generation when *Fight Club*, based on the 1996 novel of the same name by Chuck Palahniuk, made its debut. The film, considered one of the greatest movies of all time, was also filled with countercultural ideas and insight.

In one of the most memorable scenes, Brad Pitt, playing Tyler Durden gives Edward Norton, The Narrator, a horrendous chemical burn by first kissing his hand to apply moisture then dousing it with lye.

TYLER: It will hurt more than you've ever been burned and you will have a scar.

NARRATOR: Guided meditation worked for cancer, it could work for this.

TYLER: Stay with the pain, don't block this out.

TYLER: Look at your hand. The first soap was made from the ashes of heroes. Like the first monkeys shot into space. Without pain, without sacrifice, we would have nothing!

NARRATOR: I tried not to think of the words "searing" or "flesh."

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TYLER: Stop. This is your pain, this is your burning hand. It's right here!

NARRATOR: I'm going to my cave. I'm going to my cave, I'm going to find my power animal.

TYLER: No! Don't deal with it like those dead people do. Come on!

NARRATOR: I get the point!

TYLER: No, what you're feeling is premature enlightenment.

TYLER: This is the greatest moment of your life, man! And you're off somewhere missing it.

In a grave illustration, the writer of *Fight Club* elegantly portrayed one of the biggest problems facing us today. We run to corners, to dark rooms, and to our devices, so we never have to focus on the moment or deal with discomfort. We run from pain and avoid uncomfortable situations at all costs.

This was not my takeaway when I first saw the film and watched this scene. It wasn't until much later when I started to connect the purposeful pursuit of discomfort to success. A look to nature made this abundantly clear.

The wolf. While often portrayed as near-mythical beasts, wolves are failures. For centuries, the wolf has inspired legends around the world in spite of the fact that the one thing a wolf does more than anything else is, fail.

If you look at the numbers, 86% of the time a wolf steps foot on a hunt, it will fail. So 6 out of 7 times it comes up short, gets nothing, and goes hungry.

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Furthermore, one victory doesn't mean the hunt is over because there is still tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, and the day after that.

Wolves fail more than they succeed, despite their rare 14% success rate, they have a momentous impact on the surrounding ecosystem.

TO REMOVE A FAILURE

Wolves are amazing beasts, but only when you are learning about them on TV from the comfort of your couch. In person and up close, a wolf can be pretty terrifying.

So terrifying that, believe it or not, the National Park Service at Yellowstone National Park allowed the shooting of wolves, and even the poisoning of wolves, until a policy change in 1960 made these acts illegal. Between 1914 and 1926, at least 136 wolves vanished from the park; by the 1940s, reports of wolf packs disappeared as well. By the mid-1900s, wolves barely existed in the 48 states.

It turns out that when you remove an Apex Predator from an ecosystem, even one that only succeeds 14% of the time, it's still a big deal. Colorado State University's Natural Resource Ecology Laboratory professor, Tom Hobbs, said:

"There is no dispute among scientists that removing the wolf from Yellowstone had vast ecological impacts on the park."

Today, we know why this is a problem because now we are aware of one of the most exciting scientific findings of the past half-century: trophic cascades.

In a 2013 Ted Talk, an investigative journalist, George Monbiot explains the impact wolves have and how a Trophic Cascade works;

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"A trophic cascade is an ecological process which starts at the top of the food chain and tumbles all the way down to the bottom.

And the classic example is what happened in the Yellowstone National Park in the United States when wolves were reintroduced in 1995. Now, we all know that wolves kill various species of animals, but perhaps we're slightly less aware that they give life to many others.

Before the wolves turned up – they'd been absent for 70 years the numbers of deer (because there had been nothing to hunt them) had built up and built up in the Yellowstone Park and despite efforts by humans to control them they'd managed to reduce much the vegetation there to almost nothing. They had just grazed it away.

But as soon as the wolves arrived, even though they were few in number they started to have the most remarkable effects.

First, of course, they killed some of the deer, but that wasn't the major thing. Much more significantly, they radically changed the behavior of the deer. The deer started avoiding certain parts of the park – the places where they could be trapped most easily – particularly the valleys and the gorges, and immediately those places started to regenerate. In some areas, the height of the trees quintupled in just six years. Bare valley sides quickly became forests of aspen and willow and cottonwood.

And as soon as that happened, the birds started moving in. The number of songbirds and migratory birds started to increase greatly.

The number of beavers started to increase because beavers like to eat the trees. And beavers, like wolves, are ecosystem engineers. They create niches for other species. And the dams they built in the rivers provided habitats for otters and muskrats and ducks and fish and reptiles and amphibians.

The wolves killed coyotes and as a result of that, the number of rabbits and mice began to rise which meant more hawks more

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weasels more foxes more badgers. Ravens and bald eagles came down to feed on the carrion that the wolves had left.

Bears fed on it, too. And their population began to rise as well partly also because more berries were growing on the regenerating shrubs. And the bears reinforced the impact of the wolves by killing some of the calves of the deer.

But here's where it gets really interesting. The wolves changed the behavior of the rivers. They began to meander less. There was less erosion. The channels narrowed. More pools formed. More riffle sections. All of which were great for wildlife habitats. The rivers changed in response to the wolves. And the reason was that the regenerating forests stabilized the banks so that they collapsed less often. So the rivers became more fixed in their course.

Similarly, by driving the deer out of some places, and the vegetation recovering on the valley side, there was less soil erosion because the vegetation stabilized that as well. So the wolves, small in number, transformed not just the ecosystem of the Yellowstone National Park – This massive area of land -- but also its physical geography."

It's pretty phenomenal to think that one animal population could have such a significant impact on its surroundings by merely being itself. It becomes even more mind-blowing considering that this apex predator brings about such dramatic changes when it is such a failure.

EMBRACING THE SUCK

If you think this is the kind of book where I am going to tell you to keep trying because one day you will hit it big, you grabbed the wrong book. And furthermore, the facts don't agree with that sentiment.

Yes, wolves keep trying, and they ultimately succeed, or else they would die. The success they achieve lasts only as

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long as their bellies are full. That is not the lesson we learn from the wolf, and it is not how life works.

How many times have you told yourself, "If I just got that job..." or "If I just had that car..." or "If I just had more freedom..." And, if you actually got that elusive thing, what happened then?

You were on top of the world for two seconds only to find yourself still part of the human condition and onto something else. You were too focused on the success that you desired and not content with the grind and continual failures it took to get there. You were not comfortable with the discomfort of achievement. You only wanted the prize.

So, then, what do we learn from the wolf?

There is no doubt that a wolf, by its very presence, has the power to change an entire ecosystem. Yes, it is going to fail 86% of the time, and yet it still has the ability to change the world. The only way to modify your world is to improve yourself, and to improve yourself is a daily practice of discomfort. It is the grind that leads to the occasional 14%.

But let's get real for a second, are you afraid to get better? If I were to come to hang out with you for a day, how much would I see you working on yourself? Are you going to tell me you don't have time? That you have excuses? Are you not focusing on yourself and instead pretending to be a martyr for your kids, family, friends, spouse, etc.?

You may be wondering what this looks like. It looks like you, not investing a second of your time improving yourself. Not one second spent on pursuing the discomfort that will lead to success. This lack of focus often comes from the stories we tell ourselves. We skip workouts, stop reading books, and quit taking courses and say it's for the family. You tell yourself you are helping those around you. You tell yourself you are acting altruistically.

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Let me make this very clear—the act of Killing Comfort and getting better is not a selfish one. The act of getting better is a trophic cascade for your life, and it can change everyone and everything around you.

Now don't go and *try* to make a change. Intentionally *trying* to change everyone and everything around you every single day is exhausting. Wolves don't try. They don't sit around worrying about the course of the river or the increasing deer population. Wolves do what they know how to do, and that is to be an Apex Predator.

When you Kill Comfort, you don't try to change your ecosystem. Your ecosystem changes around you, you shift rivers, and you change your geography.

The wolf is comfortable being uncomfortable. That's what we have to learn and embrace. Things don't get comfortable. You won't finally “make it.” You will not “arrive.” But, you can get comfortable with imperfection. Imperfect daily action will give you a direction by dint of victories preceded by a lot of failures.

Your daily life is not over-the-top happiness because of what you have achieved. Everyday life is a process in which we have to learn, grow, fail, put in the work, try something new, and fail again.

I have no secret for striking it rich or becoming famous. There is no secret formula to get the body you've always wanted or to reach the goals you've set for yourself.

But, there is a process. A process that must be applied daily over decades for it to work. A method of intentionally seeking discomfort to improve every area of your life beyond what you could imagine. The process is uncomfortable, and it is different for every person.

The process is what we call 86%, and it hurts like hell.

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While you should always strive to make an effort towards your goals, 86% is not about dusting yourself off and trying again. That adage has been played out for too long. I know you are, like I am, tired of hearing about it.

86% isn't about trying again. It's not about changing the things or people around you.

The 86% process is about changing yourself and watching the world morph to you. It's about embracing the suck.

When you focus on the 86%, you'll be face to face with discomfort daily. And that's the point.