

### ***How to fail well – a creative guide to what to do when things go wrong***

***We all fail at some time; the trick is how you respond when things go wrong***

**Let's face it. Every single artist and creative entrepreneur who wants to make their mark on the world will fail at some time.** In fact, some of their best ideas may even have started life as a mistake or plan B. Deep down we know that, and so do you. Yet all too often we still fear failure, give ourselves a hard time when it happens, and find it really hard to move on.

**FAIL , FAIL AGAIN, FAIL BETTER!**

**- SAMUEL BECKETT**

We've been working in the creative sector for 20+ years now, and have wracked up more failures than proverbial hot dinners (with some successes in the mix too, we're pleased to say!). But we're still here, doing what we do, trying each day to make what we do that bit better and impactful. And that's because **we've learned a bit about what to do when things go wrong or not quite how they were supposed to.**

We're not saying we've got it cracked. We still get upset, and sometimes angry, when we fail to achieve something we wanted to, but we know a bit about how to pick ourselves up too. **So, in the spirit of curiosity and generosity that underpins all our work, here are a few pieces of wisdom we wanted to share with you...**

#### ***Acknowledge when things go wrong and accept responsibility for your role***

When we're so often bombarded with images of other people balancing seemingly perfect lives with hugely successful careers, it's all too easy to hide away when things go wrong. Or copy those people, and pretend everything is hunky-dory thank you very much. And so it goes on.

Experience tells us that there is real power in acknowledging failure when it happens – acknowledging it to yourself and to others – and to accepting any responsibility that's yours. And here's why. First up, acknowledging to yourself what's happened, and accepting responsibility where you need to, is the first step towards doing something about it and succeeding in the future. Secondly, sharing what's happened with others is most likely to elicit not only huge sighs of relief from them (phew, you're not perfect after all!) but also offers of support and shouts of encouragement.



## ***Accept how you feel, and allow yourself to feel it***

When things go wrong – a gig doesn't go well or sell as many tickets as hoped, or you lose a client – it's only natural you're going to feel all sorts of things, like angry, sad or disappointed. The key thing here is to let yourself feel those things; **there's nothing to be gained through false bravado**. We find that writing down how we're feeling helps us process it and move through that to a more hopeful and motivated place. And moving on in that way is really important, because while sitting with your feelings for a while is a healthy thing to do, dwelling on them for a long time is not. **Obsessing over what went wrong won't change what happened**, and the truth is it will just trap you in a doom-loop to nowhere and stop you from moving on. Plus, if all you think about for days on end is what went wrong the chances are you'll start to see yourself as a failure just because of this one thing, and that is in no way helpful. Which brings us on to....

## ***You're not a failure just because you had a setback... and the power of 'yet'***

Repeat after us, "I am not a failure just because I had a setback". When something's gone wrong, it's super easy to see yourself as a failure and start thinking you're doomed to constant failure. This is where the power of 'yet' (one of our favourite words) comes into its own. How about, if instead of drowning in thoughts of what a failure you are, you instead focus on the fact that, **just because you haven't found a successful way of doing something (yet), you aren't a failure**.

Personalising failure does no one any favours, and trust us, if you can separate what went wrong from your identity as an artist or creative entrepreneur (and person!), you are well on your way to feeling much better!

## ***Be a good friend to yourself, and don't be hard on yourself***

For many of us, our first instinct when something goes wrong is probably to have a little go at ourselves, tell ourselves that we should have worked harder, been smarter, that kind of thing. That way lies no good! Don't do it!

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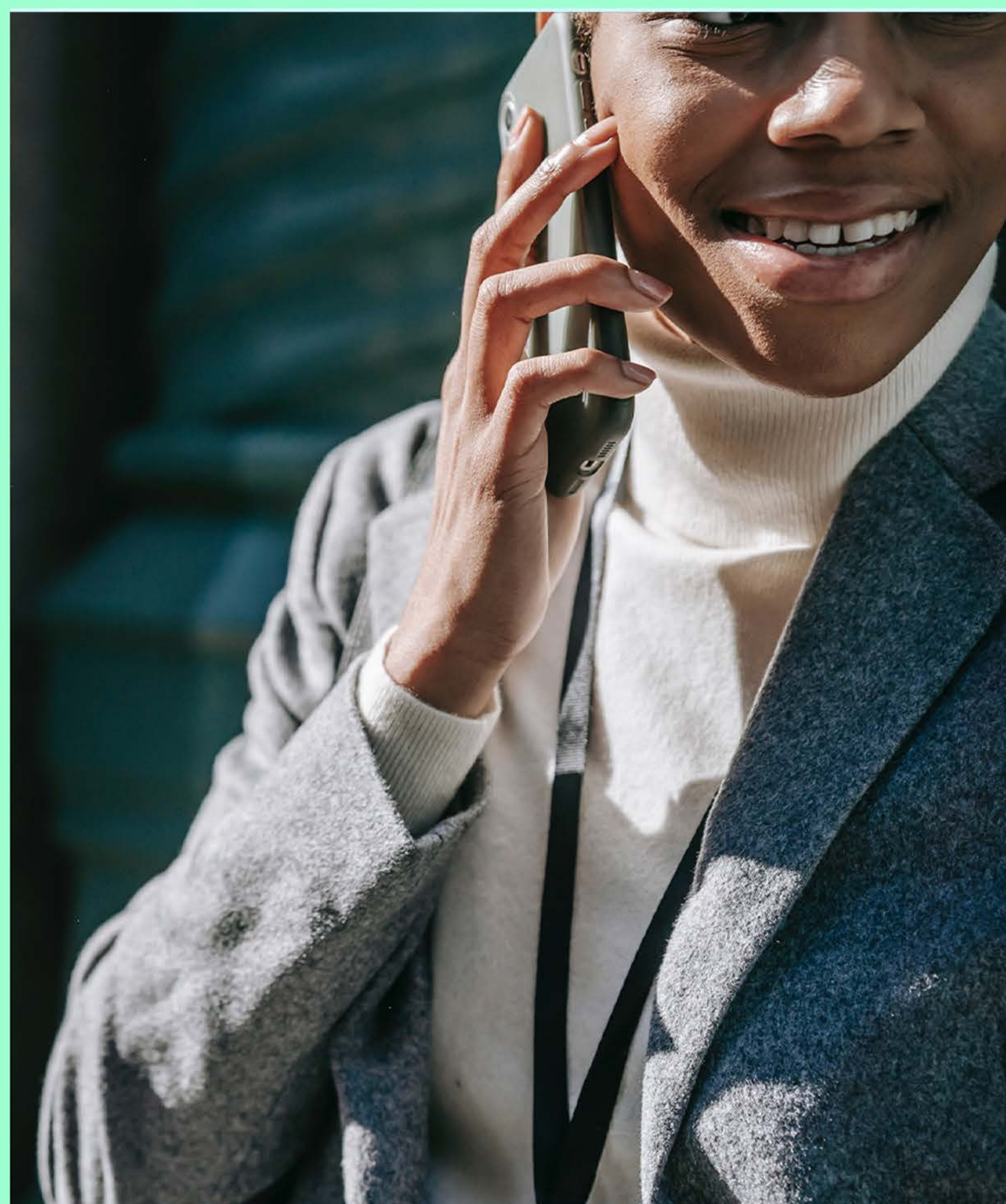
## Failure and disappointment

When things go wrong

It's much better to treat yourself the way you would a friend in the same situation, and think about what a good friend would say to you. So instead of listening to the really harsh inner critic in your head, reach instead for the wisdom a friend would offer you. Logic and experience tell us that if you're nice to yourself you'll bounce back much sooner. Oh, and the other thing? Every good friend would definitely tell you to eat some cake!

### ***Reach out to others***

While we're talking about the wisdom of friends, another thing that's almost guaranteed to make you feel better, and get you back on the right track, is talking to a friend, family member or colleague. There's no good in keeping this kind of stuff bottled up, and there are all sorts of reasons why talking things through with someone is super helpful. You'll potentially get another perspective on things, some encouragement, and maybe feel able to start to think about potential responses. And the chances are that if you're open with them about what's gone wrong they'll also share their own experiences of similar situations and how they came back from those. So, that old adage about a problem shared is a problem halved? It's bang on in our opinion!



### ***Remind yourself that nobody's perfect, and everyone fails sometime***

Fact. Did you, for instance, know that J K Rowling was rejected by 12 publishers before Harry Potter finally hit our bookshelves? Just saying. Maybe it's time to make friends with this little bit of wisdom from the very wise Paulo Coelho? **“The secret of life is to fall seven times and to get up eight times”**. So next time you mess something up, summon one of these world famous authors and remind yourself that we all make mistakes.



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***Take note...learn from what's happened, and be proud that you tried***

**There's always something to learn from when things go wrong.**

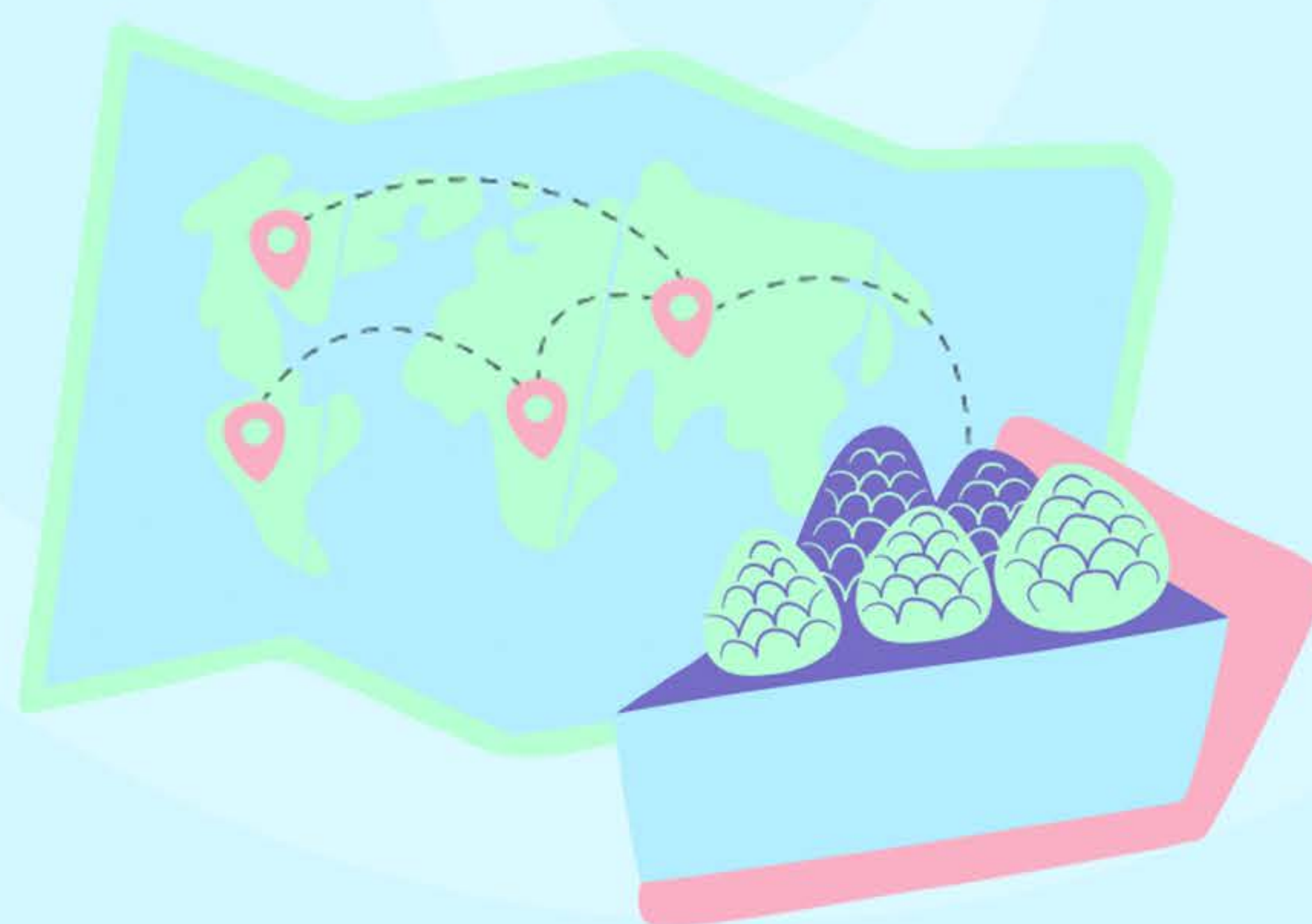
Our 'go to' guy for all of this is Thomas Edison, who (eventually) designed the first ever working lightbulb. When asked about his repeated failures to make it work, wise old Thomas said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work". What he knew how to do is learn from those mistakes and setbacks, and use that insight to move forward towards eventual success.



**Failing doesn't mean you've lost, and it doesn't mean you can't move forward. Feel proud that you tried and see it as step closer to success. The trick is to shift your perspective and try to view what's happened as a chance to grow; trade disappointment and blame for curiosity.** It's harder said than done, but soooo worth it. And that's because once you focus on working out there is to learn, and getting curious like that, you've traded dwelling on the past for working out how you can change the future.

***Map it all out, make a plan and use your vision (and cake) to keep you going***

Once you've picked yourself up (and eaten a lot of cake), the chances are that all that learning you need to do will probably start with going back to the beginning and looking at the decisions you made along the way. Getting clear on what worked and what didn't is a key step in identifying what you need to do differently next time. Get granular, break up what comes next into steps, and make yourself a plan. If it all feels a bit much after your recent setback, start with really tiny steps (remember what we said about being kind to yourself?). Oh, and don't forget to use your secret weapon. Sorry? We didn't catch that. Oh, you don't know what that is? So it's simple; it's the dream or vision that set you going on all this in the first place, the knowledge you have of the good your idea will do, the reason you started and the reason you show up every day.





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### ***Remind yourself you've been here before and that you've got this***

We know this stuff is hard. We've been doing what we do for over 20 years, and trust us, we've got zillions of things wrong in that time. Not only have we been there and got the t shirt, we probably made the t shirt, albeit getting the pattern wrong the first few times. The thing is, we're still here, despite – or rather, because of – all the things that didn't go quite to plan. Plus, more often than not we've made the right call rather than the wrong one. So next time you fail, remember the failures that have gone before, along with your successes. They've all got you to this place, and you've got this.



Hopefully, by now, you're getting the gist that every artist or creative freelancer who wants to make their mark on the world will fail. The trick is how you deal with that fact. If these favourite insights of ours have helped you, do check out all the other goodies that you'll find in the [Win Some, Lose Some](#) part of our Balance toolkit. Good luck!