Fuckup
NIGHTS

THE FUCKUP BOOK

Vol. 2

Six Stories and Lessons from the
Fuckup Nights Community

Before You Change Anything, You'll Probably Have to Fail

Being a **changemaker** at work doesn't mean having all the answers. It means seeing something that could be better and deciding to **do something about it.**

It can mean **questioning a way of working**, launching an initiative, connecting teams, or creating an opportunity where none seems to exist.

But change **rarely turns out the way we imagine.**

You can prepare, do your research, build alliances, and give it everything you've got. **And you can still fail.**

A key piece of what has taken **Fuckup Nights** to more than **300 cities** is the Fuckuppers: people who have **joined the global movement** to bring honest **conversations** about failure to their communities.

Through a license, they **build local communities** and help collectively free us from the stigma of failure. But before creating these spaces for others to share their stories, they also had to live their own.

Here we've gathered **six stories from our community to help you do it better.**

We're not trying to convince you that failing is fun or that everything happens for a reason. Some losses hurt. But they also show something important: **an outcome doesn't always determine the value of what you built.**

It's not about avoiding failure; it's about **learning to go through it**. Because if you're willing to change things, sooner or later you'll have to learn to fail, too.

Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM WE DIDN’T WANT TO SEE

As a changemaker,

it's easy to confuse movement with progress. An agency that bills well, a startup that raises millions, a team that grows: everything suggests you're on the right track. **But we rarely ask in time**: are we solving the real problem, or just postponing it?

Iram and Saul learned this the hard way. One confused mastering his craft with running a business. The other confused a product's traction with having a sustainable model. Both kept moving forward while the real problem grew quietly, until they could no longer ignore it.

These two stories are a reminder for anyone driving change inside an organization: **running toward the fire doesn't mean being busy.** It means having the courage to look straight at what truly matters, even when it's uncomfortable, even when it means admitting that the path you chose wasn't the right one.

TALENT DOESN'T REPLACE STRUCTURE

By **Iram**, Fuckup Nights community leader in **San Luis Potosí, Mexico**

For years I thought success depended on being good at my job. I was passionate about marketing; I learned fast, and after several years working at companies, **I decided to start my own business, convinced that my experience was enough.**

I landed clients, and soon my agency was billing far more than I had earned as an employee. I thought everything was working.

It wasn't.

I never made a financial plan. I mixed my personal finances with the business's. I depended too heavily on a few clients. I avoided uncomfortable conversations for fear of losing business relationships, and I confused a good work atmosphere with leadership.

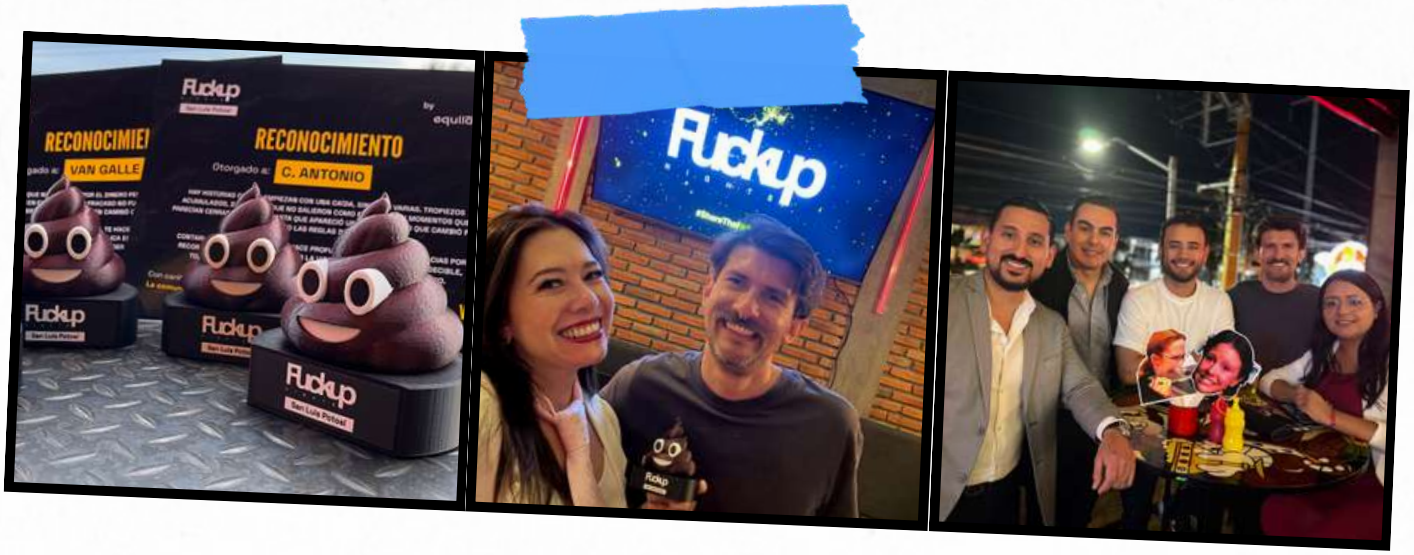
When one of my main clients stopped paying, I kept working, hoping they would settle the debt one day. To cover expenses, I started using credit cards, then loans, and finally my family's help.

Within a few months, I had accumulated about 120,000 pesos in debt.

That's when I understood that my failure hadn't been losing money.
My real mistake was believing that mastering my profession was enough to run a company.

Years earlier, I had received an ADHD diagnosis, which helped me understand why I worked the way I did. But **I also discovered that knowing how your mind works doesn't replace the skills required to lead a project**: managing resources, collecting payments on time, making hard decisions, building processes, and asking for help when needed.

Today I'm still paying off part of that debt, but I also learned something that changed how I work: **talent opens doors; structure lets you stay on the other side.**



IRAM'S KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Being excellent at your specialty doesn't mean you're ready to lead a business or an initiative.
- Growth without processes or financial planning often turns into an illusion.
- Avoiding difficult conversations to please others ends up costing more than facing them.
- Passion needs discipline, structure, and boundaries to last.
- Asking for help is not a sign of failure; it's a leadership skill.

Connect with Iram!

"ORGANIZATIONS DON'T FAIL BECAUSE THEY LACK TALENT. THEY FAIL WHEN THEY RELY ON TALENT TO MAKE UP FOR A LACK OF STRUCTURE."

WHEN GROWTH HIDES THE REAL PROBLEM

By **Saul**, Fuckup Nights community leader in **London, England**

After founding an education company, my co-founder and I saw an opportunity: a platform where communities could organize and recommend information collaboratively.
That's how quester was born.

The idea gained traction quickly. We reached over 100,000 registered users and 2 million sessions, and raised about $2M. We hired a team, took office space, and met investors in San Francisco, Dubai, and New York. From the outside, it looked like a startup in full growth mode.

But there was a problem we didn't want to see.

People were using the product, **but we didn't have a matching business model.**

Advertising didn't cover our costs, and subscriptions didn't convert. Still, we kept investing in growth and raising capital, hoping the next one would solve what was really a business model problem.

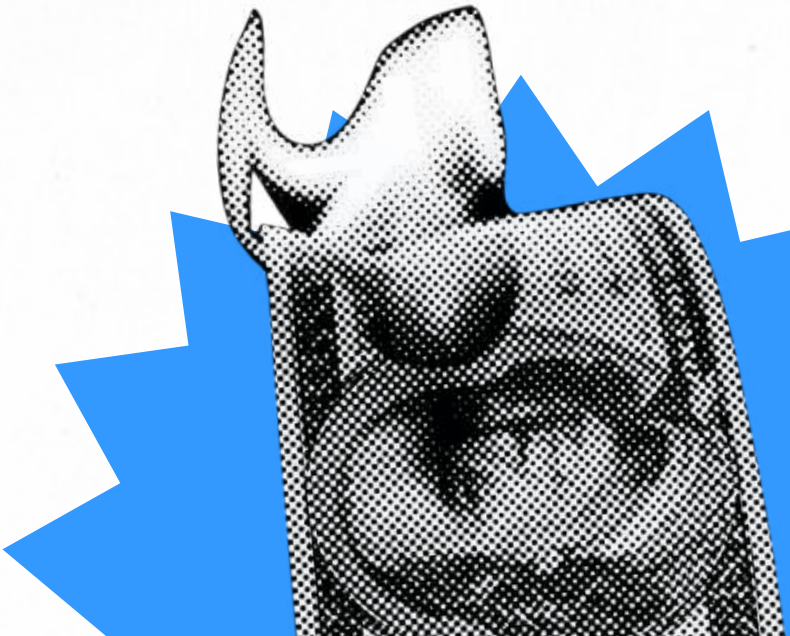
When funding became harder to secure, that strategy stopped working.

Around the same time, HMRC challenged our R&D tax-credit claim, withholding a payment we had expected and raising questions about earlier claims.

Combined with the underlying funding and business-model problems, **we ultimately put the company into liquidation.**

The hardest part wasn't losing the money. It was telling the team that quester was closing. People who had trusted us took a risk, and the company didn't survive. Letting people down was different.

Today I understand the failure didn't begin the day we closed. It began much earlier, when the evidence was already there, but we kept finding reasons to continue in the same direction.



SAUL'S KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A successful product doesn't always mean a sustainable business.
- Raising investment doesn't replace a solid business model.
- Scaling too soon can amplify problems you haven't yet solved.
- Surviving a crisis doesn't prove your strategy is right; sometimes it only proves how much stress you can endure.
- Leadership also means recognizing when the evidence says it's time to change course.

Connect with Saul!

"DON'T CONFUSE ACTIVITY INDICATORS (USERS, GROWTH, INVESTMENT, RECOGNITION) WITH EVIDENCE THAT CHANGE IS TRULY GENERATING SUSTAINABLE VALUE."

Chapter 2

KEEP TRYING
(EVEN WITHOUT GUARANTEES)

No one can guarantee the outcome.

You can prepare, do your research, knock on doors nobody else would dare knock on, and step onto a stage with a perfectly rehearsed script... **and things still may not turn out the way you hoped.**

Madai spent years pursuing a goal that seemed impossible, and when she finally got her chance face-to-face, **it wasn't enough.** Sophia walked onto a stage in front of 600 people convinced **she was ready**, and lived through eight minutes of silence that stayed with her for years. Neither of them got what she was looking for at that exact moment.

But both share something that goes beyond the result: **the decision to keep trying.** To build on what worked. To turn a stumble into practice, and practice into skills that ended up shaping their careers. This chapter is about **optimism that doesn't depend on guarantees**, and about the kind of improvement that only comes when you decide to **try again.**

THE TIME I DID EVERYTHING RIGHT... AND IT STILL WASN'T ENOUGH

By **Madai**, Fuckup Nights community leader in **New York, USA**

When I started my master's at Columbia, I had a very clear goal: to **work at the World Economic Forum.**

For two years, **I made decisions with that goal in mind.** I founded a student group dedicated to public-private collaboration and set out to achieve something that seemed impossible: an official partnership with the World Economic Forum.

I didn't know anyone inside the organization.

After trying to reach them without success, I went to their Manhattan offices in person. They wouldn't let me in, but **I convinced the security guard to help me** find out the format of their email addresses.

That same afternoon, I searched LinkedIn for Columbia alumni who worked there and wrote to them one by one.

Only one person replied. But that was enough.

That contact opened the door to a pilot program between Columbia and the World Economic Forum.

We designed an initiative where students worked as co-authors of case studies on public-private partnerships.

The program **didn't just work: it became institutionalized**, and it continues to benefit new generations of students.

I thought that was the decisive step toward the job I had been chasing for years.

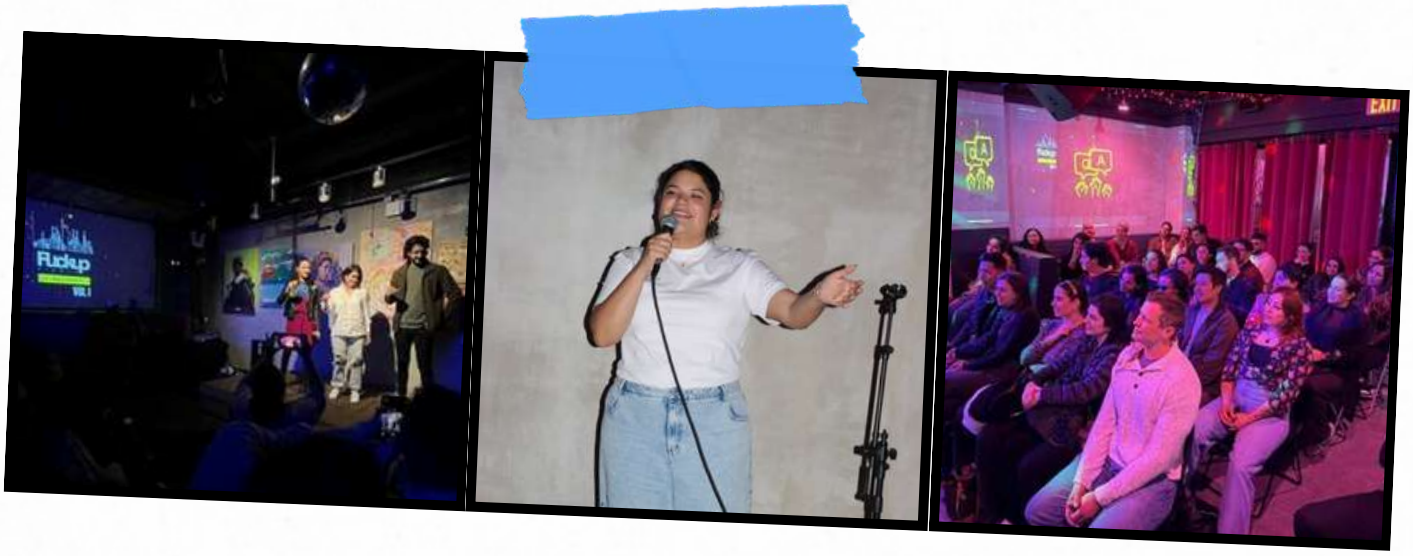
When **THE opening was finally posted**, I arrived with direct experience, internal recommendations, and Columbia's backing.

I felt I had done everything in my power…

Even so, I didn't make it past the first interview. I never received an explanation.

For a long time, **I tried to understand what I had done wrong**. Eventually I realized that was the wrong question. Some decisions are simply out of our control.

Today I look at that experience differently. **My greatest achievement was never getting the job I dreamed of.** It was building a project that is still alive, opening opportunities for others, and discovering that **pursuing a goal also transforms the person who pursues it**, even when the result isn't what you expected.



MADAI'S KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Doing everything right doesn't guarantee the result you expect.
- Not every rejection is a sign that you did something wrong.
- Creating opportunities can be more valuable than getting the one you were after.
- The impact you leave often lasts longer than the position you wanted.
- Success isn't always about reaching the destination, but about what you can build along the way.

Connect with Madai!

"DON'T MEASURE YOUR SUCCESS ONLY BY OUTCOMES THAT DEPEND ON OTHERS. ALSO MEASURE THE VALUE YOU'RE ABLE TO CREATE WHILE PURSUING THAT GOAL."

THE NIGHT I MADE THE BIGGEST FOOL OF MYSELF

By **Sophia**, Fuckup Nights community **leader in Spanish, Mexico**

I had just closed a professional project when my former partner and I received an invitation to **tell our story on a Fuckup Nights stage.**

I had never spoken in front of hundreds of people. I was extremely shy, and the idea **terrified me**. Still, I prepared every detail: I attended the rehearsals, wrote the script, and chose the photographs. I was convinced that **if I prepared enough, everything would go well.** It didn't.

On top of that, the event was sponsored by a whiskey brand, so the drinks just kept flowing.

In front of about 600 people, we started our presentation at full speed. In just two minutes, we'd covered material that was supposed to last ten.

We looked at each other. Silence. And we started to improvise.

For eight minutes, we tried to find a way to keep going. I laughed nervously, and my partner tried to invent where to take the story.

The audience didn't know exactly what was happening, but they could feel our discomfort.

At one point, someone raised a hand and **asked how many drinks we'd had.**

The whole room burst out laughing.

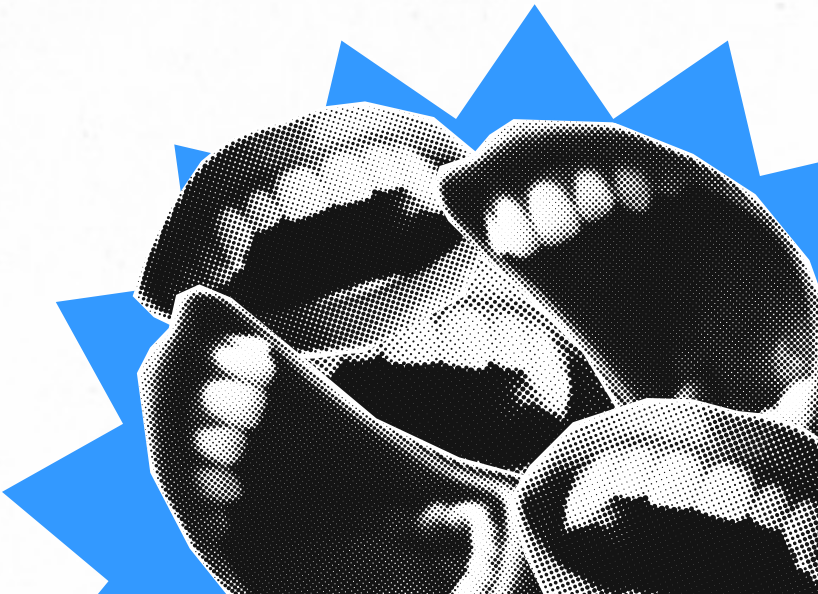
As if that weren't enough, the next speaker opened by saying he had been very nervous before going on stage, but that after seeing us, he had nothing left to fear.

For years, **that night confirmed everything I believed about myself: I wasn't cut out for public speaking**, and stages weren't for me.

But a few months later, **I changed careers** and moved into public relations.

I couldn't escape that fear. I had to pitch ideas, manage clients, moderate events, interview people, and train spokespeople. So **I started to practice.**

Over and over.



While analyzing interviews and helping others communicate their ideas more clearly, I discovered something that would have completely changed my perspective that night: **public speaking wasn't a talent** some people had and others didn't.

It was a skill. And like any skill, **it could be developed.**

Without knowing it, the stage where I felt I had made the biggest fool of myself became the **starting point** for developing one of the abilities that now defines my career the most.

SOPHIA'S KEY TAKEAWAYS

- One bad experience doesn't define what you're capable of in the future.
- Being prepared doesn't always mean feeling prepared.
- Fear doesn't always disappear before you act; often it fades through practice.
- The skills we most need to develop are often hiding behind the experiences we most want to avoid.
- Failure can become a training ground if you decide to try again.

Connect with Sophia!

"DON'T LET ONE BAD EXPERIENCE DEFINE YOUR ABILITIES. SOMETIMES THE PLACE WHERE YOU FAIL THE MOST IS EXACTLY WHERE THE SKILL YOU MOST NEED TO DEVELOP BEGINS."

Chapter 3

BIGGER THAN THE RESULT

How do you measure the success of something that's over?

Rodolfo spent a decade **looking at a single number** and calling his book a failure. Laura spent months asking herself **what she had done wrong** as CEO, after deciding to close the startup she had put everything into.

Both discovered, later on, that **the original metric never told the whole story.** An unexpected message from a reader. A classroom that would never have existed if the company had survived. The real impact showed up **where they weren't measuring.**

This **last chapter** is perhaps the most important one for a changemaker: a reminder that you're **building something bigger than the project in front of you.** Sometimes that "something bigger" only reveals itself after the immediate result hasn't turned out the way you planned.

THE BEST PROJECT I EVER HAD TO LET GO

By **Laura**, Fuckup Nights community leader in **Florence, Italy**

When I co-founded **MakeTank**, I was convinced we were building the future.

Our platform brought together Italian makers, artisans, and designers who sold products created with digital fabrication, such as 3D printing and laser cutting.

Within a few years, **we won a best innovative startup award** at the first European Maker Faire; I was named among 100 Italian innovators who would change the world, and I presented the company to American investors in Mountain View. I resigned from my job of nearly nine years.

Everything **pointed to extraordinary success.** But behind those achievements, there was a different reality.

Even after cutting costs to the bare minimum, **revenues weren't growing.** None of my co-founders was a developer, so we relied on external agencies and freelancers.

Our angel investors never released the second tranche of funding, and trends moved on. **We had gone out of fashion.**

We could **keep trying** to keep the company alive, **or accept** that it was time to close it.

We chose voluntary liquidation.

At that moment, I felt like a rather incapable CEO. **But "having failed" is not the same as "being a failure."** I tried, I failed, and I started again, building on the relationships the startup had created.

Those relationships led me to bringing **Fuckup Nights to Florence**, and finally to a new calling as a science teacher.

Today I talk with teenagers about mistakes, vulnerability, and getting back up. Many of them had **never had a space to talk about their own failures** until someone asked.

If MakeTank hadn't survived, I probably never would have reached that classroom. I have no regrets: **it was an amazing adventure.**

That's why I no longer see that decision as a startup failure. I see it as the beginning of **a much bigger mission.**

LAURA'S KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A successful project can also end when it stops being sustainable.
- Knowing how to close an initiative is as important as knowing how to start one.
- A project's value doesn't disappear when the organization no longer exists.
- Relationships and learning often outlive the business that produced them.
- Sometimes a professional failure opens the way to a purpose we never imagined.

Connect with Laura!

"DON'T CLING TO AN INITIATIVE JUST BECAUSE YOU'VE INVESTED A LOT IN IT. TRUE LEADERSHIP ALSO MEANS KNOWING WHEN TO CHANGE COURSE TO CREATE GREATER IMPACT."

THE WORST BESTSELLER OF MY LIFE

By **Rodolfo**, Fuckup Nights community leader in **Xalapa, Mexico**

When I published my first book, Bobolfo, **I was convinced it would be a bestseller.**

I pictured **packed auditoriums**, long **lines** of people waiting for signed copies, and thousands of readers taking in my story.

Even before it went on sale, I felt I was starting a new stage of my career.

The first months fed that **illusion**. Every talk was a chance to sell more books, and I thought the big moment was about to arrive.

But it never did.

Ten years later, I had to accept a reality that was hard to face: the book had sold **fewer than a thousand copies.**

For a long time, I reduced that entire project to a single number. **To me, it had been a failure.**

Until one day, after a talk, **a young man came up to me and said something** that completely changed how I understood success

"I had already decided to take my own life… but something you wrote made me stay."

Over the years, **more messages came from people who found hope**, made an important decision, or changed how they saw their lives because of a page in the book or a conversation that grew out of it.

That's when I understood that **I had spent a decade asking the wrong question.**

I kept asking how many books I had sold, when **the real question was how many lives I had managed to touch.**

Today I still dream of Bobolfo reaching many more readers. But **I no longer need that number to define the value of what I built.**

My book may not have become the bestseller I imagined.

But if it helped **even one person** decide to keep living, then it was **far more successful** than any sales chart could ever show.

RODOLFO'S KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Not every important metric fits in a spreadsheet.
- Reach and impact are not the same thing.
- A project can look small in numbers and be enormous in people's lives.
- Success changes when you stop asking how many you reached and start asking who you helped.
- Metrics can measure results, but not always the meaning of our work.

Connect with Rodolfo!

"ONE WAY TO PROCESS THE BLOWS IS MY "*GANAR*" (WIN) METHOD:

G – GOLPE / BLOW (NAME THE PAIN).
A – ACEPTACIÓN / ACCEPTANCE (ACKNOWLEDGE THE FAILURE).
N – NARRATIVA / NARRATIVE (HOW ARE YOU TELLING IT TO YOURSELF?).
A – ACCIÓN / ACTION (ACT FROM PURPOSE).
R – REDISEÑO / REDESIGN (REDEFINE WHAT SUCCESS MEANS TO YOU)."

Now It's Your Turn…

Iram, Saul, Madai, Sophia, Rodolfo, and Laura learned these lessons by **going through** their own failures. Then they decided to say them out loud, so someone else could recognize themselves and know they **weren't alone.**

Maybe you recognized something of yourself in one of these stories. You confused **activity with progress.** You measured success with the **wrong number.** You let go of something you **believed** in. Or you're still **waiting** for an answer that never came.

That doesn't make you any less of a changemaker. **It makes you a real one.**

Driving change isn't about having a perfect plan. It's about **accepting** that you don't know how something will turn out and deciding to **try anyway**. It's about moving forward after a closed door, and understanding that the value of what you build isn't always measured where you expected.

That's what this community is about: not celebrating failure or pretending it doesn't hurt, but taking away its power to define you.

Now you have six stories to bring to your team and open a conversation your culture may need: that it's okay to **try**, that the outcome is never guaranteed, and that failing doesn't have to be the end.

If you're willing to change something, sooner or later you'll have to learn to fail, too.

We hope these six stories help you do it better.

Fuckup NIGHTS

Take these conversations where they're needed most.

Failure is already happening in your **company**, your **community**, or your **city.** The question is whether there are spaces where it's safe to share it.

Discover how to bring Fuckup Nights to your organization or community.

Visit:
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