

Senior Reflection, Renuka Murthi



“Start where you are” felt like finally placing a critical puzzle piece that I’d been missing for all my life.

by Renuka Murthi



Being part of the BLI has taught me many important lessons—the value of belonging to a genuine community, mindful leadership, soft skills (such as public speaking and conflict resolution), and the importance of giving back, to name a few. However, nothing has resonated with me more than my favorite BLI habit, “start where you are.” All the habits are easy to read and understand, but internalizing them is an entirely different experience. In my case, internalizing “start where you are” felt like finally placing a critical puzzle piece that I’d been missing for all my life.

Before joining the BLI, I was a very impatient person—admittedly, I still kind of am. I was extremely intolerant to failure, and I’d give up on projects extremely easily when I inevitably encountered a roadblock that felt impossible to pass. This led to all of my goals seeming far too daunting to be worth attempting—I reasoned that it would be better not to try at all than to try to prove to myself that I couldn’t succeed. After all, it felt better to tell myself I wasn’t achieving what I want to achieve due to a lack of effort than a lack of ability. I grew complacent with the stagnation of my personal and professional growth, along with telling myself I’d “get around to” achieving all of my goals “eventually.”

Then, I began to engage with the BLI in several ways. First, I worked as a Leadership Teaching Fellow, which entailed teaching a class and mentoring student project teams on how to plan and execute projects. Through this class, I learned about fixed vs. growth mindset in a little more detail. I’d been exposed to the concepts before, but being an LTF made me realize that I was most definitely in a fixed mindset about myself. I’d used all my initial failures to label myself—stumbling over my words made me a “bad public speaker,” failing to resolve a conflict within a group made me a “bad mediator,” and so on. It was through my supervisor’s guidance that I learned that failure-based labels are useless—they stifle growth by casting failure in a negative light. I learned to view my less-than-perfect moments as opportunities for growth, and soon enough, I became more comfortable with failing over and over again because the satisfaction of growing outweighed the disappointment that accompanied messing up. This actually turned me into a good public speaker and mediator, which are two skills I definitely didn’t possess naturally.

As both an LTF and an Applied Leadership Fellow (ALF), the BLI position I filled after four semesters of teaching, I also learned that “failure” is a state people define for themselves, and this definition largely depends on the types of goals they set for themselves. Prior to the BLI, I had been setting quite vague, daunting, insurmountable goals for myself.

“Write a novel.”

“Launch that startup.”

“Learn Clair de Lune on the piano.”

Every time I had trouble figuring out how to phrase a sentence, working out my business plan, or learning a convoluted line of the song, I felt like such a failure—how could I not? I’d set so much distance between where I was at and what I considered “success.” As an LTF and ALF, I learned to set more manageable goals for myself. Building a house sounds daunting, as did the large goals I’d set for myself before, but reframing success in terms of laying a single brick made it so much easier to set myself in motion and actually work towards those goals without labeling myself as a failure for not achieving immediate total success.

In short, my experiences working for the BLI and working on self-development through the Leadership Certificate program taught me to accept, even embrace, failure for its value as a vehicle of growth and improvement. Avoiding failure may have been better for my ego, and it may have been the more comfortable option in the short-term, but swallowing my pride and letting myself experience those failures actually enabled me to get better at skills I’d previously concluded “couldn’t possibly be for me.” I also truly learned to start where I was by reframing success in terms of small steps that lead towards my larger overarching goals. I’m so thankful that the BLI has taught me to shift my views of failure and success because these changes in perspective have made me willing to take the first steps—and actually feel proud of taking those steps—of the many marathons I’d like to run.

— **Renuka Murthi** is a senior, majoring in business and minoring in statistics. She was involved in the BLI as a Peer Facilitator for four semesters and is now a BLI Applied Leadership Fellow on the grants and funding team. Outside the BLI, she enjoys getting involved in her consulting club, painting, playing piano, and writing. She plans to pursue careers in management consulting and writing fiction.

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