THERE IS FREEDOM IN FAILURE

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Key Message

Failure, when faced with honesty and reflection, can become a source of professional freedom — the beginning of real growth.

The Moment

At the end of Year 4 of medical school, I walked into my final OSCE station with the usual swirl of self-talk: I can do this. I can't. I am ready. I am not.

When the bell rang, I stepped forward, introduced myself, and worked through the case. The relief when it ended was immense. I believed I had done well.

Days later, I learned I had earned a historically low mark, paired with feedback so cutting it could have sliced the sturdiest confidence in two.

I read it in shock during my lunch break at a summer sports school, with only minutes before returning to be medically responsible for more than one hundred children. Never before had I received such a result inconsistent with both my academic record and recollection of the station. That afternoon, I fought to steady my voice and hold back my tears.

The Realisation

The feedback did not match my memory of the station, my performance, or my abilities.

When I raised this, hoping for clarification or a review, I came to understand that raising concerns about the examination process was not always encouraged. Those who did were often perceived as challenging the system rather than seeking fairness.

In that moment, I felt like I had failed twice. First in the station, then in seeking fairness.
But with distance, I began to see what that experience had given me.

The Freedom

I learned how to steady myself in real time, to perform under pressure even when my confidence was under attack.
I developed the habit of self-assessment, extracting my own lessons when official feedback was not provided.
I recognised the limits of institutional support and the importance of seeking mentors and peers who will challenge me honestly.
And most importantly, I discovered that competence can survive criticism, misunderstanding, and even the appearance of failure.
That day taught me that resilience in medicine is not built only in success, but in the moments we feel small, unseen, and unheard.
Strength can be silent, expressed in the act of returning to care for others while quietly nursing your own wounds.
I would not have chosen that failure, but I can celebrate it now. It tested me in ways no textbook or simulation could, and it proved that setbacks can sharpen your skills as much as successes do. Failure is the greatest gift a person can receive in their education.
My career did not end at that OSCE door. I am still here, still learning, still growing — and I still have something to give.