

The Success Trap: When Help Feels Like Failure

LAURA DABNEY, MD

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If you're like most of my patients, people probably tell you that you ought to be proud of your success: money, job, car, house. Perhaps you've even earned an impressive title—CEO, President, Doctor. But what people don't know is that, for you, there's still something missing. A big something. Perhaps it's stability in your relationships. Or you anger too easily. Maybe you can't even name it. What you do know is that, despite all your victories, life is still deeply painful.

A book can help you understand how your engine works, but you trust only an expert mechanic to take it apart.

For the highly successful, needing help can feel like a failure.

Even with the pain, it's not easy to walk through my door, and patients come to me with all sorts of stories. Some have tried therapy without benefit. Others have been pushed by friends or family. Still others come because they don't know what else to do. Nearly universal, however, is their deep sense of failure. It doesn't matter what car a patient drives to the office or what title they have on their business card, to be hurting and sitting in my office feels as if they've failed in a significant way. Seeking help can feel like anything but a success.

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Help and expertise are not the same thing.

The reality, however, is that help and expertise are not equivalent investments of time or resources. A book can help you understand how your engine works, but you trust only an expert mechanic to take it apart. The same is true of emotional health. One of my patients is a surgeon who once said to me, “No one would be expected to perform an appendectomy on themselves, so why should I try to solve my emotional trauma on my own? That’s your expertise.” He’s exactly right. Like a surgeon, my medical expertise is identifying the source of your pain, but instead of finding it in your physical body, the clues I search for are hidden deeply within your unconscious. It’s careful, delicate work that takes commitment and time—the same you’d expect of your surgeon, your mechanic, the best negotiator on your sales team. In your area of expertise, whatever it may be, you likely know that just because you can’t achieve a goal on your own, doesn’t mean you can’t find the right expert to get you there. After all, success isn’t about knowing everything, it’s about knowing where to look for the answers.



Learn more about how Dr. Dabney can help you at drlabdabney.com