

BE A
SUCCESS
MAVERICK

VOL. 2

*How Ordinary People
Do It Different
to Achieve Extraordinary Results*

PAUL FINCK

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FAILURE IS NOT FOVEVER

Amanda Finck

My first year of college looked different than anyone had anticipated, myself included. After a semester of random bouts of double vision, an inability to focus or concentrate, a constantly racing heartbeat, and tremors, I was eventually diagnosed with ADD and a reading disability. I was subsequently advised to drop biology and my first-year writing course and told that *not everyone is cut out for the sciences*. As I traveled home for winter break, I didn't know what to make of the semester that shattered my career visions and goals. However, shortly thereafter on my eighteenth birthday, my cousin, who was studying to become a nurse, pointed out that the true culprit behind my challenges was Graves Disease and Graves Ophthalmopathy, autoimmune diseases marked by the thyroid's overproduction of the T3 and T4 hormones. Due to the severity of these health issues, I took the next semester off for thyroid removal surgery and recovery. The events and decisions made over the following six months would set the foundation for my life to follow.

During my time away from school, I had to make decisions that would alter the trajectory of my career and life forever. *Do I retake the courses I "wasn't cut out for"? Do I even return to Gettysburg? What if my advisors were right? What if, even after my thyroid was removed, I still wasn't cut out for the rigor of the sciences?* My advisors' doubts became my doubts, and their fears became mine. My previously unwavering confidence was now dwindling in the wake of my failure. *How could my first year of college be completely derailed by two small hormones?* The science must be wrong—there's no way that all of my challenges were because of this one disease. At one point I convinced myself that the doctors just felt bad that I wasn't as good at science as I thought I'd be.

The months following my diagnosis were spent attending countless doctor appointments, as they attempted to shrink my thyroid before its

excision. My heart rate, just like my thyroid levels, was extremely elevated, putting me at risk for a heart attack. This meant I wasn't allowed to exercise, work, or even drink coffee, leaving countless hours to reflect and feel remorseful. My critical eye was no longer being applied to understanding scientific findings. Instead, I was using my deductive reasoning skills to logic through why I didn't deserve a second chance. Only later did I realize that this was out of a fear of a second failure that wouldn't be able to be explained away by medical ailments.

The second-guessing that plagued me served no purpose beyond self-pity. Ultimately there was no way to tell for certain that my concentration and avid memory would be restored, but I knew that I needed to take the leap of faith in myself. No safety nets. No second-guessing. No more "what if I fail?"

I decided to return to school, and my career in the sciences grew exponentially. I was invited to participate in HHMI-funded first-year research investigating the global decline of amphibians. From there I was accepted as X-Sig Summer Fellow studying synergistic biofilm partners and the role of the replisome in *E.coli*'s response to fluoroquinolones. I spent the two remaining summers interning at Janssen Pharmaceuticals in the Hematological Malignancies subdivision of the Oncological Translational Research group studying Acute Myeloid Leukemia. In addition to excelling in my classwork, I served as a research assistant, a peer-science mentor in the lab, and a peer-learning associate for classes such as Cell Biology and Organic Chemistry. Not only did I graduate with honors in my biology major and chemistry minor, but the same academic advisor who told me that not everyone is cut out for the sciences handed me my Magna Cum Laude honors cord at graduation.

Much like my transformation in the classroom, my later success in research was preceded by initial failure as well. The summer prior to working at Janssen, I had applied to twelve Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REUs), an internship, and an externship. I got denied from all twelve REUs, the internship, and the externship. While following up with the intern coordinator at Janssen, thanking him for his consideration, he informed me there was a possible opening in an alternate department. Later that week, I had a scheduled half-hour interview for the potential position. That interview went for an entire hour, and after a riveting conversation, I thought the position was mine. Unfortunately, they decided

to hire a postdoctoral fellow (a friend of mine) for the project instead. Several weeks later, my friend informed me she was declining the Janssen intern position because she got an REU in California. Thus, I sent the intern coordinator another email thanking him for the second opportunity, despite ultimately being rejected. I also requested that he consider me for any position that may arise, knowing that my friend had declined the position hours beforehand. On this third attempt, I finally maneuvered my way into Janssen, conducting research in my dream scientific field. As a bonus, it was also the highest-paid opportunity. After a summer of hard work, I was offered a position for the next summer, with a raise. In our exit meeting, the intern coordinator also commented on my persistence in securing my position as a valuable trait as I proceed in my research endeavors. My experiences there not only lead to a job offer at Janssen, but also gave me a platform to establish my passion for cancer immunology research, which played a quintessential role in my subsequent job offer from Yale University following graduation. There I worked as a Postgraduate Research Assistant in the Biomedical Engineering Department investigating CAR-T cell therapy at the single-cell level in collaboration with UPenn. During my time there I also received National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship funding, a prestigious and selective award providing an alternative funding source for my PhD.

Now, as an Immunology PhD student at UPenn, I plan to gain the training I need to effect the most change in the field of translational immunology. Though the scientific community is driven by data and focused on facts, my transcript was not what got my foot in the door. Instead of relying on my grades, I depended on my passion and persistence to infiltrate the often-unbending walls of the sciences. While unconventional, it set the stage for my journey in research and was often what set me apart. Refusing to allow failure to be a deterrent from my goals was not just a means to an end to rebound from my medical leave. This mindset is a conscious choice I continually apply to my research, my studies, and my life. It's not that I don't fail—it's that I've used each inevitable failure as a stepping-stone for downstream success. By channeling my failure into motivation and persistence, I erase the obstacle of fear. I no longer ask, "What if I fail?" It's been supplanted by the statement "So what if I do?" By taking away the fear of failure, I now take greater risks which tend to lead to even greater rewards.



Amanda Finck earned a BS in Biology and a minor in Chemistry, from Gettysburg College in December 2017. There she conducted research in Zakiya Whatley's lab primarily studying biofilm formation. Amanda got her first taste of immuno-oncology research at Janssen with Dr. Anna Kalota establishing long-term culture conditions that sustain primary cells from AML patient samples. She later used this platform to determine correlations between T cell phenotypes and Bispecific Monoclonal Antibody efficacy. Following graduation, she worked in the Rong Fan lab at Yale University in the Biomedical Engineering Department where she fabricated single-cell transcriptomic and proteomic devices to investigate CAR-T cell therapy in collaboration with Carl June. As an Immunology PhD student at UPenn with NSF-GRFP funding, Amanda is looking to pursue her interests in bioinformatics, immuno-oncology, immunotherapeutics, cellular engineering, T cells, and/or the solid TME, using innovative approaches to investigate all of the above.

WIN, SET, GO

Stephen Finck

I have run every day for the last five years (discounting taking one day a week off and minor injuries along the way). Since I am a long-distance runner, this constant effort toward keeping my aerobic fitness in shape is essential to success. In high school, this is important. In college, it is imperative for success, with races jumping from five kilometers (just over three miles) to eight kilometers (just under five miles) long. Since the cross-country season isn't long enough to get into peak shape by the end, summer training out of season can largely determine one's success for the season. I wanted to succeed at this endeavor. The challenge was how? What did I have to do to make it happen?

My 2019 spring track season was filled with injuries that inhibited me from meeting my goals for the season. To make up for this, over the summer I decided I would follow my coach's training plan, and even add more mileage on top of it. I felt I could handle it. My coach suggested that I run fifty to fifty-five miles a week. I decided to make my goal over sixty miles a week by the end of the summer. This would be my highest mileage summer and would require extreme dedication. Even with detractions of vacations, I stayed on task with my goals. I spent five days in Orlando, Florida, where I walked upwards of ten miles a day at the amusement parks and ran eight miles a day training. Arguably worse (or better, depending on how you look at it), I also spent ten days in Las Vegas, Nevada, where I ran at least ten miles each day in over 100-degree heat. It wasn't much easier at home, where I squeezed my runs into my schedule while working a full-time job. By the time I had gotten back to campus, I was the strongest I had ever been when entering a cross country season.

My strength was evident when I ran a personal best (PR) in the 5k early in the season by eight seconds while coming in second for my team. That broke my previous PR from three years prior. Additionally, the next week I

broke my PR again by another 14 seconds and securing my second-place spot on the team. With these shattering PRs, my season was looking very bright, and I was almost certainly going to PR in my first 8k.

The night before the race, I ate my standard pasta dish to carbo-load, made sure to hydrate properly, and got to bed at a decent time. The day of the race, I thought back to all the work that I had put in to get to where I was: the countless miles I ran over the summer, the many weekends I stayed in my room to get good rest instead of going out, and my huge twenty-two-second PR in the 5k. I had done everything right and had attempted to use these points as evidence that I was ready to run a strong 8k. My goal time going into the race was 27:30, which would have been a massive PR from my time of 28:40 the previous year.

With everything going perfectly, the only thing holding me back was my mindset. Although I knew I could succeed, I honestly didn't think I would. A 5:30 mile pace for five miles seemed incredibly daunting at the starting line, and my nerves got the best of me. I acted confidently at the start line with the hopes that it would somehow change my beliefs. This hope was short-lived as my first mile was just on pace. This scared me. Usually the first mile is the fastest since everyone is just getting out and finding their positioning. I ran through the three-mile mark thirty seconds behind where I wanted to be, but it was the next mile that was the worst. Due to my exhaustion, I missed the marker for the four-mile mark, which only made my weak mental game spiral downward. The fourth and fifth miles felt like forever as I managed to trudge myself through the finish line. With a 28:38, I had accomplished a mere two-second PR and finished fifth for my team. Although it was good, this was still a huge disappointment for me. I had aimed to do so much better. I wanted to achieve so much more.

When I realized that I missed my mark, it was already in the past. I had to take it for what it was and focus on the next race. It was a PR after all, and I did have two weeks until the next race—two weeks until my next chance to prove myself. I chose not to ignore my disappointing race. I chose to use it to motivate me instead. It became a burning flame inside of me that pushed me to perform just a little bit better in each workout and would remind me to push even harder at the next race. The next two weeks became two of my best training weeks, and I got my long-run up to fourteen miles (my longest to date). I was ready to redeem myself for the last race. The bus was leaving at 5:20 a.m. for the early morning race. I knew this

would impact the amount of sleep I got, but I was prepared to go to bed at a reasonable time.

The night before the race, I had everything set for the morning: my uniform and shoes were laid out, my new racing spikes were packed in my bag, and my mind was focused on hitting my old goal of 27:30. At 11:30 p.m., I got into bed, ready to sleep. I restlessly tossed and turned, thinking about how I would race the next day and going over my planned strategy for pacing throughout the race. At 12:45 a.m., I was still awake. I attempted again to fall asleep. This is when I started to panic about not sleeping enough the night before a race. Doubts started to creep into my mind, and I began to think this would be the reason I wouldn't run 27:30. I got out of bed, completely awake, and decided to do some reading to unwind. Picking up *See You at the Top* by Zig Zigler, I read about how individuals will act the way they see themselves, which sometimes prevents them from the success they want. I have a high self-image and quickly decided to reprogram myself. I realized that I was in complete control of my race and that no matter how much sleep I got, I would still run a 27:30 8k. With this reminder, I got back into bed at 2:15 a.m. and fell asleep almost immediately!

The next morning, I woke up ready to race and kept this confidence in my thoughts through the entire race. I told myself I was wide awake and that my minimal sleep didn't affect me. I told myself I was going to run 27:30. I read the statements printed on the insides of my new racing spikes to remind me of my plan: "Bring it all" on the left and "Leave it all" on the right. I completed my stretches and warm up and found myself on the line with the burning determination that had carried over from the last race. As soon as the gun went off, all that crossed my mind was the pace I had to run—5:30 per mile—and the belief that I was able to do this. I started just below the pace, which was expected and perfect. Two miles in, I had caught up to the front pack of my team and just kept going. With one mile left, I had pulled into first place for my team with no slowing down in sight. I held on, and when I finished, the results read "Stephen Finck 27:24," and I immediately broke into a huge smile. I was not surprised to have come in first for the first time in my college career. I was not surprised to have run over a minute PR. These were all things I knew I could and would do. Once I decided this, there was nothing holding me back, and there will be nothing

holding me back in the future. I knew I was destined to accomplish it. I believed it. I visualized it. And now I had manifested it.

So much of my life was centered on the idea that good preparation leads to success. Now I realize that the key component that needs to be prepared is my mindset. With this newfound knowledge, I not only have confidence that my future will be great—I KNOW IT.



Stephen Finck is a sophomore at Franklin & Marshall College, part of the graduating class of 2022 with an intended double major in business and psychology and a strong interest in how these two fields impact marketing and management. He has been running competitively on cross country and track & field teams since his freshman year of high school and continues to be a student-athlete at F&M as a division III level throughout the school year. He works as the product and finance manager at an on-campus late-night eatery. He hopes that his growing knowledge of the business world will allow him to land internships and job opportunities that will further his career.

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