

Building the Resilience Needed to Thrive

Resilience is the ability to cope with adversity and adapt to change. It is the number one defense against daily stressors such as deadlines, ever-increasing goals, and the need to stretch every dollar. Resilient people experience less stress and bounce back from setbacks quickly. This allows them to not only be more productive, but to enjoy a higher level of satisfaction than their less resilient peers.

Resilience, like a muscle, is something that can be developed in anyone and strengthened over time. Building resilience involves consciously managing our thoughts and behaviors in a way that enables us to frame challenges and setbacks effectively and bounce back quickly. How resilient are you?

- Do unexpected difficulties overwhelm you?
- Are you able to see the light at the end of the tunnel or do you get lost in the darkness?
- Do you have confidence in yourself to persevere or hope someone else will step up?
- Are you able to express strong emotions effectively or does your anger, frustration, disappointment, etc. inhibit your ability to solve the problem and work effectively with others?

People don't react to setbacks and challenges the same way, so what might work for one person won't work for another. Below you will find four strategies you can use to respond with resilience in the moment and 4 strategies for developing greater resilience over the long term.

4 strategies for responding with resilience in the moment:

1. **Breathe.** Stressful situations can trigger the fight or flight response in people. In this state, people no longer have access to the rational part of their brain and instead respond emotionally, making a bad situation worse. Breathing is an easy strategy you can use to help counteract this response, enabling you to think more clearly. Slow your breathing down to a count of six on the inhale and 6 on the exhale. Paying attention to your breathing in any stressful situation can help you to both stay engaged and be more effective.

2. **Make a plan.** We often feel out of control when life knocks us down. You will get back up faster if you make a plan focusing on what you have control over. The next time you feel overwhelmed by deadlines or goals, sit down and make a plan. As you execute your plan, your sense of control and strength will increase, enabling you to bounce back faster from a setback.
3. **Look for the positive in others.** Different personalities and conflicting goals can make it challenging at times to work effectively with others, slowing productivity. Counter the tendency to focus on what bothers you by consciously looking for what you like or respect in the other person and search for common ground. There may be more there than you realize. Implementing this strategy can help you get through challenges with others faster and develop more productive and satisfying relationships.
4. **View challenges through an optimistic lens.** Optimists look at challenges from a perspective of personal power. They see setbacks as temporary and believe they can overcome them through their effort and ability. Anyone can do this by simply remembering that bad events are temporary and looking for a specific action to take to improve the situation. Framing challenging situations or setbacks in this manner will help you stay focused and continue moving forward.

4 strategies for building greater resilience long term:

1. **Find the lesson.** Learning from mistakes helps us appreciate them for the lessons they bring and minimizes the likelihood of repeating them. Every time you have a setback or make a mistake, ask what you could have done differently to prevent it and what lesson you can take away to use next time. Each lesson provides tools you can use to help you adapt to future challenges.
2. **Take a look in the mirror.** How do you view yourself? Research shows that people who have a positive view of themselves and their abilities are more able to cope with setbacks. They tend to believe that they can find a way through the challenges they face. Those who believe others are more capable than they are tend to wait for someone else to fix the problem, causing them to struggle longer. Make a list of your strengths and accomplishments. Focus on your role in your success to build your self-esteem and self-confidence. It will help you weather the next storm.

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3. **Prepare physically to battle life's challenges and setbacks.** Getting enough sleep, exercise, and eating right gives you greater physical endurance when things get tough as well as greater mental clarity to help you with problem solving. Research shows that any amount of sleep deprivation impairs mental clarity, which decreases productivity and impairs decision-making. If you have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning, it is an indication that you need to find a way to get more sleep.
 4. **Develop a support network.** Trying to do everything alone is like carrying a log uphill by yourself. The more people you have helping you carry that log, the easier it will be on you and the better you'll feel when you get to the top. In addition, you'll have more energy to go back down and carry the next log up. Start with a goal of getting together with a friend 2 times per month or build your professional network by two people per month. Nurture those relationships and you'll find that your resilience will increase as your support network grows.

We can't prevent challenges and setbacks; they are part of life. We can, however, be proactive rather than reactive in our response. If you make the time to build your resilience, you will experience less turmoil in the moment and bounce back faster, setting yourself up to be ready for the next one.