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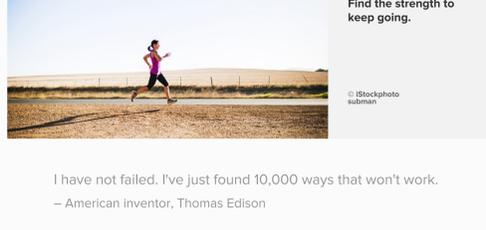
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# Developing Resilience

Overcoming and Growing From Setbacks

(246) ★★★★★

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I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.  
 – American inventor, Thomas Edison

According to legend, Thomas Edison made thousands of prototypes of the incandescent light bulb before he finally got it right. And, since the prolific inventor was awarded more than 1,000 patents, it's easy to imagine him failing on a daily basis in his lab at Menlo Park.

In spite of struggling with "failure" throughout his entire working life, Edison never let it get the best of him. All of these "failures," which are reported to be in the tens of thousands, simply showed him how not to invent something. His resilience gave the world some of the most amazing inventions of the early 20th century, such as the phonograph, the telegraph, and the motion picture.

It's hard to imagine what our world would be like if Edison had given up after his first few failures. His inspiring story forces us to look at our own lives – do we have the resilience that we need to overcome our challenges? Or do we let our failures derail our dreams? And what could we accomplish if we had the strength not to give up?

In this article, we'll examine resilience: what it is, why we need it, and how to develop it; so that we have the strength and fortitude to overcome adversity, and to keep on moving forward towards our dreams and our goals.

## The Importance of Resilience

Resilience (or resiliency) is our ability to adapt and bounce back when things don't go as planned. Resilient people don't wallow or dwell on failures; they acknowledge the situation, learn from their mistakes, and then move forward.

According to the research of leading psychologist, Susan Kobasa, there are three elements that are essential to resilience:

- Challenge** – Resilient people view a difficulty as a challenge, not as a paralyzing event. They look at their failures and mistakes as lessons to be learned from, and as opportunities for growth. They don't view them as a negative reflection on their abilities or self-worth.
- Commitment** – Resilient people are committed to their lives and their goals, and they have a compelling reason to get out of bed in the morning. Commitment isn't just restricted to their work – they commit to their relationships, their friendships, the causes they care about, and their religious or spiritual beliefs.
- Personal Control** – Resilient people spend their time and energy focusing on situations and events that they have control over. Because they put their efforts where they can have the most impact, they feel empowered and confident. Those who spend time worrying about uncontrollable events can often feel lost, helpless, and powerless to take action.

Another leading psychologist, **Martin Seligman**, says the way that we explain setbacks to ourselves is also important. (He talks in terms of optimism and pessimism rather than resilience, however, the effect is essentially the same.) This "explanatory style" is made up of three main elements:

- Permanence** – People who are optimistic (and therefore have more resilience) see the effects of bad events as temporary rather than permanent. For instance, they might say "My boss didn't like the work I did on that project" rather than "My boss never likes my work."
- Pervasiveness** – Resilient people don't let setbacks or bad events affect other unrelated areas of their lives. For instance, they would say "I'm not very good at this" rather than "I'm no good at anything."
- Personalization** – People who have resilience don't blame themselves when bad events occur. Instead, they see other people, or the circumstances, as the cause. For instance, they might say "I didn't get the support I needed to finish that project successfully," rather than "I messed that project up because I can't do my job."

In our **Expert Interview with Dr. Cal Crow**, the co-founder and Program Director of the Center for Learning Connections, Dr. Crow identified several further attributes that are common in resilient people:

- Resilient people have a **positive image of the future**. That is, they maintain a positive outlook, and envision brighter days ahead.
- Resilient people have **solid goals**, and a desire to **achieve those goals**.
- Resilient people are **empathetic and compassionate**, however, they don't waste time worrying what others think of them. They maintain healthy relationships, but don't bow to peer pressure.
- Resilient people never think of themselves as victims – they focus their time and energy on changing the things that they have control over.

How we view adversity and stress strongly affects how we succeed, and this is one of the most significant reasons that having a resilient mindset is so important.

The fact is that we're going to fall from time to time: it's an inevitable part of living that we make mistakes and occasionally fall flat on our faces. The only way to avoid this is to live a shuttered and meager existence, never trying anything new or taking a risk. Few of us want a life like that!

Instead, we should have the courage to go after our dreams, despite the very real risk that we'll fail in some way or other. Being resilient means that when we do fail, we bounce back, we have the strength to learn the lessons we need to learn, and we can move on to bigger and better things.

Overall, resilience gives us the power to **overcome setbacks**, so that we can live the life we've always imagined.

## Build Your Resilience in the Workplace

The good news is that even if you're not a naturally resilient person, you can learn to develop a resilient mindset and attitude. To do so, incorporate the following into your daily life:

- Get enough **sleep** and exercise, and learn to manage stress. When you take care of your mind and body, you're better able to cope effectively with challenges in your life.
- Practice **thought awareness**. Resilient people don't let negative thoughts derail their efforts. Instead, they consistently practice positive thinking. Also, "listen" to how you talk to yourself when something goes wrong – if you find yourself making statements that are **permanent, pervasive or personalizing**, correct these thoughts in your mind.
- Practice **Cognitive Restructuring** to change the way that you think about negative situations and bad events.
- Learn from your mistakes and failures. Every mistake has the power to teach you something important; so don't stop understanding until you've found the lesson in every situation. Also, make sure that you understand the idea of "**post-traumatic growth**" – there can be real truth in the saying that "if it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger."
- Choose your response. Remember, we all experience bad days and we all go through our share of crises. But we have a choice in how we respond; we can choose to react negatively or in a panic, or we can choose to remain calm and logical to find a solution. Your reaction is always up to you.
- Maintain perspective. Resilient people understand that, although a situation or crisis may seem overwhelming in the moment, it may not make that much of an impact over the long-term. Try to avoid blowing events out of proportion.
- If you don't already, learn to set **SMART, effective personal goals** – it's incredibly important to set and achieve goals that match your **values**, and to learn from your experiences.
- Build your **self confidence**. Remember, resilient people are confident that they're going to succeed eventually, despite the setbacks or stresses that they might be facing. This belief in themselves also enables them to take risks: when you develop confidence and a strong sense of self, you have the strength to keep moving forward, and to take the risks you need to get ahead.
- Develop **strong relationships** with your colleagues. People who have strong connections at work are more resistant to stress, and they're happier in their role. This also goes for your personal life: the more real friendships you develop, the more resilient you're going to be, because you have a strong support network to fall back on. (Remember that treating people with compassion and **empathy** is very important here.)
- Focus on being flexible. Resilient people understand that things change, and that carefully-made plans may, occasionally, need to be amended or scrapped.

### Key Points

Resilience is the ability to bounce back when things don't go as planned. According to psychologist, Susan Kobasa, there are three main elements that resilient people possess. These are challenge, commitment, and control.

You can develop resilience in several ways. First, take care to exercise regularly and get enough sleep, so that you can control stress more easily. The stronger you feel physically and emotionally, the easier it is for you to overcome challenges.

Focus on thinking positively, and try to learn from the mistakes you make. Build strong relationships with colleagues and friends, so that you have a support network to fall back on. Also, set specific and achievable personal goals that match your values, and work on building your self-confidence.

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**PEDLERSJ** 2020-10-28 08:26:17 ★★★★★

This articulates so well what I am working with in restorative supervision for my colleagues working under high stress during COVID (and myself). Thank you

**WillMac** 2020-10-02 12:46:16 ★★★★★

**HappyPatty68** 2020-09-05 15:54:25 ★★★★★

Thanks for the great article. I will return and read it multiple times.

**Non Member** 2020-08-24 06:26:30 ★★★★★

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### Comments (26)

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- BillT wrote**
- Hi OLMmchurch,
- Thank you so much for that great feedback. I fully agree with you when you say "How we choose to handle this crisis or any other for that matter is totally an individual choice..."
- BillT  
Mind Tools Team
- [Report](#)
- OLMmchurch wrote**
- Very good article I Quite appropriate to the challenging time we All are facing presently. Yes, we need to be reminded that we are going through an incubation period with promise of new Life. How we choose to handle this crisis or any other for that matter is totally an individual choice . Thank you, once more for your support .
- [Report](#)
- Michele wrote**
- Hi Bradford61,
- The language we use with others and in self-talk is powerful. Your explanation of how language creates our reality reminds me of a phrase used in appreciative inquiry: our words create worlds.
- Thank you for sharing your research with us!
- Michele  
Mind Tools Team
- [Report](#)
- Bradford61 wrote**
- Kia ora from New Zealand, In regards to - 'self-talk' The language we use shapes the realities we live in and the realities we create. One of the most powerful ways you influence others is to pay conscious attention to the language you use.
- 'Our practices are shaped by our language. Sometimes we shape our world deliberately when we are aware. ...mostly, we are unaware of how the ways in which we language our realities create and restrict the possibilities of life'. Kotze 2004
- The key thing for me is the affect that self-talk can have on others. I was going to say we don't live in a bubble however, given current circumstances that is not the case!
- 'The ways we talk together have a profound impact on relationships, on the quality of collaboration, and collective intelligence that emerges, and significantly, on the achievement of learning improvement and transformation'.
- Dalton, 2010  
Nga mihi nui (and stay safe!)
- [Report](#)
- Michele wrote**
- Hi bill@quarryhawk.com,
- Thank you for your comment. I agree that resilient people own their failures. What differentiates the resilient from those less so is their determination to learn from their experiences. They just don't give up. When I read the section on Seligman's personalization, I interpreted it differently. What I understood the sentences you quoted to mean is that resilient people don't generalize unfavourable events to a lack of ability. Instead, they seek to find the cause.
- Michele  
Mind Tools Team
- [Report](#)
- bill@quarryhawk.com wrote**
- I can embrace most of what I am reading here, but there is one sticking point: You reference psychologist Martin Seligman who describes 3 elements of how the resilient person explains setbacks to themselves. I have to disagree with the 3rd one; Personalization – People who have resilience don't blame themselves when bad events occur. Instead, they see other people, or the circumstances, as the cause. For instance, they might say "I didn't get the support I needed to finish that project successfully," rather than "I messed that project up because I can't do my job."
- A resilient person does not internally shunt blame or responsibility for failure to other people in order to feel better about themselves. A resilient person can only find peace within themselves by taking personal ownership of failures and finding ways to overcome them. They understand that they cannot control all the factors of a given event, but that they can control and take responsibility for how they respond to those factors.
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- Midgie wrote**
- Thank you for your question about citing our resources. When I have taught university students about referencing using the Harvard Referencing System, you are to use the company name if there is no author mentioned from an internet source. When there is no specific year, you are to use the year you accessed the document.
- For more information about citing Mind Tools, please see our helpspages: Cite https://www.mindtools.com/php/Permissions.php?e=rdpermissionslpdesk#Cite Good luck with your paper.
- Midgie  
Mind Tools Team
- [Report](#)
- wrote**
- when was this article posted and who are/s the author so i can cite it on my paper.
- [Report](#)
- BillT wrote**
- Hi ms\_julie,
- As you suggest, our self talk has a strong influence on such things as our confidence, our ability to take on challenging tasks, and so on. Thank you for the comment.
- [Report](#)
- ms\_julie wrote**
- The way we talk to ourselves, controls our very being
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By the Mind Tools Content Team

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**Self-Mastery**

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REFERENCES

Seligman, M. 'Learned Optimism' (2006). Vintage Publishing.

Kobasa, S. C. (1979). 'Stressful Life Events, Personality, and Health – Inquiry into Hardiness.' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(1), 1–11.

Maddi, S.R. and Kobasa, S.C. (1984). 'The Hardy Executive: Health Under Stress.' Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin.

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