

FIVE STEPS TO BUILDING RESILIENCE

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO BE HUMAN

1. GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO BE HUMAN

Acknowledge that negative emotions like sadness, anxiety, and disappointment are simply part of the human experience, and the ways that we respond to those kinds of setbacks have important implications for our overall well-being. Trying to undo or not feel those emotions when they come up will often backfire and make us feel them even more intensely.

USE FAILURES AND SETBACKS AS LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

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Like a lot of other things, failure is neither inherently positive nor is it negative, but the beliefs we hold about it make it positive or negative. As Winston Churchill once said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." Maybe something didn't turn out as we hoped or expected, but there are likely important lessons that could be gleaned from the experience, which can serve us well in the future. Plus, we are gaining more and more awareness today of how successful people have gotten to where they are, and we now see that for most it has involved a circuitous path with stumbles along the way. The most successful people will tell you that in order to achieve their success they had to learn a lot along the way. Often, a very effective way to learn where there's still work to be done, or to figure out what needs to change in our approach, is through failure—trying things one way, identifying what doesn't work, and then making the appropriate modifications.

DO NOT COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS

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Often when we are feeling down we will start to compare ourselves with others who appear happy and successful, which is counterproductive for making ourselves feel better. Though it's easier said than done, it's much better to compare ourselves only to our own internal standards and values. Social media (especially sites like Facebook) often exaggerate how much better off others are in comparison to how we are feeling at a give time. Limiting how much time we spend on these sites is important. Research has shown that the more time people spend on social media, the lower their self-esteem is, along with several other outcomes that are all negative, such as fewer positive emotions, less optimism, less sleep, less motivation, more homesickness in college students, and perhaps most ironically, feeling less socially connected to others.

FOCUS ON THE PROCESS RATHER THAN THE OUTCOME

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People who focus more on the process than the outcome of their work tend to remain motivated in the face of setbacks and are more likely to persevere on future tasks, even when the work is very challenging. They even voluntarily go for more challenging work when they could have gone with something easier. We call this a growth mindset, as opposed to a fixed mindset in which people focus only on the end outcome and superficial characteristics that get them there; this often leads to premature burnout at the first sign things aren't turning out as they had hoped, as opposed to the growth mindset, which is energized in such circumstances.

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT FAILURE IS IMPORTANT FOR GROWTH

5. FOCUS ON THE PROCESS RATHER THAN THE OUTCOME

There's other research showing that adults who had to overcome a moderate level of adversity while growing up tend to have the greatest outcomes later in life because they have had to engage their social support networks and develop the coping mechanisms that are necessary to negotiate life's challenges. Developing these skills early on comes in handy for bouncing back from later hardships and responding to future adversity. The people who have the strongest psychological health later in life are often those who have learned how to fail. They've learned how to pick themselves back up after being knocked down, reflect on the experience, grow from it, and soldier on.

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