

# Resilient People Aren't Stronger — They Know How To Bounce Back

[MOREY STETTNER](#)

We like to think we're resilient — [until adversity strikes](#). It's easy to buckle when beset by bad luck.

Rebounding from setbacks requires strong will and steely determination. It's a heavy lift. Many people can't do it. Attitude plays a huge role. Separating what you can and cannot control helps. So does focusing on solutions, not sinking into self-pity.

Resilient people are disciplined optimists. They modulate their thoughts and stop negative spirals from intensifying.

"Resilience is the ability to navigate change toward a positive goal," said Dr. Deborah Gilboa, author of "From Stressed to Resilient." You gain resilience by adopting smart strategies.

Resilience enables you to withstand hardship. But it depends on the context. "Resilience can drop unexpectedly," said Gilboa, a Pittsburgh-based family physician.

She cites the example of a resilient manager who suddenly

struggled after her colleague took paid time off to help his mother battle cervical cancer. And she had to cover for him in his absence.

"She dropped the ball when asked to do parts of his job," Gilboa said. "It turns out that seven years prior, her mom died of cervical cancer" and her grief resurfaced.

To gain resilience, apply key skills. How can you handle life's body blows without giving in?

## **Expand Your Gaze To Be Resilient**

Overwhelmed by defeat? Look beyond your daily travails and adopt a broader perspective.

"To be resilient, it takes believing in something larger than yourself," Gilboa said. Derive meaning on a wider scale that fuels your inner strength.

## **Engage The Right Allies**

Learn from others to [build resilience](#). Seek input from people who've undergone what you're going through. Their strategy may not exactly apply to your situation. But you can pick up some techniques that will.

Ask them, "How did you deal with this?" Gilboa says.

# Set A Big Goal

Born with a congestive heart defect, Jeremy Woodward had two major open heart surgeries by age 30. While in the hospital for his second surgery, he read a magazine article about the Ironman triathlon and declared, "I'm going to walk out of here and train for this."

"I knew I needed to do the hardest thing," said Woodward, 46, a performance coach in Concord, N.H. "I wasn't going to let anything hold me back."

Three years later, he completed his first Ironman race.

## Fight The Fear And Be Resilient

Dwelling on what can go wrong will shake your resilience. Instead, find a healthy outlet for your fear. "After the surgery, there was a fear of 'What if my body rejects this mechanical heart valve?'" said Woodward, co-author of "Heart Failure to Victory." "I still have that fear every day. I cope by distracting myself through exercise."

## Choose A Mantra

When your resilience is tested, pick an [uplifting message](#) to guide you.

"In the beginning, there were moments I wanted to give up,"

Woodward said. "I could've easily talked myself out of it. But I had a 'Nothing is going to stop me' attitude and I kept telling myself that. I kept showing up and it got easier in time."

## Know When To Quit

Resilience and self-awareness go hand-in-hand. If you're honest with yourself, you're better equipped to withstand adversity.

Resilient people know when "to maintain the mission when facing challenge" but also when to pivot amid diminishing returns, says Taryn Marie, an executive coach and author of "The 5 Practices of Highly Resilient People."

Case in point: Top athletes who decide to quit playing and start coaching. Marie calls this ability to heed your inner voice "productive perseverance."

## Pick Your Response When Resilient

Don't default to hopelessness when misfortune strikes. Build resilience by asking yourself, "What choices do I have?" Gilboa said. "It calms your stress response" to make conscious choices.

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