



MICROGUIDES

DEALING WITH FAILURE

Proven methods to take your team's
performance to the next level

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INTRODUCTION

The MicroGuides are your shortcut to staying current on the world's top Business, Leadership, and Personal Development books. They are used by individuals looking to better themselves, as well as by teams and organizations looking to create and foster cultures of continuous learning and development.

The MicroGuides are meant to serve as your starting point for identifying your goals and the obstacles that are standing in your way of achieving them. In addition to participation in regular ActionClasses, we urge leaders to use the content in these guides as inspiration for developing your own unique ActionPlan to make your ideal state a reality.



DEALING WITH FAILURE

Everybody fails: it's an undeniable fact of life. Considering that failure is one of the most inevitable parts of work and life, how we choose to deal with it can say a lot about our characters. Too often, people view failures as inherent setbacks and waste time and energy being critical of themselves instead of using that time and energy to learn from and grow because of their failures.

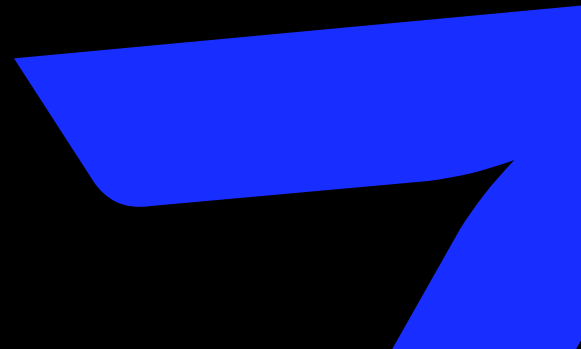
Effectively dealing with failure is not a skill we are all naturally endowed with, but luckily there are skills we can all learn and practice that will help us learn to adopt a growth-mindset when it comes to dealing with temporary setbacks. Keep reading to learn the experts' best tactics for handling failure in a poised and productive manner.



01

Rising Strong

by Brené Brown



01

Rising Strong

How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead

by Brené Brown

Death, taxes, and failure. If you strive to do great things in your business and life, those are the 3 things that are guaranteed to happen to you.

Not only are you certain to fail, you are most likely to do it many different times and in many different ways. Maybe you'll disappoint an important client. Maybe you'll mis-handle a sensitive employee issue. Maybe that new initiative you spearheaded will blow up in spectacular fashion. I could go on.

So if we—as people out to do great things in the world—are certain to fail in many different ways—why are we so bad at dealing with the emotions that inevitably come along with it?

Not only are you certain to fail, you are most likely to do it many different times and in many different ways.





The Rules of Engagement for Rising Strong

You've probably seen or heard the following quote from Theodore Roosevelt's "Man in The Arena" speech, but it bears repeating:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly;...who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

From this quote comes what Brown called the basic laws of emotional physics: simple but powerful truths that helps us understand why courage is both transformational and rare.

These are the rules of engagement for rising strong.

- If we are brave enough often enough, we will fall; this is the physics of vulnerability. There are more spectators than players for a reason - being in the arena is tough. Being in the arena means committing to failure.

- Once we fall in the service of being brave, we can never go back. Once you place yourself in the game, you can't go back to being a spectator. Courage transforms the emotional structure of our being. We know what it means to show up and play, and when we are just spectating.
- This journey belongs to no one but you; however, no one successfully goes it alone. We need to surround ourselves with others who can give us support and walk side-by-side with us on this journey.
- We're wired for story. Neuroeconomist Paul Zak has found that hearing a story - which we define as a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end – causes our brains to release cortisol and oxytocin. These are the chemicals that trigger our abilities as humans to connect, empathize and make meaning. More on stories later.
- Creativity embeds knowledge so that it can become practice. The Asaro tribe of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea have an incredible saying: "Knowledge is only a rumor until it lives in the muscle." What they are saying is that we truly learn when we use our knowledge - through an act of creativity - and put it into action.
- Rising strong is the same process whether you're navigating personal or professional struggles. Your emotions show up in your personal and business life, and you can't deal with them fully in one area of your life and ignore them in another.
- Comparative suffering is a function of fear and scarcity. Failing leads to self-doubt, and self-trust and even our worthiness. In those moments, we often compare our struggles to those of other people in other situations. That is a natural part of the process and having compassion and empathy towards yourself in those moments is critical.
- You can't engineer an emotional, vulnerable, and courageous process into an easy, one-size-fits-all formula. When we are dealing with messy emotions like we are when we fall down, the outcome can take minutes or years.



- Courage is contagious. Your experience will profoundly affect the people around you whether you are aware of it or not. Courage begets more courage - both in yourself and in others.
- Rising strong is a spiritual practice. As Brown points out, getting back up does not require religion or doctrine. But it is a spiritual practice in the sense that we are all connected to one another by a power greater than all of us.

The Problem: Gold Plating Grit

One of the things that Brown suggests is standing in our way - as a society as a whole - is that we like to “gold plate grit.” This essentially means that we embrace the idea that failure is a positive experience, without acknowledging the hurt, fear and confusion it can cause.

We love to hear the stories of people getting back up when they get knocked down – Steve Jobs getting ousted from and then coming back to save Apple is a great example – but we don’t spend a lot of time talking about the real emotional consequences of failure.

We love to hear the stories of people getting back up when they get knocked down...but we don't spend a lot of time talking about the real emotional consequences of failure.



Steve Jobs, and every other person in the history of mankind who has failed, had to work through tough emotions like desperation, shame and panic. So do you.

As Brown points out, the real badasses aren't the people who ignore the negative baggage that comes along with failure. The real badasses are the people who fall down, get back up, and say, "Damn. That really hurt, but this is important to me and I'm going in again."

The 3 Stages of Dealing with Your Failures

There isn't a step-by-step playbook for dealing with failure, but there is a path that you can follow.

Stage 1: The Reckoning

The first stage is called "The Reckoning and it's where we recognize the emotions that come along with failure and get curious about how they affect the way we think and behave.

Notice that this is the opposite of ignoring these emotions and refusing to talk about them, which is what most of us are inclined to do.

How do you recognize these emotions?

Usually, you'll feel a knot in your stomach, you'll want to eat a box of Oreos in one sitting, or you'll feel like slamming your fist through a brick wall. Or maybe all of them at the same time. When you feel this way, it's a good indication that you should start paying attention to what's going on.

Research has shown that most people are not very good at correctly identifying the emotions they are feeling in the moment. The good news is that we don't have to pinpoint our emotions accurately - we just need to recognize that we are feeling something.

Then, you need to open a line of inquiry into what's going on and why.





Stage 2: The Rumble

The second stage is called “The Rumble” and this is when we confront the stories we make up about ourselves through this struggle.

For instance, a common story we make up about ourselves when we fail is that “I’m not good enough.” Sometimes that might be true, but most often this is a self-protection mechanism that tries to prevent us from getting hurt again. After all, if we’re not good enough, why bother getting up and trying again?

Rumbling is all about identifying the story you are making up so that you can properly deal with it. Brown suggests that we take the step of actually writing it down using six simple sentences in the following structure.

1. The story I'm making up:
2. My emotions:
3. My body:
4. My thinking:
5. My beliefs:
6. My actions:

Brown tells us that the most important thing in the process is to just get it down on paper. It doesn't need to be perfect.

Now that we have it down, we can deal with it. We'll ask ourselves some simple questions in this stage.

1. What more do I need to learn and understand about the situation?
2. What more do I need to learn and understand about the other people in the story?
3. What more do I need to learn and understand about myself?

What we'll most likely learn through that process is that there is a difference between what we make up about our experiences and the truth. This is where the key learnings and wisdom live.

Stage 3: The Revolution

The third and last stage is called “The Revolution. As Brown points out, this is where we write a new ending to the story. A story where you get up off the mat, brush yourself off, and change the way you engage with the world in a positive, life-affirming way.

This last step takes an incredible amount of courage, because you are opening yourself up to the one thing that your biology is hard-wired to avoid—getting hurt again.

As Brown points out, this is revolutionary change because it fundamentally transforms our thoughts and beliefs. Rumbling with our story and owning it so that we can write a new, more courageous ending, changes how we engage with the world forever.

How to Rumble with Criticism

Let's talk about a concrete situation that you'll most certainly face if you are trying to do anything that's remotely game changing in your business or your life—getting criticized by other people. Especially people who are watching the game from the cheap seats.

How you react to this criticism—how you rumble with it—is going to have an enormous impact on the trajectory of your life.

There are 3 traps we can fall into when dealing with criticism.

First, we start to play small. Getting criticized hurts, and our natural reaction is to make sure it doesn't happen again. We do what we need to do in order to make ourselves a smaller target, and in the process strip away everything that gives us the strength and the courage to do great things.

Second, we resort to the "I don't care about what anyone thinks" defense. As Brown points out—this is a game we can't win. You are wired to care about what other people think, whether you like it or not.

Third, we fall into the trap of eliminating all criticism from our lives. This is like throwing the baby out with the bath water, because thoughtful and constructive criticism is incredibly useful, especially to people who are attempting to do great things.



Adaptive reflection question: Think of a criticism you received recently. How did you respond? What would you do differently looking back now?



The solution that Brown gives us is to get totally clear on whose opinions actually matter. Take out a one-inch-by-one-inch piece of paper right now, and write down the names of the people who really matter to you. If you find yourself wanting to cheat and increasing the size of the paper, you need to tighten up that list.

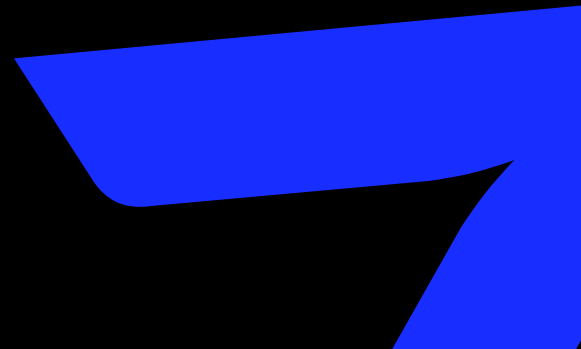
These people should be the ones who love you because of your imperfections and vulnerabilities, not in spite of them. These are the people who will be there for you when you fail (did I mention that it's certain that you will?), confirm that it totally sucks that you failed, and then gently remind you that you are one brave badass who is about to get back into the ring.

And that is the greatest gift you could ever give yourself.

02

The Obstacle is the Way

by Ryan Holiday



02

The Obstacle is the Way

The Timeless Art of Turning Trials Into Triumph

by Ryan Holiday

Every obstacle we face on our path to greatness is unique. But our responses to them are the same.

Fear. Frustration. Confusion. Helplessness. Depression. Anger.

Why is it that some people get paralyzed by these circumstances and emotions, and others seem to answer the call and deal with life head on - and sometimes, to our amazement, even seem to enjoy it?

That's what we'll cover in Ryan Holiday's *The Obstacle Is The Way*. Overcoming obstacles, Holiday tells us, is a discipline of three critical steps.

Let's get started.





Part 1: Perception

Perception is how we see and understand what occurs around us. It's also who we decide what those events mean to us.

Our perceptions can either be a source of weakness or a source of strength. If we are emotional, subjective and shortsighted, they can be a weakness. If we can learn to limit our passions and their controls over our lives, our perceptions can become a strength.

When we are faced with a seemingly insurmountable obstacle, we must try to do the following things.

Be objective

The events in our lives - even the obstacles - are neither good or bad. They just are. We are the ones that add meaning to them. We have the choice to determine if the story we make up about an event is positive or negative.

Our tendency, especially when faced with adversity, is to choose a negative narrative. What if, instead, we chose to tell ourselves a positive story about the event?

Control emotions and keep an even keel

The emotions you feel about an event in your life are determined by the story you tell yourself about the event.

So it follows that you can also choose to keep an even keel even in the face of the most difficult of circumstances. When panic (or any other negative emotion arises), you can feel the emotion, let it pass, and then get back to work.

Choose to see the good in a situation

Once you've got your emotions under control, you can decide to see the good in a situation.

Just like you can make up a negative story, you can make up a positive story. One that moves you towards action instead of despair. Choose a narrative that empowers you rather than debilitates you.

Place things in perspective

As Holiday points out, perspective has two definitions.

The first is context - a sense of the larger picture of the world, not just what is immediately in front of us. The second is framing - an individual's unique way of looking at the world, a way that interprets its events.

Both of them matter. For instance, George Clooney was rejected by Hollywood for years, and his perspective was that the system was broken and they couldn't see how talented he really was.

However, when he changed his perspective to one where the directors had a problem they needed solved - they were hoping the next person to walk in would be the right somebody - Clooney realized that he was the answer to their prayers, not the other way around.

The rest, as they say, is history. Your perspective matters.

Adaptive reflection question:

Think of a problem you are currently facing. How might a change in perspective help you approach the problem in a new light?

Live in the present moment

It doesn't matter whether or not you are in good economy or a bad one. Or whether or not a huge obstacle is lurking right around the corner. What matters no, is right now.

We all spend a good portion of our lives thinking about the past and the future, much to the detriment of dealing with whatever is right in front of us.

You can't deal properly with your obstacles if you are only thinking about what should have been, and what might yet come.

This isn't touchy feely philosophical stuff - the only thing you truly have control over is what you do right now.

Focus on what can be controlled

What is in your control?

Your emotions, judgments, creativity, attitude, perspective, desires, decisions and your determination.

Focussing exclusively on what is in our power magnifies and enhances our power. Any ounce of energy directed at things we can't actually control is wasted.



Part 2: Action

Now that we've got our perspective and emotions under control, it's time to take action.

But not all action is created equal. In order to be effective we need directed action - everything done in service of the whole.

We dismantle our obstacles piece by piece, with courage and creativity. We greet our obstacles with energy, persistence, a deliberate process, iteration, pragmatism and a strategic vision.

Get moving

We often get stuck when facing obstacles. Sometimes taking action seems too risky. As a result, we do nothing.

The only rule in taking action is to stay moving, always.

If you want to create momentum, you need to do it yourself. Now.

Practice Persistence

In 1878, Thomas Edison wasn't the only person who was working on incandescent lights. But he was the only person who was willing to test six thousand different filaments - inching closer to the finish line with every test.

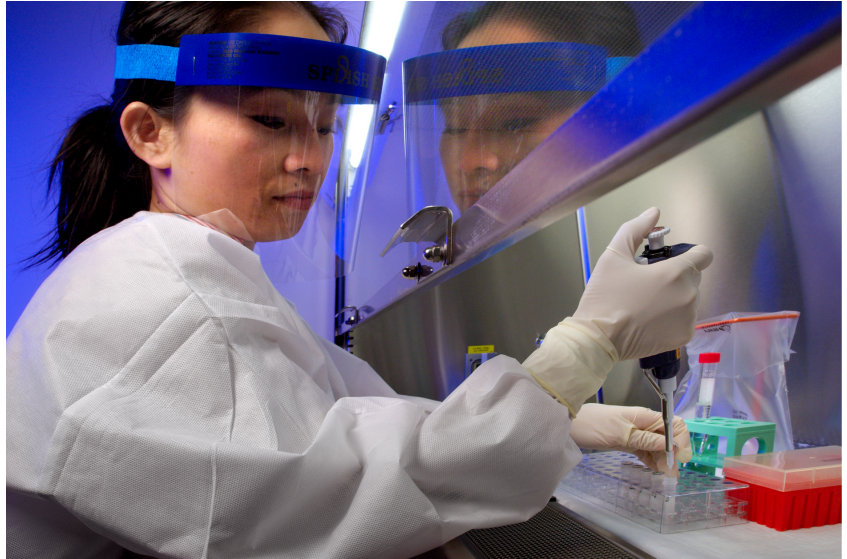
As Holiday points out, genius is often just persistence in disguise.

Nikola Tesla spent a year in Edison's lab, and once said that if Edison needed to find a needle in a haystack, he would simply "examine straw after straw until he found the object of his search."

Iterate

When you take action, you must keep in mind that action and failure are two sides to the same coin. You don't get one without getting the other.

"Genius is often just persistence in disguise"



When you do fail (and you will), ask yourself what went wrong and what you could improve for the next time. Failure is often the source of your biggest breakthroughs.

As Holiday points out, great entrepreneurs are never wedded to a position, never afraid to lose a little of their investment, and never bitter or embarrassed.

They slip a thousand times. And if they fall, they always get back up.

Follow the process

Nick Saban - the coach of the powerhouse University of Alabama football team, teaches his team "The Process."

Here's how he puts it:

"Don't think about winning the SEC Championship. Don't think about the national championship. Think about what you needed to do in this drill, on this play, in this moment. That's the process. Let's think about what we can do today, the task at hand."

Basically, focus only on what you need to do right now, and do it well. Then move on to the next thing.

The process is about finishing. Whatever you are doing right now, finish. Finish your workout. Finish games. Finish your inbox. Finish the smallest task you have in front of you right now.

Don't worry about what will happen later, or what has already happened.

Do your job, do it right

Sir Henry Royce puts it perfectly when he says "Whatever is rightly done, however humble, is noble."

Whatever tasks we are faced with - some prestigious and some onerous - we must respond with hard work, honesty and helping others as best we can.

What's right is what works

The other side to the "do it right" coin is that we need to get the job done, and being a pragmatist helps.

Holiday tells the story of Sam Zemurray, who was battling for a plot of land with United Fruit, a giant company many times his size. Two separate people claimed ownership of the land. United's response was to bring a large crew of expensive lawyers to figure out who rightfully owned the land. Zemurray simply bought the land twice - once from both parties who claimed ownership.

Don't worry about what your family, friends, and society say is the right way to do things. Worry about getting the job done.

Use obstacles against themselves

As Holiday points out, Gandhi didn't fight for independence for India. The British Empire did all of the fighting, and all of the losing.

Ghandi realized that he - and the Indian people - had no chance of victory by meeting force with force. Instead, he peacefully violated British rule, exaggerating his weakness in the process. The British Army had two choices - to enforce a bankrupt policy or abdicate. Ghandi had neutralized their military advantage by making its very use counterproductive.

Instead of fighting obstacles, find a means of making the obstacles beat themselves.

Channel your energy

Arthur Ashe battled segregation in the 1950s and 60s when we was on the rise in the tennis world. His father taught him to mask his emotions and feelings on the court as a defense mechanism. Instead, his father coached him, he should channel his energy into his shots.

His style was to be "physically loose and mentally tight."

Obstacles and adversity can harden you, or it can loosen you up and make you better. Put your frustrations to good use.

Prepare for none of it to work

You can manage your perceptions and direct your action. What we can't do is control the world around us. It's possible that even after doing all of the right things, you'll still fail.

Preparing yourself for that possibility gives you the freedom to act with boldness and courage.



Part 3: Will

Will is our internal power. It can never be affected by the outside world, because it is completely within our control.

Will is not how badly we want something. But will is much more about surrender than strength. It is more like "God willing" than "the will to win."

When we are placed into a situation that seems impossible to fix, we can decide to view it as a learning experience or a chance to help others. That's will power.

The discipline of will

Most people don't know that Abraham Lincoln suffered from crippling depression his entire life. It nearly drove him to suicide, twice.

But because Lincoln defined his life by enduring and overcoming great difficulties, he was able to find meaning in his suffering. For him, he was destined to suffer these things so that they could forge him into the man he needed to become.

It should be no surprise that "this too shall pass" was his favorite saying.

Build your inner Citadel

It's possible to face every external adversity you could conceivably imagine, and never break down. But that capacity needs to be built. Use whatever adversity you are facing right now to prepare you for larger and scarier challenges you'll face later.

Anticipation (thinking negatively)

These days, it's fashionable in business to hold a pre-mortem. Basically, you think about all of the things that could go wrong with an initiative in the hopes that you solve most or all of them before they happen.

Adaptive reflection question:

What tactics do you use to approach adversity with an open mind?



This serves two purposes. First, it enables you to avoid some of the things that you can easily prevent. Second, it ensures that you are infrequently surprised by negative events.

Things will always go wrong. Preparing for how you will react in those cases is critical for your success.

The art of acquiescence

This is the art of accepting reality as it is. You don't have to like or enjoy the treatment, but you know that denying it only delays the cure.

Quickly come to terms with the reality of your situation so you can get on doing the things you can actually control.

Love everything that happens - Amor Fati

When Thomas Edison was 67, a great fire broke out at his lab and factory. As he was looking on at the devastation with the hundreds of onlookers, he told his son to "Go get your mother and all her friends. They'll never see a fire like this again."

By loving everything that happens - Amor Fati - we turn what we must do into what we get to do.

The Stoics commanded themselves "Cheerfulness in all situations, especially the bad ones."

Perseverance

As Holiday points out, there are more failures in the world due to a collapse of will than there will ever be from objectively conclusive external events.

Antonio Pigafetta was the assistant to Magellan on his trip around the world. When he reflected on what his most admirable skill was, he said that the secret to Magellan's success was his ability to endure hunger better than the other men.

Meditate on your mortality

Nobody gets out of life alive. There is a very short list of obstacles that cannot be overcome, and death comes in a #1.

When we meditate on our mortality, all of a sudden life seems very short, and we are faced with a choice.

We can live the rest of our life using the power of the principles Holiday has taught us, or we can live the rest of our life like we've always done, and keep getting the results we've always got.

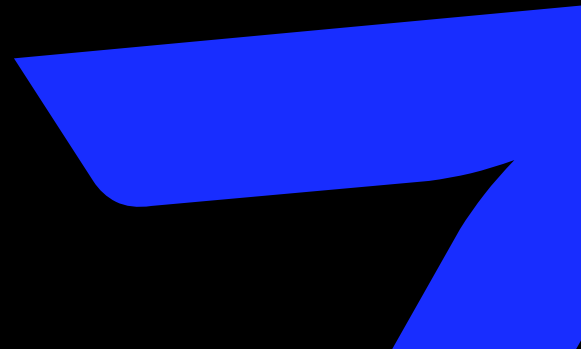
The choice is yours - decide today.



03

The Upside of Stress

by Kelly McGonigal



03

The Upside of Stress

Why Stress is Good for You, and How to Get Good at It

by Kelly McGonigal

Stress is bad for you, right?

As Kelly McGonigal tells us in this fascinating book, the research that scientists have done on stress tell a slightly different story.

As it turns out, whether or not stress is harmful has a lot to do with how you view it.

Consider the following research findings comparing people who view stress as harmful to people who view stress as enhancing.

People who believe stress is enhancing are less depressed and more satisfied with their lives than people who view stress as harmful. They have more energy and less health issues. They are more productive at work and are happier doing it. They also have a greater confidence in their ability to cope with challenges, and even find meaning in difficult circumstances.

Fact: People who believe stress is enhancing are less depressed and more satisfied with their lives than people who view stress as harmful.





That's a pretty long list of benefits just for changing your mind about what stress means to you.

Join us for the next 12 minutes as we explore what stress actually is, and how you can completely change your relationship with it.

You might even learn how to harness the stress in your life to create a more meaningful, fulfilling life.

Let's get started.

What is Stress?

We first need to start with an understanding of what stress actually is. When you are feeling stress, your body releases cortisol and adrenaline.

From an evolutionary perspective, this stress response is designed to help you. But - like stress in general - it is more feared than appreciated. We've come to associate stress as toxic a state which we should try to minimize as much as possible.

But, as we'll describe as we work our way through this book, your stress response is a resource to rely on rather than an enemy to eliminate.

How Stress Got a Bad Name

We won't spend much time on this section. Basically, a scientist by the name of Hans Selye did a lot of stress research in the 1930s and 40s that showed that stress caused negative physical reactions.

He became known as the Grandfather of Stress, and was nominated for the Nobel Prize ten times, and devoted his life to spreading the word about his research, leading us all to believe that stress is toxic.

The problem is that all of his research was performed on rats, and in situations that bear little resemblance to everyday human stress.

This is what a typical day looked like for one of Selye's lab rats. You'd start off with unpredictable, uncontrollable shocks. Then you'd get thrown in a bucket of water and forced to swim until you started to drown. Then, finally, you'd get put into an overcrowded cage with other rats where you would fight over an inadequate supply of food.

That, McGonigal rightly points out, isn't stress - that's the Hunger Games for rodents.

Nonetheless, Selye made the leap from rats to humans, and from torture to every day stress, and voila - we all developed a negative view about stress.

So now you have a negative mindset about stress

In recent surveys, the American Psychological Association has found that most people in America perceive their personal levels of stress as unhealthy.

These people believe that experiencing stress:

- depletes their health and vitality
- debilitates their performance and productivity
- inhibits their learning and growth
- is negative and should be avoided

Adaptive reflection question:

How do you view stress? Is it a negative or positive thing?

People who have this mindset about stress are much more likely to say that they cope with stress by trying to avoid it. They are more likely to:

- Try to distract themselves from the cause of the stress instead of dealing with it.
- Focus on getting rid of their feelings of stress instead of taking steps to address its source.
- Turn to alcohol or other substances or addiction to escape the stress.
- Withdraw their energy and attention from whatever relationship, role or goal is causing the stress.

Obviously, this reinforces the belief that stress is bad and should be avoided at all costs.

But as we turn our attention towards the benefits of embracing stress, we'll find a much different story emerges.



Changing from a negative mindset to a positive one

As it turns out, you have a choice about how you respond to stress. Victor Frankl described this as the space between stimulus and response.

A minority of people in the general population believe that stress enhances their lives. These people believe that experiencing stress:

- enhances their performance and productivity
- improves their health and vitality
- facilitates their learning and growth
- is positive and should be utilized

Where people with a negative mindset towards stress try to cope with stress, people with a positive mindset towards stress try to use it to their advantage. They are much more likely to:

- Accept the fact that the stressful event has occurred and is real.
- Plan a strategy for dealing with the source of stress.
- Seek information, help, or advice.
- Take steps to overcome, remove, or change the source of stress.
- Try to make the best of the situation by viewing it in a more positive way or by using it as an opportunity to grow.

So, just by creating a positive mindset about stress, you can turn self-doubt into confidence, fear into courage, and isolation into connection. All without getting rid of the stress.

Which begs the question, how do you change your mind about stress?

The insight from the research is that you get what you expect. If you expect stress to be a negative experience, that's exactly what you will get. If you expect it to be a positive experience, that's exactly what you'll get.

Adaptive reflection

question: What might you do to change your view of stress from a negative to a positive mindset?



There is evidence for this in a lot of different areas of your life. For instance, how you think about getting older has some serious consequences for you later in life. People who have a positive view of aging add an average of 8 years to their life, and have an 80% lower risk of a heart attack.

Your mindset not only helps you in the moment, but also influences you to make better decisions in the future, leading to better outcomes. It's as though mindset matters twice.

Now let's turn our attention to the three different ways that your new positive mindset about stress will help you lead a more productive and fulfilling life.

Stress helps you engage

In this section we'll focus on how you can transform a threat into a challenge.

Our common reaction to stress is to avoid it, and the most common advice you get when do deal with stress in the moment is to "calm down." Basically, you should find a way to get rid of the stress.

However, viewing the stress response as a resource can transform the physiology of fear into the biology of courage. The stress response does a number of things that will help you perform well under pressure.

It focuses your attention, heightens your senses, increases your motivation, and mobilizes energy. This is true even when the stress doesn't feel helpful, which is the case when people experience anxiety.

When you start to feel your heart pounding or your breath quickening, remember that this is your body's way of trying to give you more energy. When you start to feel tension in your body, remember that the stress response gives you access to your strength. Are your palms sweaty? Good, that means you are close to something that you want. Do you have butterflies in your stomach? Embrace them - it's your guts way of saying that this is something that matters.

If you take the traditional advice and try to calm down, you are preventing yourself from accessing the energy, strength and drive that the stress gives you. So, instead of trying to take a deep breathe to try and calm down, take a deep breath and sense the energy that's available to you.

Then, use it. Ask yourself what action you can take that is consistent with your goal in this moment.

Viewing the stress response as a resource can transform the physiology of fear into the biology of courage.





Connect: How tending and befriending transforms stress

In this section we'll focus on how you can activate your "tend-and-befriend" response to better deal with stress.

From an evolutionary perspective, we have this "tend-and-befriend" response to make sure we protect our offspring. Rather than get paralyzed with fear (and let our offspring get eaten by that lion), we spring into action.

It does so because it increases activity in three systems in your brain.

First, it activates the social caregiving system, which is regulated by oxytocin. When this happens you feel more empathy, connection and trust.

Second, it activates the reward system, which releases the neurotransmitter dopamine. When this happens you feel more optimistic about your ability to do something meaningful, and it primes your brain for physical action, ensuring that you don't freeze under pressure.

And third, it activates the attunement system, which releases the neurotransmitter serotonin. When this happens, your perception, intuition and self-control are all enhanced to ensure that the actions you take have the biggest positive impact.

In other words, as McGonigal points out, the tend-and-befriend response makes you social, brave and smart. Which is a much better response than trying to avoid dealing with whatever is causing you stress.

So, when you are feeling overwhelmed, look for opportunities to do something for somebody else that goes beyond your regular responsibilities.

air warning - your brain is going to tell you that you don't have the time or energy to do it. But that's exactly why you should. The good news is that small gestures work just as well as grand gestures to activate this response, so just get into action rather than waiting for the perfect moment to do something big.

Grow: How adversity makes you stronger

In this last section we'll focus on how stress can actually help you learn and grow.

As McGonigal points out, the idea that we grow through adversity is not new. It's embodied in the teachings of every major religion.

The science shows that plenty good can come from stressful or traumatic experiences. Here is a partial list of some of the positive changes that are commonly reported in cases of hardship, loss or trauma:

- A sense of personal strength
- Increased appreciation for life
- Spiritual growth
- Enhanced social connections and relationships with others
- Identifying new possibilities and life directions.

The important part, McGonigal explains, is that the good that comes from difficult experiences isn't from the event itself - it comes from you.

What it requires is for you to look back on the difficult experiences from your past, and to reflect on the positive changes that came from them. Then, when you are faced with future stressful situations, you'll be able to recall how you were able to overcome them in the past to help you overcome them in the moment.

This creates a growth-mindset towards adversity.

Ultimately, if you are trying to do big things in your life (the fact that you are listening to this would suggest that's the case), you are going to face adversity. Lots of it.

How you choose to deal with it is up to you. One path leads to growth and the fulfillment of your goals, and the other leads you despair and inaction.

And when you look at it that way, there really is only one choice.

Adaptive reflection

question: Think about a negative event in your life. What positive things came out of it?



ABOUT ACTIONCLASS

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