

Bounce back

How effectively do you bounce back from a disappointment or failure? Your answer almost certainly depends on whether you are looking through a lens of problems or a lens of possibilities. Set-backs are inevitable in your life and career, so you must decide on how you respond if you are going to bounce back.

Carol Dweck, a leading organisational psychologist, explains the essential difference between these two lenses. Either you see problems or you see possibilities when faced with adversity.

Put another way, you can either behave in ways that reflect helplessness and surrender to external forces over which you believe you have no means of control. Or you can be adaptive and make every effort gain mastery of the situation by believing you are in control of your own destiny. For an in-depth review of how these differences play out in patterns of behaviour, I recommend this [paper](#) by Carol Dweck.

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The art of being able to bounce back is grounded in the positive psychology movement. One of the tenet of positive psychology shows that your attitude is better predictor of your success than your cognitive ability.



People who look through the lens of possibilities have a mindset of growth. They believe they can improve with effort. They grasp challenges and tackle them as opportunities to learn, to grow. Research shows this is equally true for those with lower IQs, as it is for those with IQs in the top decile. In other words, your attitude is a more important contributor to your success than your intelligence. This type of person sees glasses as half full.

In contrast, those with a fixed mindset believe they are who they are, and they cannot change. Their view is through a lens of problems, constraints and obstacles. The locus of their control is outside them; they are victims, carried by the tide of life and circumstance.

When they fail, there is always a reason outside them;

someone else did or did not do something. They feel hopeless, helpless, and overwhelmed. They readily catastrophise. Their glasses are somehow always half empty.

Success is all about how you deal with failure

If you don't try, you can't succeed. If you do try, you will certainly fail or fall short on occasions. Which fork in this road do you usually choose? Not to try at all, remain passive, and wait for the world to pass by. Or try, and accept those occasions when you fail as learning opportunities. According to Carol Dweck, success in life and career is all about how you deal with failure.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained, the old saying goes. In a contemporary context, I put the aphorism this way: Try in measured ways. When you realise you are failing, stop. Learn. And try again. This is learning loop of Peter Senge and others.

Everyone can learn to look through the lens of possibilities

If you believe you are inclined to a fixed mindset way of seeing and doing things, think again. Dweck and others have shown that we can all become more positive and see the world with a growth mindset. You can learn to choose the lens of possibilities; it's up to you. No one else.

Another reason for only looking through the lens of possibilities

Carol Dweck offers another, hugely important reason for seizing control of yourself and looking through a lens of possibilities. In this [video interview](#) based on her book, [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#), Carol explains why some people reach their potential while others who are just as talented don't. She delves into the science of persistence and praise, and provides ample reasons to view the world around you as one of endless possibilities. One where the real challenge lies in prioritising and focusing on those few things that will yield the highest returns (however you choose to assess returns) for your effort.

Techniques to help us bounce back

Travis Bradbury, another authority on emotional intelligence and success, offers a [range of techniques](#) to help us adopt a positive mindset. I especially like those that help us bounce back, including:

- ✓ Get up off the floor and say to yourself, I am going to succeed. A good example of this is how Malcolm Turnbull, the current Australian Prime Minister, remained in Parliament in 2009 with a positive attitude after being dumped as party leader while in opposition.
- ✓ Remain principled and pursue your passion. How often do we hear that passion trumps prowess? It's true!
- ✓ Do something. Sitting on your hands, gnashing and feeling down after failure is the surest way to remain flat. Taking (the right) action is a sure antidote.
- ✓ Don't stop. Go the extra mile. Standing still. Waiting. Being on a plateau are all certain to leave you down and out. Others are moving forward. If you are not doing the same, then you are in effect going backwards.
- ✓ Set the bar high. Coming off a failure, doesn't mean you should lower your sights. To do so is tantamount to accepting defeat.
- ✓ Don't complain. Those around will give you their energy if you are positive. They will suck energy from you if you are not positive.

Everyone can bounce back

Wherever you are on the positivism curve, you can bounce back if you put your mind to it. You will be happier, a more enjoyable person to be around, and more successful if you adopt a growth mindset and always look through the lens of possibilities.

More on related topics

If you want to delve into other aspects of this topic I recommend read this earlier post:

+ [When one door closes you can open the next one](#)