

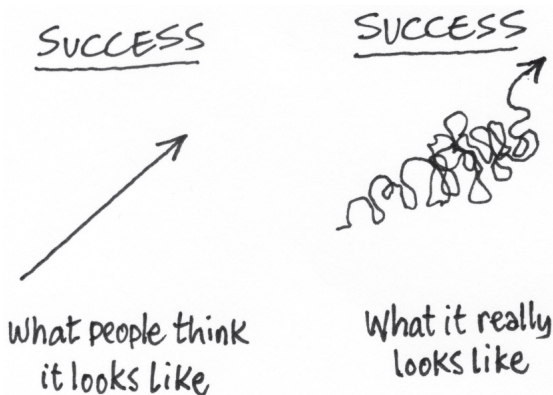
### 38. Attitude Activity: Benefit Finding, aka The Rocky Road

Two psychologists, Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough (2003) at the University of Miami, asked this question: what if we reviewed stressful and difficult times and turned our attention to the lessons we learned from those negative experiences?

Three hundred pupils were asked to reflect on challenging periods of their lives: poor results, breaking up with partners, feeling insulted or offended, or being rejected from a particular course. Of the 300 subjects, 100 were asked to specifically focus on the lessons they had learned – the positive benefits that had eventually come from these challenges. It turned out that it was these pupils who coped better with their disasters and moved on from them. Emmons and McCullough found that positive benefits could flow from negative experiences.

David Collins, professor of coaching and performance at the University of Central Lancashire, has coached at the very top level, including being responsible for UK athletics at the Beijing Olympic Games. Collins, with his colleague Áine MacNamara, has done similar work to Emmons and McCullough. He's discovered that top athletes have travelled what he calls a 'rocky road'. This means that they've usually had their fair share of setbacks, failures and disappointments along the way. Often, we don't get to hear about these setbacks – we only hear about the successes!

#### The rocky road



Professor Collins suggests that the rocky road might even be good for you as you will develop some useful skills along the way. The key thing is not to dwell on the setback and to bounce back.

Your exam period is going to bring challenges and difficulties, but you can use them as fuel. Think about a recent negative experience and look at the ten suggestions below. You don't have to address all of them but aim to make notes under at least five in the space below.

**Tick the statements you want to tackle**

1. A personal quality that has strengthened because of the experience.
2. A personal quality you didn't have at all that you've now begun to develop.
3. An increased appreciation of some part of your life as a result of the experience.
4. A valuable lesson you've extracted from the experience.
5. A realisation about life that you might not have ever considered before the experience.

# April Activities

- 6. An increased confidence about that way the world, or certain people, work because of what happened to you.
- 7. A skill you've developed or consolidated (e.g. thinking through problems, reflecting and understanding, communicating ideas, arguing confidently) because of the experience.
- 8. A relationship that has strengthened, perhaps with someone who helped or supported you through the experience or a stronger relationship with someone who hurt you.
- 9. A 'rule' you have extracted from the experience that you can now test in new situations.
- 10. A reassessment of certain priorities that might have happened because of the experience.

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This piece of writing will remind you that we grow as a result of difficult times. Keep it somewhere close and refer to it when you need to!

## Final Thoughts

We've found it really useful to normalise setbacks and problems by asking others about theirs. We've done it loads. It's such a relief to hear other people sharing their catastrophes!

You might ask a parent, an aunt or uncle, a friend or an older cousin. Teachers are often willing to tell you their stories too. A good prompt to start the conversation might be, "Tell me the story of your biggest study disaster!"

Finish with, "What did you learn from it?"