

Building Resilience

21-Day Resilience Training Challenge

Popular belief points to a magical 21-day period for breaking a bad habit or forming a new one. However, recent research published in the European Journal of Social Psychology points to a minimum length of 18 days to 12 weeks. Regardless of training regimen, I challenge you to work on your resilience training for a consecutive number of days until you feel more competent. If it takes you longer than 21 days, go back to the top of the list and repeat. All of us have different starting points and different aspirations. One thing is for sure: to build a threshold of endurance with any new skill and behavior, you have to endure.

Ask and get comfortable with rejection

Modern-day technology is diminishing our skills of asking for directions, accommodations, and special needs in a face-to-face setting. Asking for what you might not get and occasionally getting rejected only strengthens your resilience muscle and gets you comfortable with being uncomfortable.

- On your next scheduled airplane travel, walk up to the ticket counter and ask for an upgrade.
- Next time you are eating in a restaurant, ask for either twice the sauce or napkins, an extra serving, a vegetable side, or ice in your drink.
- Call your mobile phone company and ask for a new phone upgrade before the official due date.
- Next time you visit a county where you do not speak the language, walk up to a stranger and ask for directions.

Put yourself in challenging situations and learn new skills

Discomfort zone is where resilience threshold stretches and builds.

- For a half day, choose to do daily tasks with your nondominant hand (dialing on your phone, picking up a pen, raising a glass, combing your hair, or using a computer mouse).
- Seek out a work assignment (serve on a committee, introduce a keynote speaker, write an article) that will require you to stretch and may not be in your job description. Ask for it.
- Consider a language you've always wanted to learn and sign up for an online five-week training or conversational class.
- Choose a physical activity you are not familiar with (ballroom dancing or recreational volleyball) and sign up.

Manage your internal language/attitude

Choosing your attitude starts with your internal language. Catch yourself and your self-talk right around a challenging event.

- Pick a phrase (“you got this,” “yes, you can,” “strong-centered-confident,” or whatever works for you) and repeat it on your walk to your car, up the stairs, and during any type of repetitive exercise movement. Does it help you dissociate from negative thoughts and stay in the present?
- Maximize the word “can.” List five phrases that start with “I can” and relate to an upcoming challenge. Focus on the positive and see your glass half full versus half empty.
- Choose an activity you excel in (sports, games, home projects, hobbies) and choose a time this week when you can do it. Remind yourself how competent, strong, and intentional you look. Be your number one fan; you have to be the one to cheer first!

Manage your overall energy

Stronger and more resilient body allows you to tackle tough situations with more patience, perspective, and positivity.

- Take a regular sit-down meeting and suggest a walking version.
- Make a list of your tasks and tackle the toughest ones first, during your highest energy time of the day.
- Over the weekend, schedule a 20–30-minute nap. Note how you feel afterward and try to fit in naps on nonwork days.
- Choose one day a week (possibly a weekend day) and do not set your alarm. If your body needs more sleep, it will welcome it.
- Pack healthy snacks (veggies and hummus, raw almonds, fresh or dried fruit) to eat during the low-energy time of your day. Note if the calories and nutrients change your energy level and help you be more productive.
- If music energizes you, it might also help you focus. Choose a deep-work type of project and line up instrumental music in your headphones or create a completely quiet environment. Does it help you be more productive?

Evaluate action

Reflection helps you gain perspective.

- Think of a latest challenging event. Make a list of what you did well and what you could have done differently if this occurred again.
- Think of a latest challenging event. Was there a skill that could have helped you? What can you do to gain that and be stronger next time?

Advisory board

Ask a colleague or friend (or more) who knows you, your history, and your aspirations to help you process a tough experience or prepare for an upcoming one.

- Choose a colleague who knows a situation and ask for advice on how you handled it.
- Choose a colleague and listen to their feedback on how you performed while running a meeting or giving a presentation.