

# Supportive relationships linked to willingness to pursue opportunities

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Credit: Carnegie Mellon University

Research on how our social lives affects decision-making has usually focused on negative factors like stress and adversity. Less attention, however, has been paid to the reverse: What makes people more likely to give themselves the chance to succeed?

That's the question Carnegie Mellon University psychologists recently

posed. Published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, they discovered that people with supportive spouses were more likely to take on potentially rewarding challenges and that those who accepted the challenges experienced more [personal growth](#), happiness, [psychological well-being](#) and better relationship functioning months later.

"We found support for the idea that the choices people make at these specific decision points—such as pursuing a work [opportunity](#) or seeking out new friends—matter a lot for their long-term well-being," said Brooke Feeney, lead author of the study and professor of psychology in CMU's Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The researchers brought 163 married couples into the lab and gave one member of each couple a choice: either solve a simple puzzle, or they were given an opportunity to compete for a prize by giving a speech. The researchers then recorded the couples' interactions as they decided whether to take on the challenge.

Participants with more encouraging partners were substantially more likely to decide to compete for the prize, while those with partners who discouraged them or expressed a lack of confidence more often chose the simple puzzle. Six months later, those who pursued the more challenging task reported having more personal growth, happiness, psychological well-being, and better relationships than those who didn't.

So what can one do to encourage a [partner](#) to embrace life opportunities? The researchers found that the most supportive partners expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity, reassured their partners, and talked about the potential benefits of taking on the [challenge](#).

"Significant others can help you thrive through embracing life opportunities," said Feeney. "Or they can hinder your ability to thrive by making it less likely that you'll pursue opportunities for growth."

**More information:** Brooke C. Feeney et al, Predicting the Pursuit and Support of Challenging Life Opportunities, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/0146167217708575](https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167217708575)

Provided by Carnegie Mellon University

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