

Six ways to beat the back-to-work blues by building resilience

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We are all faced with obstacles at work, and sometimes just going back to work after a holiday can feel like a challenge. We might be faced with a backlog of work, new targets or systems, or looming deadlines – alongside all the usual criticism, office politics and pressures from our personal lives.

One way we can deal with all this is to build our resilience. Resilience is your capacity to respond to the pressures and challenges brought about by everyday life. In essence, it is about how well we can bounce back from difficult circumstances, disappointment and failure – the "rubber ball" factor. Our approach to life and our ability to work (and live) through adversity to some extent determines our experiences.

The good news is that we can change our natural responses by boosting our resilience and improving the way we react to stress. Resilience develops through experience, and over time we learn how to adjust and adapt. A study of nurses [found that](#) working to strengthen their personal resilience helped reduce their vulnerability to

workplace adversity. Here are some suggestions for how you can attempt to do the same.

Set yourself manageable goals

Achieving our goals creates a sense of accomplishment that drives us forward. So by setting smaller and more achievable targets you can experience success more often – and this fosters a positive mindset that [builds mental resilience](#). It helps to list specific steps or actions that might help to make your goals a reality, and confidence will grow with each small success. Professional coaching can be beneficial in helping us to consider our future plans and the steps needed to get there. Research [has shown](#) that coaching can enhance attainment of goals, increase resilience and improve mental wellbeing.

Don't be afraid to fail

Resilient people are not afraid to show that they have weaknesses. Their self-worth does not depend on being the best. They tend to be [more optimistic](#) and see opportunity to learn from a task, whether the outcome is success or failure. With that in mind, we should try to accept failure as something that happens to everyone – it is how we handle it that makes a difference. Looking for the silver lining keeps the mood positive and allows you to continue, even when things haven't gone the way you hoped.

Learn to handle rejection

Everyone experiences rejection at times and, as with failure, what matters is how you deal with it. Philosopher and businesswoman Elaine Dundon describes [three common stages](#) to carry out after rejection: reflect, reboot and reject. By reflecting, you might realise that you did not give enough information, or used the wrong approach. Or it could simply have been an issue of timing or resources. By rebooting you can choose to start

again, ideally with new information to offer, or a new approach. You may then choose to reject rejection. Essentially, this is accepting that sometimes, no matter what you say or do, the outcome will be the same and you should focus your attention elsewhere.

Ask for support

The people around us play a clear role in our resilience. One study of university students [found that](#) the most resilient students had wider social networks. This was important for their career development, as more resilient students tended to report greater work engagement and have higher academic achievement.

When things get tough at work, our colleagues may be able to provide practical advice, reassurance or even emotional support. Having a network of colleagues will serve you well when you hit a problem, or feel overwhelmed. Resilient nurses say that [support networks are essential](#) for thriving in this challenging profession. But asking for and receiving help depends on good group dynamics, and we all play a role in creating functional and inclusive team relationships that foster compassion and mutual support.

Look after your health

Most people know stress can take a major toll on our physical health, but there is also a [strong relationship](#) between personal [resilience](#) and immunity to disease. So being physically active, eating a healthy diet and taking steps to managing stress will contribute to a healthy body and mind and ultimately help you cope with challenges at work.

Progressive organisations are offering workplace health promotion programmes for their staff, including such benefits as exercise classes, general health checks and mindfulness and relaxation sessions. [My own research](#) shows how a workplace health promotion programme gave employees more opportunities to make healthy lifestyle choices while at work. When the programme was offered, more employees were encouraged to look after their health, and there

were more reports of job satisfaction and positive attitudes towards the employer.

Take a break

Be compassionate to yourself. Although we sometimes feel there aren't enough hours in the day, too much work and not enough time off isn't good for your productivity. Taking regular breaks improves concentration and, for office-workers, helps to ensure we don't spend too much of our time sitting down, which is bad for our health whether we [exercise daily or not](#). My colleagues and I are [looking at ways](#) technology can help remind us to take a break, through email and phone reminders, desktop gadgets and wearable devices such as activity monitors.

On the same note, having a good [work-life balance builds resilience](#). If your sole purpose is gaining value through work, you'll experience greater knocks from [work](#)-related setbacks than those who seek fulfilment in other areas of life.

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