



**At a Glance:** Manage stress and anxiety. Develop the resilience and self-determination to overcome procrastination and obstacles. Be empowered to take ownership and deal with uncertainty.

## Understanding Resilience

Resilience is the capacity to bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure, or even positive events (such as increased responsibility, or progress), therefore adapting to changing circumstances. <sup>1 2</sup>

### Why does it matter?

Whether at work, school, or in personal life, our resilience and self-determination are often challenged. Developing resilience helps you to overcome challenges, such as those resulting from difficult relationships, disrupted work-life balance, and stressful or tragic events. Cultivating resilience can also contribute to increasing your ability to accept and respond constructively to criticism<sup>3</sup>. In a large study on resilience in the workplace (835 respondents), 99% of employees considered resilience to be important for career success, and 56% said it was essential. Resilience is key for advancement: senior employees in this same study considered resilience integral in leadership development<sup>4</sup>.

Resilience of higher education student population leads to social and educational gains and positively correlates with students' problem-solving skills<sup>5</sup>. Developing resilience is also positively associated with happiness<sup>6</sup> and can be an important factor in reducing the stress and anxiety associated with challenging situations. For example, if you have developed the capacity to create an effective and healthy work schedule while accounting for potential sources of delays, you will meet your deadlines and achieve your goals with less stress and a higher potential for success.

## Cultivating Resilience and Managing Stress and Anxiety

A resilient person conquers challenges by mobilizing various personal resources such as knowledge, strengths, skills and abilities, and psychological capital -which includes, in addition to resilience, other positive capacities such as hope, optimism, and efficacy<sup>7</sup>. In fact, research in positive psychology has shown that resilience, optimism, and efficacy<sup>8 9</sup> can be developed<sup>10 11 12</sup>, instead of being exclusively attributed to "gifted" individuals as it has been previously believed<sup>13</sup>, are skills which can be developed by anyone. Acceptance and adaptation are key mechanisms to employ when confronting uncertainty and events we cannot control. Accepting and learning from failure (not to be confused with admitting defeat) is vital in reaching the greatest achievements. No breakthrough could be made without taking risks and accepting their consequences, or without persistence, perseverance and determination when facing challenging obstacles such as failure. The moon landing is arguably one of the biggest accomplishments of humanity. We all remember Neil Armstrong's famous words: "That's one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind." Did you know that this "one small step" was preceded by a long list of failed national and international missions (over forty) coordinated by the greatest minds in the field? <sup>14 15</sup>. Failure did not deter NASA from accomplishing what was long thought to be the impossible, and nor should it deter you in the pursuit of your personal or professional goals.

Another important consideration in the cultivation of resilience is the development of coping self-efficacy. Introduced by psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977, coping self-efficacy refers to your belief in your own ability to succeed in a specific situation<sup>16</sup>. High levels of coping self-efficacy have been linked to enhanced goal achievement<sup>17</sup>, decreased stress<sup>18</sup>, and increased academic resilience<sup>19</sup>. Thus, in the same way that the title character in the children's book *The Little Engine that Could* succeeds in getting up the hill by chanting "I think I can! I think I can!," cultivating the belief that you are capable of achieving what you set out to do (coping self-efficacy) will make you more likely to succeed against any obstacles that may arise.

# Quick Guide to Becoming More Resilient

## Evaluate and gain perspective on your situation:

- Look at the specific situation in its larger context so that you can be more realistic about its severity and about what you can and cannot control. The Serenity Prayer by philosopher and theologian Reinhold Niebuhr beautifully illustrates this concept: “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”<sup>20</sup>.
- Calculate risk and anticipate obstacles <sup>21</sup>.
- Conceive a solid Plan B <sup>22</sup>.

## Use your self-knowledge when faced with challenges:

- Use the [Self-Knowledge handout](#) to help you determine your strengths and leverage those relevant to the challenge<sup>23</sup>.
- Prepare for anticipated obstacles by developing your knowledge and problem-solving skills to tackle challenges as they arise<sup>24</sup>.

## Develop a growth mindset:

- “Challenges are what make life interesting; overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.”- Joshua J. Marine;
- Cultivating a growth mindset over a fixed mindset has been shown to result in higher achievement<sup>25</sup>. Interpret your problems as an opportunity for growth (a “not yet”) rather than a fixed outcome.
- Try completing the “benefit -finding” exercise: for 20 minutes a day on three consecutive days, reflect on the positive aspects of a difficult situation (e.g. a traumatic event or a loss) that you have experienced in your life. How have you changed or grown as a person from this experience? How has this experience made you better able to meet the challenges of the future?<sup>26 27</sup>.

○ **Increase your self-efficacy** by setting small goals and recognizing your progress towards them, asking for input from a professional or watching someone you admire complete a task similar to the one you are struggling with, and by reflecting and celebrating your past accomplishments<sup>28</sup>.

○ **Seek community** by creating or attending a support group to reflect and relate to others facing similar difficulties

○ **Ask for advice** and recommendations from a mentor, a sponsor, or a coach<sup>29</sup>.

○ Develop **strategies for stress and anxiety** management (see next section)

# Quick Guide to Managing Stress and Anxiety

Remember that stress is a normal part of life: a certain level of stress is healthy and can motivate increased levels of productivity and creative problem solving. Everyone experiences stress differently and what can be stressful to one person may not be stressful to another. However, prolonged stress can have a negative impact on health<sup>30</sup> and should be addressed. Use the [Self-Knowledge handout](#) to help you evaluate your stressors and incorporate self-care strategies into your life as needed to recharge and replenish from periods of intense stress or anxiety.

Adopt [healthy ways of living](#) such as sleep hygiene, nutrition, physical activity, and social activity.

**Mindfulness** is a powerful tool that produces positive emotional states and psychological being overall<sup>31</sup>.

- It is the practice of continually returning your attention to the present moment with patience and non-judgment by using an object of focus such as the breath or a physical object. Mindfulness can be applied to a simple action such as doing the dishes to more specialized formats adapted for various mental and emotional difficulties, such as anxiety and depression<sup>32</sup> or physical difficulties (e.g. pain management)<sup>33</sup>.
- *Please note that meditation and mindfulness practices are not for everyone. Those with a history of trauma, PTSD, and/or suicidal thoughts are encouraged to proceed with caution*
- See the “Taking action” section for mindfulness and meditation resources

**Goal setting** helps to develop a sense of personal agency. Incorporating goal setting strategies into one’s work and personal life has been shown to have a positive impact on stress and anxiety<sup>34 35</sup>

- Identify life goals that are important for your self-satisfaction with the following exercise: write 1-2 pages for your “goodbye party speech”. What would you like to have said about you? What would make your life more satisfying and fruitful? The answer to these questions are your goals. Is there something that you need to be doing more or less of in order to reach these goals?
- Here are some strategies to consider to help you progress towards a goal:
  - Own this goal: how does it relate to your values? How important is it for your success?
  - Make it fun: how can you make the progress towards your goal more enjoyable?
  - Remember the big picture: how does it align with your long-term or broader priorities?
  - Keep a balance: How would you distribute your time and effort between your different goals?

*Use the myPath Journal Kit to help you create and pursue your goals*

# Taking Action

## Workshops & Programs

- Check [myInvolvement](#) for upcoming workshops and programs under “Be well: Resiliency.”
- [Coursera: Penn - Positive Psychology Specialization](#)

## Websites & Apps

- [10% Happier App](#) - A clear, simple approach to meditation. Designed for skeptics, built to help you keep it going.
- [Insight Meditation Timer](#) - The #1 free meditation app. Guided meditations and talks led by the world’s top mindfulness experts, neuroscientists, psychologists and meditation teachers. Also includes music tracks and a simple timer.
- [ThinkUp: Positive Affirmations App](#): motivational goal-setting, self-help app.
- [Mindfulness at McGill](#)
- [McGill audio for meditations and relaxation](#) - mindfulness meditation facilitates awareness of our thought patterns, our emotions, and how we experience stress or happiness
- [Positran: Psychology for Positive Transformation](#)
- [TAO \(Therapist Assisted Online\)](#) -an interactive and dynamic easy to access online program to help with depression and anxiety.

# Resources

## Books, Articles & Reports

- Brantley, J. (2007). *Calming your anxious mind: How mindfulness and compassion can free you from anxiety, fear, and panic*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications. <http://mcgill.worldcat.org/oclc/85485158>
- Graham, L., & Hanson, R. (2013). *Bouncing back: Rewiring your brain for maximum resilience and well-being*. Novato, Calif: New World Library. <http://mcgill.worldcat.org/oclc/872430956>
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- Pink, D. H. (2006). *A whole new mind: Why right-brainers will rule the future*. New York: Riverhead Books. <http://mcgill.worldcat.org/oclc/64445948>
- Siebert, A. (2005). *The resiliency advantage: Master change, thrive under pressure, and bounce back from setbacks*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. <http://mcgill.worldcat.org/oclc/310696172>
- Southwick, S. M., & Charney, D. S. (2012). *Resilience: The science of mastering life's greatest challenges*. <http://mcgill.worldcat.org/oclc/812178328>
- [The Road to Resilience](#)

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> [Tough at the Top? New Rules of Resilience for Women's Leadership Success. Bond, S. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [The need for and meaning of positive organizational behavior. Luthans, F. \(2002\).](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [Tough at the Top? New Rules of Resilience for Women's Leadership Success. Bond, S. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [Tough at the Top? New Rules of Resilience for Women's Leadership Success. Bond, S. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>5</sup> [Analysis of the Relationship between the Resiliency Level and Problem Solving Skills of University Students. Coskun, Y.D. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [Resilience in Positive Psychology: Bouncing Back & Going Strong. Nwiran, Y. \(2017\).](#)
- <sup>7</sup> [The need for and meaning of positive organizational behavior. Luthans, F. \(2002\).](#)
- <sup>8</sup> [Seligman. \(1998\).](#)
- <sup>9</sup> [Self-efficacy and educational development. Zimmerman, B.J. \(1995\).](#)
- <sup>10</sup> [The need for and meaning of positive organizational behavior. Luthans, F. \(2002\).](#)
- <sup>11</sup> [Masten & Reed. \(2002\).](#)
- <sup>12</sup> [Snyder. \(2002\).](#)
- <sup>13</sup> [Garmezy. \(1974\).](#)
- <sup>14</sup> [Deep Space Chronicle: A Chronology of Deep Space and Planetary Probes 1958-2000. Siddiqi, A.A. \(2002\).](#)
- <sup>15</sup> [Interplanetary Probes. Krebs. \(2018\).](#)
- <sup>16</sup> [Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. Bandura, A. \(1978\).](#)
- <sup>17</sup> [Self-efficacy and educational development. Zimmerman, B.J. \(1995\).](#)
- <sup>18</sup> [Self Care, Coping Self-Efficacy and Stress Among Graduate Students in the Helping Profession. Clarke, E.W. \(2017\).](#)
- <sup>19</sup> [Resilience Building in Students: The Role of Academic Self-Efficacy. Cassidy, S. \(2015\).](#)
- <sup>20</sup> [The Yale book of quotations. Shapiro, F.R. \(2006\).](#)
- <sup>21</sup> [Tough at the Top? New Rules of Resilience for Women's Leadership Success. Bond, S. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>22</sup> [Tough at the Top? New Rules of Resilience for Women's Leadership Success. Bond, S. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>23</sup> [Tough at the Top? New Rules of Resilience for Women's Leadership Success. Bond, S. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>24</sup> [Positive Psychology in Practice. Linley, P.A. and Joseph, S. \(2004\).](#)
- <sup>25</sup> [Developing a Growth Mindset with Carol Dweck. Dweck, C. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>26</sup> [Positive Psychology interventions: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies. Bolier, L. \(2013\).](#)
- <sup>27</sup> [Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: a practice-friendly meta-analysis. Sin, N.L. \(2009\).](#)
- <sup>28</sup> [3 Ways to Build Self-Efficacy and Boost Your Resilience. Nwiran, Y. \(2017\).](#)
- <sup>29</sup> [Tough at the Top? New Rules of Resilience for Women's Leadership Success. Bond, S. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>30</sup> [STRESS AND HEALTH: Psychological, Behavioral, and Biological Determinants. Schneiderman, N. \(2008\).](#)
- <sup>31</sup> [The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-Being. Brown, K.W. \(2003\).](#)
- <sup>32</sup> [Full catastrophe living : using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness. Kabat-Zinn, J. \(2013\).](#)
- <sup>33</sup> [The mindfulness solution to pain : step-by-step techniques for chronic pain management. Gardner-Nix, J. \(2009\).](#)
- <sup>34</sup> [Positive Psychology interventions: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies. Bolier, L. \(2013\).](#)
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