

Bounce Bounce Bounce

By James Bone, physiotherapist & yoga teacher

“You've got to accentuate the positive
Eliminate the negative
Latch on to the affirmative
Don't mess with Mister In-Between “

Johnny Mercer

Get Up and Go

Life is full of waves – exciting peaks and miserable dips. Bad things happen, stress, loss, pain, and also good things happen, and then life goes on between these events.

Our ability to cope with change and live through challenging experiences depends upon our resilience. This is our ability to bounce back, to get back up when life's negative events topple us over.

“Resilience lets an artist like Frank McCourt turn the pain of a difficult childhood into compassionate literature. Resilience carries a Nelson Mandela through his years of prison without letting him lose heart, and shows an injured yogini how to align her body so that her own prana can heal the pinch in her groin. Resilience is basic. Without resilience, none of us would survive the accumulated losses, transitions, and heartbreaks that thread their way through even the most privileged human life.”

Sally Kempton

Our attitude to things influences how we are motivated to act – if you believe you will do well ie are optimistic, then you are more motivated by positive outcome; however if you believe you will do poorly ie are pessimistic, you are more motivated by avoiding failure.

Bad is stronger than Good

Unfortunately extensive research indicates that psychologically we have a built in “bias” – bad is much more powerful than good. The negative anxious, angry thoughts capture our attention much more powerfully than the positive happy thoughts. Think about it yourself – do you remember the bad events more significantly than the good? The media understands this bias and makes use of it often – most news is of sensational bad events, playing upon our fears and insecurities. Remember this negative bias especially at night before going to bed. Consider - Is the news a good thing to hear just before going to sleep?

I can be my Own Threat

When caught in the negative we can spiral downwards. Our brains find it difficult to see the positive in this situation, due to the power of the negative bias. Threat is so powerful that the brain short circuits the response directly to the limbic brain (emotional brain) setting off the stress response even before we have consciousness of the event. Threat is enhanced by past experience and expectation. Radhika and I have had experience with noisy violent neighbours, so now we have become sensitized to noise from neighbours as threatening, even small amounts, which may have not bothered others. People with chronic pain who fear that they may cause damage have learned to become threatened by certain movements. Expecting certain movements to hurt or cause damage, they change how they move or even avoid the actions, even stopping what may have been enjoyable activities for themselves before. The new negative appears to win out over the positive memory of the past.

The Power of Good

Though bad is more powerful over our psychology, some research suggest that good is more powerful over our behaviour.

So what can we do to not be caught in this negative cycle and so help us be more resilient to life's ups and downs?

Be aware... Be alert... Watch...

Be on the look out for the negative and how it affects you. If you feel you are falling into the negative cycle of thoughts and feelings, the first thing to do is to "take action". Do something, get physical and move. Get out of your head and back in the present. If you have time, do what makes you feel alive. The more fully engaged you are in the present, the less time you have to focus on the negative – and so help break the downwards cycle. The 'being present' brain circuit can help cut off the negative thinking/feeling circuit, and taking action helps to move more towards the positive.

May the Focus be with you...

This is where yoga can help – to focus on the breath; also to do something challenging often helps to get out of your head (and the research is there to prove it!) An interesting study at a British University found 6 weeks of yoga was able to improve wellbeing and improve resilience to stress in workers at the university.

In the *Yoga Sutras*, a classic yoga text, it describes that it is not life's negative events themselves, but our suffering to the events, which causes us distress. Suffering is very individual and the yoga sutra is basically a text designed to reduce human suffering, as it recognises we cannot change events, only our

attitude and approach to the events. It provides a path to be more in touch with consciousness or our deeper self.

Once the mind is clearer, then it is in a better position to focus on the whole not just the negative, and be in a better position to solve problems or deal with the issues. This does not mean to run away from the problem; it may mean to better listen to your feelings, be with them, and then let them go. This is where another concept within yoga and tantra can be a powerful aid. The simple act of “surrendering”; letting go at mind level, stop fighting, be more in touch and act in flow with what is going on than against it. It does not mean giving up, nor being walked over, but rather letting go to the situation to find a better way to resolve it.

Reminder to remember

These things take time and practice to master. Going to a yoga class, tai chi class or even some martial arts classes, help remind us of important principles. Reading inspiring literature may help, but then we also need the internal discipline to practice, self reflect and give our selves some time out to do this. See beyond the current challenges, enjoy life more, and cope with stress better

And remember to persevere!

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."
Winston Churchill

"All great masters are chiefly distinguished by the power of adding a second, a third, and perhaps a fourth step in a continuous line. Many a man has taken the first step. With every additional step you enhance immensely the value of your first."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another."
Walter Elliott

"Consider the postage stamp; its usefulness consists in the ability to stick to one thing until it gets there."
Josh Billings

"Patience and perseverance surmount every difficulty."

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