

OVERCOMING DISAPPOINTMENT

MARTIN LUTHER KING FAMOUSLY SAID, 'THE ULTIMATE MEASURE OF A MAN IS NOT WHERE HE STANDS IN MOMENTS OF COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE BUT WHERE HE STANDS IN TIMES OF CHALLENGE'.

HOW TRUE THIS IS, because we all face adversity and disappointment at different times in life. No one welcomes it, but it happens, and it comes in all shapes and sizes: the loss of a loved one; a failed relationship; poor exam results; missed promotion or selection; sickness or not reaching your training goals.

Learning to overcome disappointment, persevere through adversity and move on, is key for becoming all we want to be and living our best life. How many people do you know who have been richly rewarded for quitting? And what successful person hasn't had to rise from the bottom, persevere after some setback or failure and deal with disappointment?

Consider Walt Disney who reportedly had his loan rejected by 301 banks before he finally got a yes and built Disneyland, the most famous theme park in history. There's also J.K. Rowling, the author of the *Harry Potter* books, who had her first novel rejected by 12 publishers. Since then her books have become some of the best-known and most well-read in history and she has become one of the richest women in the world. Another great achiever is the inventor Thomas Edison, whose parents pulled him out of school after teachers called him 'stupid' and 'unteachable'. He wasn't deterred from his passion to invent and obtained 1,093 patents along the way to inventing things like the light bulb, stock printer, phonograph and alkaline battery.

There are many examples of overcoming adversity, including my own, which occurred last year while I was competing in my second Winter Olympic Games, Vancouver 2010. As the pilot for our two-man and four-man bobsleigh team, I lined up at the top of the notorious Whistler bobsleigh track for the two-man event in the best physical and mental shape of my life and ready to beat my Australian record. It's a dangerous, difficult and fast track – the fastest track in the world where our sled gets up to 150km per hour, and which 10 days earlier had tragically claimed the life of Georgian luge athlete Nodar Kumaritashvili.

This moment was what I had trained so hard for and why I had made all those sacrifices – to represent myself and my country with pride at the Olympic Games again. I am the last sled to go off in the first heat and as we explode off from the start I feel strong and powerful, like I am pushing well. I jump into the sled and my nightmare begins: before I know it I am surrounded by medics after having crashed and slid the

whole way down the track on my head. I am fine physically but I am crushed – I can't believe it – I get out of the sled wishing the ground could open up and swallow me whole. Why me?! Why now at the Olympics and why here in front of the whole world? Why would my equipment fail me in such a way, something that had never happened in my entire career to date? I deserve better, surely this cannot be my Olympic Games. No!

How would I handle one of the biggest disappointments of my life? How would I ever get over it? Well, it wasn't easy, but the point is I did! And while your situation may be different, the key is that you too can overcome disappointment. So here are some tips to help you move forward from any disappointment that you're currently facing or that you may face down the track. Use them in your life as well as your training.

Understand the process

Understanding the natural stages that you will go through when you're hit by a major setback or disappointment is very helpful.

- 1. COMPREHENSION** – the period when your brain tries to make sense of what happened versus what you thought was going to happen. It could react in a number of ways such as shock, denial, seclusion or a sense of numbness. There is little you can do at this point while your brain adjusts.
- 2. EMOTION** – the powerful emotions of sadness, anger, loss, grief and/or disappointment will then take over. You can't ignore these emotions. Just ride them out and look for comfort and support.
- 3. REASON** – come to a conclusion/resolution on what happened (even if it is 'stuff happens' or 'I just don't know') so that you can break the endless repetitive cycle of thoughts and emotions that will drag you down and keep your initial emotional response going long after it should have stopped.
- 4. PROGRESSION** – at this point you actively choose to stop concentrating on the setback/disappointment. You refuse to be the victim and choose to move forward and get on with the next goal/living your life (easier said than done I know!).

Remind yourself of the end result

Try to keep your eyes off the disappointments and obstacles and put them back on your ultimate goal/vision/dream to become energised again and persevere. Remind yourself again of the big picture, of what your dream was, why you were doing it and why it was so important to you.

Draw sweetness out of the adversity

To help you keep going in these times, try and draw some positivity (anything) out of your adversity. Even if you're convincing yourself, hang on to any sweetness you can find in the midst of the adversity and disappointment, to help you keep going and move forward.

Become stubborn in a good way

Perseverance is about finishing and not quitting; it is stubbornness with a purpose. To successful people, adversity and discouragement are not signs to quit. They know that this is when most people quit and that is reason alone to persevere. They know that if they run every step of the race well except the last one and stop before the finish line, then in one respect, the end result will be the same as if they had never run a step. So become stubborn, grit your teeth, take the next step forward, and rise up rather than give up.

Recognise that the journey is not one long road but a series of smaller ones

You don't need perseverance when you're fresh, excited and energetic. It only comes into play when you are tired, discouraged, disappointed, close to giving up and when the obstacles seem insurmountable and your dream still seems a long way off. At this point, if you can recognise that life is not a long race but a series of small ones then it can help you take that next step forward. You realise that each day has its own event and each task its own challenges and so you strive – rung-by-rung, day-by-day, goal-by-goal, step-by-step – always moving forward.

Choose to keep a positive attitude

Our thoughts are more powerful than we realise. Our thoughts determine our emotions, which determine our attitudes and expectations. This affects our behaviour, which then affects our outcomes/results. So, even if you don't feel like it, choose to speak positively. Choose to tell yourself that this disappointment will end up being a blessing in disguise. Choose to keep a positive attitude even when you don't feel like it inside. Just 'fake it until you make it' because your thoughts are more powerful than you realise and will influence your emotions and actions.

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