

Ep #290: 7 Steps to Overcome Setbacks



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is episode 290 and today I want to talk to you all about overcoming setbacks. I have asked the members inside my membership to contribute some of the struggles that they have when they run into setbacks, when things don't go according to plan. And I've melded that with my recent experience of a setback and put it all beautifully packaged together into seven steps for you. So let's do this.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen, then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Hello, folks, welcome to the podcast, welcome back. Okay, let's start off with, what is your relationship like with setbacks? How do you tend to respond to them? Because we all have our go-to places when something happens, so how do you tend to respond? What happens when you have a setback? So that might be something that doesn't work out as you'd planned, or you hoped. So that might be a conversation, a date, a project or a goal that you have.

And it can also be something like when you experience illness or an accident, and that might be something that happens to you, or it might involve something that you own. So setbacks can not always, but they can shake our confidence, they can disrupt our plans. And sometimes they can leave us questioning our abilities, but they also present a really powerful opportunity for growth and for learning and becoming the version of yourself who makes it through. And as a result of that, the powerful identity shifts that happen as a result of going through all of this.

So I shared recently about how I came off my horse. My foot, such a weird accident, my foot got caught in a coat that was draped over the fence of the arena I was riding in. And he just thought this flappy monster was after him, and he took off bucking. And although he did stop at the fence at the other end of the arena, I didn't stop, and I went through the fence. And I've been riding since then, and my instructor commented on my mental resilience and my ability to recover.

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So she and I had this conversation about how does someone mentally come back after experiencing a setback or adversity of some kind. And it just got my brain ticking over because between, I think, being who I am, as in how I was born and raised, my experiences, just who I happen to be, there's that side of things. But there's also all of the training and investments that I have made into being a coach, which means that responding to setbacks has become somewhat second nature to me.

It was so funny, she made a comment. She's like, "I've never known someone to have the mindset that you have, Maisie." And I was like, "Well, I should bloody well hope so." The amount of money and time and energy I've put into managing my own mind, as well as coaching others, that should be the result of that. If it weren't the case, there's a problem. So I've been reflecting on that and just trying to figure out what it is that I do that helps me to come back so that I can share my process with you in case it's useful, and feel free to take it and make it your own, but here we go.

Step one. And this is so important. I would actually say it's the most important. Ask yourself, do you want to find a way through this? If you do, if you want to continue to do whatever it is you're doing, or you want to meet your goal, then immediately decide that you will get past it, full stop or period as North Americans say. This is paramount. Make the immediate decision that you will get past this, no matter what. And make that decision as quickly as you can.

Just commit to being on the other side of it and really feel that in your bones because this decision sets the foundation of everything that follows. If you don't make this decision, if you are uncommitted and just kind of wishy washy about it all, then you're effectively saying, "Well, I'll just let circumstances decide," when you could be saying, "I will decide what happens." It's such a huge difference.

Now, the challenge in doing that is when you're feeling despondent or hopeless, disappointed, frustrated, etc. But I'm going to get into all of that, so let's do step two, which is feel how you're feeling. Alright, process what happened. Take care of yourself. Setbacks do come with emotions.

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Sometimes they come with stress responses. It's okay to feel those things. It makes sense that you feel disappointed. It makes sense that you're frustrated or even scared.

Acknowledging and processing these thoughts, these feelings, these responses, that's important, especially if you want to then effectively move forward. And you don't have to jump into it being a learning lesson. One of my clients was sharing this, that that's their go-to, well, if I can find the positive in this, then I don't have to feel the emotions that I'm feeling. So you get to feel disappointed and frustrated or whatever it is. But just notice if you're using mindset work to actually avoid how you're feeling or try to avoid how you're feeling because it's not going to be successful.

Feeling like giving up, by the way, is just part of the stress response to setbacks. It does not have to mean anything. You don't have to add all this story to what you're feeling and experiencing because feeling hopeless, thinking things like, well, what's the point. They come from that sense of collapse that is associated with the freeze response, which is why you might also be experiencing a degree of inactivity rather than jumping back into things.

But if you recognise it as that, if you recognise it as a temporary state, that it's simply down to human physiology, then what happened and your response to it doesn't represent the entirety of your capability or your potential. So this is really crucial for your recovery, for your resilience. And I know that resilience is a bit of a buzzword that gets chucked around in self-help, and it's somehow taken on the meaning that the more you can endure, the stronger you are. That is not what I mean.

When I'm talking about resilience, I never mean that you should be able to put up with things that harm you or that you shouldn't be affected by the circumstances of your life or that constant adversity and being in survival mode is somehow good for you. This is not a message to toughen up. Actually, I think resilience often involves what we could describe as falling apart.

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And the conversation around resiliency typically neglects broader systemic issues, inequalities, and just used to do with sideways things like justify poor conditions, like, well, look at how well they're enjoying this hardship. They're so resilient. Not cool. We're not doing that round here. And you don't have to do this on your own; other people can help you. Other people can help you process what's happened because, as I said, that is important. So you can do this with the support of others, but, big but, there are caveats to that. So make sure you listen to the other steps that I'm about to talk you through first.

So step three is control your narrative. You are going to repeat what happened to you dozens of times. You will say it to yourself internally. You will tell other people. Every time you recount your experience, you are reinforcing a narrative in your mind. When I say mind, I mean literally every part of you because we can't actually separate body and mind. But each time you go over what happened, you are deepening that neural pathway. So it is of the utmost importance that you decide on the narrative.

Setbacks can either define us or refine us, and the only thing that depends on is the narrative you have about your experience. That can be about how you describe the experience and also what you make the setback mean about you.

So this came up when I was coaching someone in the membership last week. I'll give you the general gist of things, no details. But this member had had a stressful thing happen, a mishap with something that they own, that got damaged and needed to be repaired. So it was an unexpected cost for something, and not just financially, but also about what that thing represented to them.

And of course, when we're stressed out, and we're in a situation like that, our minds like to offer us all sorts of criticism, that we should have known better, that we're stupid, that because this setback has happened, then we shouldn't be doing it in the first place. And it just proves that we're useless and all of the things that the inner critic likes to offer. And my client had a

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narrative that was along those lines. So we unpacked that, and they figured out a much more useful narrative.

And this isn't about gaslighting yourself and saying that it wasn't stressful or challenging or painful, but can you describe things in a less loaded way? So what about, well, this sucks, and I'm going to feel this way. And I'm also going to take care of myself as I go through this. It's not going to last forever. So even in the stress response, you can reframe your narrative of being in that stress response.

Step four is to acknowledge what went well, because there will be things that went well amidst the not-going-well stuff, both can exist. And this is where doing this in community can help, well, at least my community, because as you're here in step four, not all help is actually helpful. But this kind of resilience that we're often talking about is more about community support, collective effort, rather than just individual grit. And that includes those around you helping you to see everything, including the things that you might have missed. So that's often what I'm doing as a coach.

And my client had come up with some things that had gone well and that she was proud of herself for. So, even in stress and tragedy and things like that, there are things that have gone well. But if you don't look for what went well, then you're just going to focus on what didn't go well, but can you give equal airtime to the positive? Because unless you purposefully do that, your inner critic is going to let loose. It's going to use the setback as evidence, evidence that proves that you're not good enough. And then it will go back in time and look for all past evidence of how you are a failure.

So I used to have this pattern of thinking where if I experienced a setback or received criticism of some kind, it might not even have been criticism, just I perceived it as criticism. Then I would just descend all the way back to a reading test that I did when I was in infant school, so younger than my son is now, I would say. And in this reading test, I mispronounced one word. I can even tell you what the word was; it was tongue. And I think I said, tongue you, but I got everything else correct. So I think I got 39 out of 40 on the reading test.

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And nobody berated me for it. I wasn't teased. My parents didn't punish me or anything like that. I was just gutted to get one wrong, and it was really painful for me. So as an adult, I would go back to that early experience and use it to beat myself up. It's such a clear example of cognitive distortion. So that's when we over-generalise from a single incident to this overall belief of failure. And cognitive distortions often take the form of sentences that have always and never in them. It's very dramatic representations. I'll never do this. This always happens to me, blah, blah, blah.

Another cognitive distortion that I often hear is, "Well, all the progress I've made is lost. I'll have to start from scratch and it's going to take me ages to get back to the same place. And that might be true in some respects, but how is it not true? How have you gained even with the loss? So if my business ended overnight, I would certainly lose things, but I would be able to create and rebuild my business so much quicker than I did the first time around because of everything I now know and all the experience that I have.

So the skills and insights you've gained you retain. They can never truly be lost, and it probably won't take you that long to get back to where you were. Would you prefer not to have to do it again? Probably. But it's probably going to happen a lot quicker than the first time around. This happened to Paul, my partner, in the last week. He was making a radio show, and he'd worked on it for a couple of hours in the evening, and then the software he was using crashed, and it didn't save it. But he did it the next morning and it took him 15 minutes. And that's often the case, so it's not even true necessarily that it's going to take the same amount of time.

Another cognitive distortion is blaming yourself versus taking self-responsibility. It's really easy when you're going through a setback to fall into the trap of thinking this is all my fault. But there's a big difference between constructive self-reflection and destructive self-blame. Self-responsibility means looking at what happened, understanding your part in it, and then using that knowledge in a helpful way. Whereas blame is using that information as a weapon against yourself.

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Acknowledging what went well isn't about ignoring what went wrong, by the way. It's just about balancing your view to include what you handled well. Choosing a narrative that acknowledges the challenge, but also it acknowledges your capacity to navigate and overcome it. So when I came off Buttons, my horse, I immediately started focusing on what went well. I controlled my narrative. So he stops at the fence. Some horses would have gone through it. I sat on all of the bucks that happened before we got to the fence.

After I came off, he just went back to hanging out. He was pretty chilled. He had actually found a packet of Polos that was in the coat pocket. He just ate the whole thing, wrapper and all, so he adjusted afterwards. And I got back on him without any issue. That is amazing. He was fine with me being on him, also great. So I just focused on that rather than focusing on all of the other things.

So step five is something, it's kind of a continuation of the last couple of steps, but well, I'll just tell you, it's to reject unhelpful thoughts. So I've covered addressing your thoughts, but be mindful of the thoughts that other people offer you. You have to be vigilant about the thoughts that you entertain following a setback because people are going to offer you their thoughts, their opinions. Reject the unhelpful ones, whether they're originating from your own doubts or they're the opinions of others.

Be on it, especially during more vulnerable times when we might be more open to what other people think and may be more susceptible to negative input. You have to guard your mindset because other people will have their reactions and responses; that's natural. But you get to decide if you're going to accept their thoughts or if you're going to reject them. Most of the time, what people say is an attempt to be helpful. It's often their concerns about things, their fears, but their thoughts can actually undermine your recovery if you allow them to.

A really good example of this is prior to me having Nelson, I had a miscarriage. And someone that I told, they'd also experienced a miscarriage, and their response was to tell me about how, in any future

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pregnancy, I would experience so much anxiety and worry. And I instantly and completely rejected that thought because I knew it reflected her experience. And I know from all the work I've done that it also represented the experience of many. And common sense would probably say, yeah, that will happen, but I didn't want it to be my experience.

So I just decided it wouldn't, and I rejected her thought that she'd offered me. Knowing that she was trying to be nice and loving and helpful and supportive and all those things, but I was like, "No, I refuse to accept that." And people might say things that are helpful, but they can also say things that seem helpful in terms of being reassuring, but what seeds are those thoughts actually sowing? What shoots are they nourishing?

After I came off Buttons, someone sent me a text that said something along the lines of, "How are you feeling after your shocking accident?" And to reach out to see how someone is, how they're doing after an accident, is a lovely thing to do. But I was quite fascinated at their, what I would call, dramatic way of describing it. And this is what I mean by, it's not just you who will form a narrative around what happened, other people will too. And it might be your mum, your partner, your colleague, all sorts of people, words matter.

And if you're not actively rejecting the thoughts that others offer you, then you are accepting and absorbing their narrative. And we often have a sensitivity to what's said after an intense event, so be onto this. Be vigilant about the thoughts you entertain following a setback. Be mindful of those seeds that are being sown. This can also happen when you don't get the desired response or positive feedback from other people.

So relying heavily on others' positive feedback leaves you vulnerable to their criticisms as well, and also to their indifference. And that might be in the form of something that's said explicitly. It could also be entirely created by your imagination, and you've just decided that this is what they're thinking. So are you valuing their opinion over your own? There are things I've done that other people just aren't into or they're just not fussed about,

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but I've been solid in knowing what I've created is great; they're just not the person for it.

I once had an ex offer an opinion about something I was creating in my business at the time. And if I had been relying on his opinion and approval, I would have been devastated, and I would have scrapped the idea and believed his opinion. But I knew that what I was making wasn't for him. He didn't represent my clients at all, so I just ignored him and cracked on, and it went really well.

At other times, outside opinion is helpful, but if you're relying on positive feedback from others to prop your self-belief up, then you will be greatly swayed by both positive and negative responses. And your emotional well-being will be contingent upon other people. And that's never useful because your self-esteem will fluctuate based on external responses and what other people happen to say or not.

And with a setback, you will mentally and physically revisit what happened. So decide what you will focus on right from the get-go. And our memories aren't even as accurate as we think they are. So you may as well just decide your narrative.

Step six is just to identify your needs, simple. This step is about tuning into your unique situation, your unique requirements. So what would support you in order to move forwards from this setback? Do you need to make adjustments? Could you do with some help? Do you need some time and space to process things? Do you need to talk it out with someone? Do you need some coaching, some physical TLC, a different horse? Not really, Buttons is lovely. Or is it more about belief? Do you need to believe that it's okay to make mistakes? So just identify your needs.

And the last step, step seven, is get back in the saddle. Because this isn't just about your thoughts, you have to take action as well. And I do think there's great wisdom in getting back on the horse as soon as you can. This is about actively engaging in the activities or tasks or projects that you were

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involved in before the setback occurred or when the setback occurred. You've got to get back in the game and create some fresh experiences.

For me, getting back on my horse after coming off, it had to happen then and there, despite the bruises and initial apprehension. I just knew that delaying it would only feed that fear. So I got back on about 15 minutes after, once I knew it was safe and we'd kind of assessed how I was doing. And I just walked around on him, I didn't do more than that. And then I actually didn't ride for a few days whilst my finger was healing, but my next lesson, I was walking and trotting and just getting past it.

Bringing in those fresh, new memories of it being okay because I stay on the horse more than I come off. But when we have something like this happen, we focus on the time that we came off, but what about all the times when I didn't come off. And I think actually I got back on him the day that I came off, then I didn't ride him for a few days. Then I had a lesson where I was walking and trotting. And then the day after that, I just decided, I'm going to ride on my own because I just didn't want to leave it any longer, because I knew that delaying things would create more space for worry and fear.

So I got on him. It was a really windy day, it was really wild, but I was just like, "I'm getting back in the saddle." And getting back in the saddle reinforced the narrative that I had chosen. It started creating other neural pathways. And just riding in that same direction that he took off where I went through the fence, approaching that fence line, I needed that visual of it happening without any issues so that I had newer visual memories of that environment. This is about demonstrating to yourself that fear isn't going to dictate your actions.

It doesn't mean that fear won't be there, because courage isn't the absence of fear, it's the presence of it, and moving through it. And it's the same for my client. The next time she uses the piece of equipment that was damaged, that's a mistake that only happens once. And as she said to me, you don't know until you know. We all have to have these experiences in

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order to learn, and we just do our best not to repeat them. So each action you take rebuilds your confidence, it reaffirms your chosen narrative.

And that might be revisiting a failed project, re-entering the dating scene after a bad experience, riding your horse again, the act itself is a declaration of courage and resilience. And actually, about a year ago, I also came off another horse, and I damaged my knee. And part of coming back from that involved having a riding lesson where I cried for most of the lesson, really crying, not just little tears, bawling and saying whatever on Earth was coming out of me at the time.

Because I needed to feel those feelings and face that fear, whilst being on horseback, whilst being in the environment that the accident happened in. People around me were so concerned, and I think most people who saw or heard about me crying interpreted that as weakness of some kind and therefore not being resilient, but that was resiliency, it really was, and it helped me come through it. So this isn't about the absence of fear or discomfort or tears. It's about the mastery of those feelings and being able to experience them if they're there.

But taking action reassures your brain that you are capable of facing and handling challenges, which you are, and that is essential for psychological growth and resilience. So there you have it, folks, seven steps to overcoming setbacks. I would love to hear about the setbacks you've experienced, the things that have helped you. So if you're in the membership, post in the community, let's discuss it. And if you're not, just shoot me a message, let me know. Alright, folks, catch you next time.

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