How to Feel Good When Things Go Bad: Boost Your Resilience With Self-Affirmations.

By, Leslie Becker-Phelps, PhD

Life's twists and turns can be scarier than any rollercoaster ride out there. Without warning, a perfectly fine—even good—life can take a turn for the worse. Whether you are faced with a lost job, failed health, or personal rejection, such a blow can knock you off your feet. And you might find it almost impossible to get up, never mind feel good about moving on. But, with time, effort, and the proper perspective, you can get yourself up and back on a good path.

The real problem in situations that seem to pull the rug out from under you is that they affect your whole sense of self. Whereas problems that cause less distress don't feel good, they still allow you appreciate other positive aspects of yourself, which strengthens your sense of self-worth. This happens naturally because people are motivated to feel good about themselves.

When you lose your sense of self-worth, a good way to recover is to use what psychologists call self-affirmations. These are statements you make to yourself that affirm your strengths in some areas when you are struggling in other areas. For instance, consider a manager who struggles with making presentations to colleagues. This person might help herself or himself feel better by remembering that they are a good athlete, a generally well-liked person, and someone who employees come to for guidance. Then, with improved self-esteem, they would be more likely to address the problem at hand in an effective, non-defensive way. In this example, they might acknowledge their performance anxiety and learn strategies to manage it. As a result, they'd be more likely to improve their skills, feel good about this accomplishment, and generally view themselves at work in a positive light.

Without a sense of self-worth or such self-affirmations, people often defensively place the blame for problems outside of themselves. This kind of defensive response can backfire, leading people to remain stuck in bad situations or destructive patterns of behavior. In our example, the manager might feel the need to protect himself or herself by viewing colleagues as highly critical. And, in such a hostile work environment, they will probably be more defensive and have tense interactions with those colleagues. Whatever the circumstance, externalizing blame won't help you make changes to improve yourself or your situation.

Another possible reaction to significant problems is for people to turn against themselves. Those who are inclined toward high standards often become critical of themselves and their performance. So, when faced with a situation that cannot be realistically overcome, they frequently keep pushing themselves even as they become more and more distraught about their abilities and their value.

So, when faced with adversity, it is important not to turn a critical eye to others or yourself. Instead, choose to remember positives about you that are based on an honest assessment of your strengths. Then, with self-affirmations, practice, and effort, you can learn to regain your sense of worth and become more resilient; moving on more easily from major setbacks to new exciting life challenges.
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