

STUFF HAPPENS: WHAT MATTERS IS HOW YOU RESPOND

What helps you handle situations when things go wrong, or events seem to conspire against you? You may feel a mix of disappointment, frustration, and resentment. Your confidence in your own judgement can take a dip.

We observe that leaders who stay resilient:

- accept that 'stuff happens' and it doesn't help to dwell on what might have been
- remember that no senior leader anywhere can expect a career without setbacks
- draw parallels from other spheres such as sport where success and failure happen in rapid succession
- recognise that many events are outside their control, and life is not always fair
- know how they best reflect on an event, act on the learning, and regroup
- have trusted others with whom they can work through their emotions
- draw out one or two learning points from each adverse event

Approaches that might be helpful can include:

- assume there will be maybe four setbacks each week and that if only two things have gone wrong it has been a good week
- draw from the experience of scientists who might do hundreds of 'failed' experiments before finding a method that works
- talk with others about what they have learned from mistakes and how they have internalised their learning and moved on
- be ready to take responsibility for mistakes, but resist beating yourself up for things that were outside of your control
- remind yourself of what has gone well, and remember to mark progress with your team
- observe when you are at risk of taking things personally and know how you best protect yourself.

Key is how we keep disappointments, setbacks and mistakes in proportion. Remember what makes you smile and what gives you fresh energy. The best of leaders have learned hugely from apparent failures and intense disappointments. They draw from their mistakes as much as from their successes.