

How to SOAR Past Setbacks



We often assume that the size of a setback determines how much it affects us, but that's not the full story. **Your response to setbacks is a big part of what shapes your recovery.** Here's a helpful approach for SOARing through future challenges.

- S** → Self-compassion and acceptance
- O** → Optimism
- A** → Act wisely
- R** → Reach out for support

Self-compassion and acceptance

S

Treat yourself like you would treat a loved one in distress: with compassion, not judgment. Research shows that offering yourself words of reassurance and comfort, rather than criticism, contributes to greater motivation and improved mental health.

Remember: your feelings are not “right” or “wrong.” They just are.

Optimism

Optimistic thinking doesn't mean excessively positive thinking. It means realistic thinking. Use the 3 “P”s to take a realistic view of your problem.

Permanence: Will this matter as much in the next 2 months? In a year?

O

Pervasiveness: Does this issue affect my whole life, or just one part? Who or what in my life reminds me of what's going well and that my life is bigger than this moment?

Personalization: How can I try to prepare better next time for the things I can control while being careful not to take responsibility for things I can't control?

Act wisely

Leverage the best of your rational mind and your emotional mind to find a helpful middle ground: your wise mind.

A

Emotional mind:

“I'm going to give my boss a piece of my mind!”

Rational mind:

“I'm angry, but I've got to shut down and push through. I won't say anything.”

Wise mind:

“I'll explain to my boss how this situation affects me, without shutting down OR being overly emotional.”

Reach out

R

After a setback, don't go it alone. Help others help you by asking for exactly what you need. For example, if you just need to vent, ask, “Could we set aside an hour to talk? I don't need advice right now, but I do need someone to listen.”

Reflection exercise

Think of a setback you've experienced at work. For example: a missed deadline, an unfavorable performance review, a layoff, or a conflict with someone on your team.

How did you respond?

How did you treat yourself in the aftermath? Who or what did you blame?

What were your next steps? Did you seek help from others?

Using the principles of SOAR, what would you do differently next time?

How can you reframe your thoughts about yourself?

E.g. "I'm not smart enough" → "I could have prepared better, and I also faced unrealistically tight deadlines. Next time, I'll be more proactive and ask my boss to help me prioritize."

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