



## 3 Ways For Runners to Build Resilience

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It's true runners are a tough bunch, but even the strongest runners can reach their breaking point, both directly in training or in their personal life, which can have a secondary effect on their running. From recreational runners to elite runners, all levels come with their specific set of challenges and can benefit from learning how to build resilience.

"Resilience is withstanding or even thriving on stressors or adversity," explains John Keenan, MS, running and mental skills coach and co-owner at [Intrepid Performance Consulting](#). "Based on research, the four most common issues — and therefore resilience-building opportunities — are injury, performance slumps, illness and career transitions."

Just reading that list may make you anxious, but it is important to know that these issues don't have to be a negative end to your story. Keenan uses injury as an example; how you approach recovery and set goals as you return to running can make all the difference in building resilience. It is all part of turning an unfortunate circumstance into a positive outcome.

### THE BENEFITS OF REACHING YOUR BREAKING POINT

When you reach a breaking point, in training or a race, it puts you in the perfect position to build resilience. In fact, some would say that you can become a stronger runner — and person — by bouncing back from these tough moments. This applies to both reaching the breaking point and actually 'breaking.' It should be noted that if you do 'break,' this doesn't necessarily mean you quit; Keenan notes the difference between the two because with quitting, there is no bouncing back involved. Reaching a breaking point may not seem like a good thing in the moment, but there definitely are some long-term benefits.

"You can reach a breaking point and even break, yet go on to finish a training session or race," confirms [Jeff Grant](#), a specialist in mental coaching, peak performance and transformation and author of "[Flow State Runner: Activate a Powerful Inner Coach's Voice](#)." "These are often the moments that impact you in a hugely positive way, as you experience firsthand the lesson that you are stronger and more resilient than you believe you are. We only know our limits when we push past them, and to do so, we have to be willing to break, perhaps just mentally and emotionally, but potentially physically as well. In this way, reaching a breaking point is digging into a juicy growth moment. It's well worth it for your evolution as a runner and a person navigating life in general."

Again, a lot of this depends on how you are able to look at the situation and you may not get these benefits until you are able to step back and reflect on what happened. This may even help you identify triggers and weaknesses you either should work to avoid or strengthen so you don't run into the same situation again.



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## WHY MENTAL TRAINING IS IMPORTANT

To better arm yourself, adding mental training into your routine can help. From bonking in a race to suffering an injury that sets you back in training, mental toughness is key. If you've done the mental work upfront, you'll already have a lot of the tools you need to bounce back faster (and be able to turn the situation around and see the positive aspects a lot more quickly, too).

Mental training may look different for everyone, but Keenan stresses it should be a "specific and separate practice" that is often overlooked. People don't know what to do, so they skip it altogether.

"I ask all of my clients to keep a 'thought log' alongside their running log," Keenan explains. "Forget the concept of positive and negative thoughts and ask yourself, 'Are the thoughts that I have while running helping or hurting my progress toward my goal?' If they're getting in your way, consider why you may be having them at that exact point during the run. Maybe the thoughts occur at the beginning of your run before you've found your stride, at the end of your run when you're tired or somewhere in the middle during a particularly tough section. After reflecting, begin to plan your next workout."

When planning the next workout, Keenan has runners look at the route on MapMyRun and zone in on sections where they are more likely to have those negative thoughts. Once those are identified, create a [mantra](#) or positive thought to use in that section; you actually want to rehearse the process of pulling that thought into your mind before you go on your run. As you do this more and more, Keenan says you'll become better at not only being able to identify what problems you commonly face but have an exact solution of what can mentally help you push through.

## THREE WAYS TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Besides keeping a thought log as part of your overall training log, there are a few other things you can do to build resilience. You may choose to do all of them, a combination or even just try them out one by one to find which works best for you. Even employing just one of these tactics can help make mental training a regular part of your running (with the overall goal of becoming an even stronger runner).

### 1 RUN EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T WANT TO

Taking action is an incredibly valuable part of building resilience according to Grant. Even if you end up cutting your run short, you still won the mental battle by getting out the door and running, no matter how long or how far.

"Run when you don't feel like it," he exclaims. "Run when you're stressed and have too much to do. Run when it's cold and rainy. Run when you're hungry. Run earlier than you want to in the morning. Run when you feel slow. Run when you feel tired."

### 2 RUN HEADFIRST INTO TOUGH SITUATIONS

Keenan says you should be proactive and put yourself into tough situations rather than avoiding them. Do you reach your breaking point on a hill? Add hill training into your weekly routine. A certain distance always leave you feeling run down? Don't shy away from it, but instead look at it as a challenge.



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“When designing your workouts, identify elements that are difficult and act on them, persevering until you succeed,” he encourages. “The more that you design your workout regimen to include legitimate challenges that you gradually overcome, the more you can expect your resilience to be there when you need it.”

### 3 CELEBRATE A WIN FROM EVERY RUN

When keeping track of your data and thought log in MapMyRun, be sure to add a win you had that run. Not only does it help you recognize you can do hard things, but during those particularly tough times, you can go back and read a running log of all of the successes you experienced.

“In building resilience, it’s crucial to give credit where credit is due,” adds Keenan. “Sometimes it’s a grand gesture ([such as] fastest time ever [or] farthest run ever) and sometimes it’s a seemingly insignificant act, like just waking up and getting out the door. Both build resilience, and acknowledging that on a consistent basis helps to build your arsenal.”