

# Five Key Ingredients in the Recipe for Resilience

With figures showing the world is facing a tsunami of depression and tragically high rates of suicide here in New Zealand, there is good reason to be concerned about mental health and wellbeing. Particularly for people working in high stress, fast paced, pressure cooker environments like the restaurant industry.

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The good news is science has uncovered a kind of 'vaccine' for depression. Not only can this 'mental toughness vaccine' help prevent depression, but it can also enhance our lives by increasing productivity, creativity, motivation and physical health.

The core ingredient of 'mental toughness' is having an optimistic mindset. Fortunately, this type of mindset is a learned skill – not just being lucky when the genes get handed out at birth. When we think of optimism, we tend to think of happy people who look on the bright side of life, 'glass half full' types. While there is some truth in that, what we're talking about is deeper, more specific than simply seeing the world as full of all things good.

The recipe for an **optimistic mindset** is based on the ground breaking work of Dr Martin Seligman, one of the most influential psychologists of the 21st century. His work has led to hundreds of scientific studies exploring the benefits of learning to use an optimistic mindset.



Seligman examined the thinking styles of people who are able to bounce back from adversity, and who can easily get on a roll after brief success. It's about keeping our internal 'self-talk'

on the right track, and using more helpful thoughts to drive how we feel and act, rather than letting momentary emotions take charge.

When faced with a **setback**, unfortunately it's human nature to catastrophise the event in our mind. It can often be one of three default settings we use to explain the cause of adversity (a fire in the kitchen, a rude diner, a mistake with an order). There is **permanent** ("customers are always ungrateful"), **global**, affecting all aspects of our life ("everything is so stressful"), and **personal** ("I'm hopeless at all this stuff").

When something **good** happens, often we're too quick to think of it as a **temporary** success, one *specific* only to this particular situation and mainly due to **external** forces, rather than our own skill or talent. (For instance "what a huge tip, I'll probably never get another one like that again.")

The proven style of optimistic thinking is about seeing our **setbacks** as temporary or fleeting. That they are *specific* to that one event or situation and mainly due to circumstances or **factors outside our control** ("Tough day, last night's big night out has made a few people cranky".)

Just as importantly, when **things go well**, we need to capitalise on that success, big or small, by thinking of it as **permanent** – "I always..." – and applicable to other areas of life. We need to find aspects of that success that are due to 'me' – my efforts, skills or talent.

Data from thousands of New Zealanders who've had their thinking styles tested show that we are quite a pessimistic bunch when it comes to how we see the causes of our successes. We love to be humble and knock those tall poppies down, but we actually need to high-five ourselves more.

So there's work to be done, but it can be learnt, and the pay-off can be huge.

We hope to be sharing more with you on this in the future, but in the meantime:

1. When the proverbial hits the fan think PIP – "put it into perspective". Treat it like a speed bump on the highway of life, not a landslide that has destroyed the whole transport network.
2. Don't sweat the small stuff.
3. Put your energy into what you can control and let the other stuff slide away.
4. Think of bad events in terms of being temporary, specific and the 'result of many factors' alongside your part in it.
5. Think of the good stuff that happens in terms of permanent / always, everything / universal and 'me'.

**It's your mindset that matters most.**

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kim Tay and Jamie Ford are directors of Resilient Minds, a consultancy that thrives on teaching people the skills that drive motivation, enhance performance and unlock potential.