



BOUNCEING BACK

Sometimes life throws us some pretty nasty setbacks, but it is possible to weather the storms and come out smiling. By Helen Hawkes.

Sometimes life does give us lemons, and making lemonade isn't that easy. The pips can obscure the juicy stuff, and being fired, having your partner cheat on you, or even being the victim of vindictive gossip can leave a sour taste in your mouth.

However, there's one big difference between those who survive setbacks and those who go under: the survivors know how to bounce back from even the most appalling, flattening or scandalous setback.

Think about cyclist Lance Armstrong, who overcame impossible odds to survive cancer and win the Tour de France seven times.

Or, less nobly, supermodel Kate Moss, who has weathered a storm of bad publicity over her cocaine use to continue being one of the world's most successful models.

Gary Bertwistle, a creativity expert and international lecturer, says: "Most people face major setbacks at some stage in their lives. But those who overcome the downers make a decision to turn things around. They don't wallow in the problem. They use their brain (and often someone else's, such as a media consultant, family member or counsellor) to formulate a strategy to move forward."

All right, you might well say, but not all of us are Lance Armstrong.

"The experience of such situations is different for everyone," says coach, speaker and consultant Sue Pieters-Hawke. "But everyone who is caught in a bad situation can use the same techniques for overcoming life's challenges."

PRACTISE ACCEPTANCE

"Accepting how things are is critical," says Pieters-Hawke. "Only then can you move forward."

In 1993, Queensland lawyer Paul Harpur, then 14 years old, was running along some railway tracks when he was hit from behind by a train.

After several days in a coma and four months of rehabilitation, he was left with no sight.

The 27-year-old has gone on to complete business, law and masters degrees and is currently completing his PhD. He also teaches law at Queensland University of Technology and is a face of the Royal Blind Foundation of Queensland.

After losing his sight, Harpur also became a star sprinter at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games, where he broke a record that had been in place for 18 years, even though he was the only competitor who was blind.

"I had two choices – give up or get on with it," he says. "I faced reality and decided to get on with my life. As Lao Tzu said, 'A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.'"

GET HELP

To get past a crisis, you need to take a step back and look at exactly what kind of mess you are in, says Pieters-Hawke. "If you feel you can't do this, talk to friends, a therapist, your GP or someone who can help you."

They can also be enlisted to help you brainstorm coping strategies, says Bertwistle.

For Scarlett Gordon, a 29 year old from Queensland, it was her parents who provided her with valuable perspective about a disastrous relationship in her teens.

"Unbeknown to me, my boyfriend was using drugs and getting mixed up with some bad people," she says. "Once I broke up with him I was scared for my physical safety and I had to move house so he didn't know where I lived.

"My family helped me get out of that situation with support and guidance. My dad also sent me on an interstate trip where friends and family showed me how to be happy again and he sent me to a self-defence class to give me more confidence."

LOOK FOR THE SILVER LINING

"Many of us tend to see every reason why we can't do something and all the frustrating details, as opposed to looking for the ideal outcome," says Bertwistle. "Yet if you focus on the things you don't

want, your brain sure as hell won't help you get what you do."

Or, as Harpur says, "If you dwell on the problems instead of the solutions you're sunk."

When 38-year-old Lisa Balakas fell pregnant at 21, she feared it was the end of her career dreams.

"I was halfway through my interior design studies and not ready for children," she says.

Balakas turned an unexpected challenge into a chance to refine her career ambitions: she developed her own clothing label, Ripe Maternity Wear, which is now in 600 stores nationally and internationally.

"Maternity wear wasn't something I would have come into contact with if life had gone according to my plan. But the business has not only allowed me an outlet for my creativity, but given my business partner and I the opportunity to offer women and families more flexible working environments."

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE GOOD PR

Media strategy consultant Anthony McClellan has helped both Ian Thorpe and Robbie Waterhouse weather PR storms. "I help clients put strategies in place before it all goes pear-shaped," he explains.

McClellan says he not only helps clients manage potentially damaging situations, but he also points out that this path has been trod before and that people can, and do, get through it.

You may not have your own PR, but you do have a support team – friends, family and maybe a therapist. So why not put them to work positively spinning your experience to flapping ears or letting it be known that you are in the market for a great new job, partner or life. It's a better way to get past a crisis than allowing everyone access to the gory details.

FORGET REVENGE

If your partner cheats on you, or your boss screws you over, it may be tempting to embark on a mission to ruin their life, but this just keeps you bitter.

It may be a cliché, but success – in other words, getting on with your life – really is the best revenge.

Amanda Booth, managing director of Melbourne's Spice & Soul communications, was married at 24. At 29, her partner had an affair.

While she could have taken revenge, she chose to direct her energy into rebuilding her own life instead.

"I don't think taking revenge is constructive because you lose your dignity," she says.

Okay, it wasn't all sweetness and light – she did write a book called *The Break-Up Survival Guide* (Hardie Grant). But Booth says it was constructive, not bitter. "It tells you how to get through things like denial and anger and get your mojo back."

Today she is remarried and expecting her first child.

REFUEL YOUR SOUL

Somehow you need to find a way to shore up your spirit so you have the energy to move on.

"Ask yourself what are the things that settle, ground or nurture you, that you can access in your current situation," says Pieters-Hawke. "For some people that may be a spiritual or religious tradition. Others have a meditation practice. Or it could be walking on a beach, or getting out in the garden and digging holes or pulling weeds."

Doing something that makes you feel good and gets you over feeling sorry for yourself is important.