

4 Strategies to Survive the Entrepreneurial Roller Coaster



Not every day is rainbows and unicorns.

If you've spent even one week on the entrepreneurial thrill ride, you'll know what I mean.

Maybe it was those targeted ads you hired someone to create that weren't so targeted after all. Maybe all the money you put aside to invest in new tech gear turned out to be merely a down payment. Or maybe it was that morning you were set to pitch the biggest deal in the history of your startup, but your nose started dripping like mad and your drip-campaign dried up.

Some days are just hard.

The entrepreneurial journey is difficult to navigate, and many people develop unhealthy or downright dangerous coping mechanisms. You might be familiar with one or two: binge-watching, binge-eating, binge-internet-surfing, binge-shopping, binge-whatever – insert your dysfunctional behavior of choice here.

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Stressful experiences result from an imbalance between the demands of your environment and your ability to cope with these demands. Excess demands create a disruption that requires you to somehow cope and re-establish order in your life. No doubt you've developed strategies for dealing with these challenges over the course of your lifetime – formed from behaviors and attitudes that alleviated stress for you in the past.

The fact is, not all coping mechanisms are created equal. Most responses to stress fall into two categories: emotion-focused strategies and problem-focused strategies. Emotion-focused strategies may include behaviors such as denial, disengagement, distraction, donuts or cheese dip. Not good for the bottom line (your company's or your own). As an entrepreneur, you need a better plan than sugar and salt. You need a problem-focused strategy that moves the dial and helps you reset so you can get back to kicking butt and taking names.

Stress is not new and it's not going away. The right coping mechanisms can help you be more effective and resilient. They'll enable you to bounce back quickly and bounce *up* to an even healthier place. Here are four problem-focused strategies to help you step up.

1. Physically reset.

Changing your body chemistry is a great way to start shifting your physical reaction to stress. For you cynical eye-rollers, scientific research proves the mind-body connection is real. The next time you're freaking out, move away from the screen (or offending object or party), and release your pissed-off energy with a short walk. Nowhere to go? Fine. Try 25 to 50 jumping jacks, mountain climbers, surfboard jumps, burpees or whichever exercise you prefer.

The goal is to channel your frustration so you can release it and give your body a chance to emit some endorphins – naturally produced neurochemicals whose effects are similar to hormones. An added bonus: If you're having a really stressful week and decide to channel it into regular exercise sessions, you might just find yourself looking at some curvy calves. Feeling good and looking good is a great combo for upping your entrepreneurial confidence.

Daily hack: Take a five-minute physical break every hour and do a mini-makeover. Walk away from the mental task at hand and stretch or do a short burst of physical activity to raise your heart rate.

2. Build your posse.

You need your mastermind posse – a group that serves as a safe place for you to share challenges, get a breadth of perspective and know you are not alone. Notice I did not say vent. It's all about constructive sharing. Receiving social support focused on problem-solving avoids putting you in the role of wounded victim or bitter blamer.

Of course you can tell your tale. Just set the timer for seven minutes. If it takes more than seven minutes to share your story, you aren't helping yourself cope. (Resetting the timer

for a new seven minutes doesn't count.) Exposure to other brilliant minds will help you better navigate the next pitfall or – better yet – avoid it altogether.

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Daily hack: Text, email or launch a five-minute video chat with a mastermind buddy. Share today's frustration or give an update, tell a silly joke, celebrate a win, whatever. You'll both get a smile and a reminder you're on this crazy ride together.

3. Make a plan.

Planning involves two steps. First, examine and strategize possible ideas for how best to handle the stressful challenge. Leave your darts at the door. No need to pop balloons too early – enjoy the exploratory phase of how you might proceed going forward. Some of your ideas might be snarky, and that's understandable as long as you focus on realistic responses to get back on track.

Second, decide which ideas are the best ones for crafting a plan of action. If and when you choose an idea, separate it into bite-sized chunks to decide how you will implement it successfully. Knowing you have control over these big pieces will help you deal with the few things you have zipo control over.

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Daily hack: Take two to three minutes every morning to review the bigger game plan. That might include your personal or company mission, your core desires, affirmations, some large goal or mini monthly goals. Maybe it's simply a few mantras you're focused on right now. It's important to reset the bigger framework and reprioritize your energy so you can

put the little stuff in its place.

4. Take action.

Saying and doing are two different things. It's easy to announce you're starting a diet – right *after* you inhale a burger and fries. It's much harder to start that diet the next day. By then, your stomach is rumbling, the phone is ringing with new business, and the chocolate bar at the back of your desk drawer is whispering sweet messages directly to your subconscious.

Get ahold of yourself. Focus. You've got this. You know you can take one small action step to make things happen. You do have the power to influence a better outcome. You are NOT at the mercy of the entrepreneurial gods. You know *exactly* what you need to do today to move your business forward. Many of the greatest entrepreneurs have revealed their wild successes as merely a collection of small action steps every day. This is a journey to be celebrated and enjoyed.

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Daily hack: Before you put your head to pillow mentally or physically, list five things – no matter how small – you acted on during the day to move the needle. The nightly reminder that you're a kick-ass go-getter will set the tone for the next day.

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You will never be entirely stress-free. But how you handle stress is a lifestyle choice. Emotion-focused coping strategies can be helpful in the short term when you feel overwhelmed or the situation is out of your control. Used consistently in the long term, however, emotion-focused coping strategies get in the way of your success. In fact, some

studies link them to lower levels of resilience and higher levels of overall stress and illness.

Problem-focused coping strategies increase your resilience and productivity. Put these into practice, and you'll be less likely to get stressed out or sick. Even better, you'll be much more likely to ride the entrepreneurial coaster all the way to end.

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