Success Isn’t About Having the Best or Most Original Idea — It’s About Resilience. Here’s How to Build It.

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My company, Jotform, was not an overnight success. I didn’t wake up one day to find myself the darling of TechCrunch or attract massive funding rounds from VCs ravenous to get in on the form-building action.

I probably don’t have to tell you that a form-builder is not the world’s sexiest basis for a startup. But that doesn’t bother me one bit. Jotform became successful not because it’s flashy, but because our products work. And I believe they work because my employees and I strive every day to create the best experience for our customers.

Here’s the truth: Success is not about having the best or most original idea. It’s about being resilient. In my case, it was about getting up with the birds and spending time every morning before my full-time job to work on my startup, even when it was cold and dark, and it would have been easier to stay in bed. It was about not quitting when a major tech behemoth released a product similar to the one I was launching. Resilience helped me press on, even when I felt like quitting.

Resilience is an internal fire that keeps glowing, even in adverse conditions. Some people are born with it; others develop it over time. Here’s how to build your own resilience,

even if it doesn’t come naturally to you.

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Stay calm

I’m a proponent of the practical philosophy of Stoicism, the goals of which, as described by the philosopher Epictetus, are “to identify and separate matters so that I can say clearly to myself which are externals, not under my control, and which have to do with the choice I actually control.”

As a founder, there are so many things you can’t control — the “externals.” Maybe you’ve lost a client, received a bad review or experienced data corruption. These things may feel like the end of the world, but they’re not. The sun will rise again tomorrow.

It’s normal to be upset over a setback, but fretting excessively will only keep you from focusing on the things you do have power over — the “internals.” A huge part of building resilience is learning to set aside the externals and channel your efforts toward managing the internals instead.

I find it helpful to make a list — what are the things I’m worrying about that I can control? What are the things I’m worrying about that I can’t? Fold up the list of external worries and put them in a drawer. Then, move on to the internal list, using an Eisenhower matrix to help prioritize.

Be data-oriented

In times of turmoil, I always look to data. Not only do numbers never lie, but they’re crucial for making informed decisions based on concrete insights about everything from market trends to user habits to operations. I have always been vigilant about tracking our monthly active users — seeing that they’re consistently growing helps quiet the “what ifs” that

might otherwise take over.

As important as a gut feeling can be, I strongly believe in making decisions driven by data.

Practice gratitude

It may sound a little woo-woo, but practicing gratitude has proven benefits on both mental and physical health, building a layer of resilience against hardship. Back in 2003, psychologist Robert A. Emmons produced a landmark study that opened the door for research on the myriad effects that a grateful mindset has on our well-being. Researchers have since found that those who experience gratitude in their daily lives have lower levels of depression and sleep better.

> *"What impresses me are the objective, biologically verifiable outcomes that go beyond self-report measures," Dr. Emmons told the New York Times.*

The best part? Being grateful requires very little time. Experts advise building it into your routine – while you're brushing your teeth or as you open your laptop to start the day.

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Keep going

One of the best ways to build resilience is simply to keep moving forward. World War II General George Patton, who led troops through nearly every major American conflict of the 20th century, put it best: "A good plan, violently executed now, is better than a perfect plan next week."

At Jotform, we practice a hybrid launch strategy – we

continuously improve our products while simultaneously planning big, public releases. For the latter, we strategize carefully – teams have their tasks mapped out before the big day to mitigate stress and unforeseen circumstances.

But even with careful planning, bugs happen. It’s just the reality of a product launch. And you know what? We deal with them. Our development team is notified daily about the open bugs, and we keep a scoreboard in which we handle the oldest tickets first. We even make it a little bit fun, with developers competing to see who can fix the most bugs each week.

No product is going to be perfect, but that doesn’t mean you stop moving forward. Of course, you want your product to be good, and you should do everything in your power to ensure that it is. But striving for an impossible ideal will only slow your momentum.

There are a lot of genius startup ideas that never get off the ground. That’s because the idea itself is only a fraction of what it takes to become successful. Resilience is key. Stay calm, analyze your data, be grateful and most importantly, keep going.

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