

## How to develop a mountain of RESILIENCE

By Martin Murphy

When you're going through some tough times you really have two challenges going on simultaneously. One is the outer world challenge you're faced with and the other one is the battle that's raging on the inside. You have to master your inner game if you want to overcome the challenges life throws at you.

I found this out when engaged in the selection process the Special Air Service Regiment puts potential candidates through, in order to assess their suitability. The 'Regiment' has some intriguing ways to test your inner game. Some are blunt instruments and some more complex. I developed a technique which helped me through the physically and mentally demanding challenges I faced.

On the selection marches we were made to navigate across what seemed like a gazillion miles of the steepest mountains and bog infested valleys carrying heavy packs called Bergen's. We often picked up rocks along the way, shoving them in the Bergens so as to maintain the heavy weight, or fear being kicked off the course at one of the check points. The pain of the straps biting into our shoulders increased as time wore on, exacerbated by the muscle numbing cold wintry weather.

As the exhaustion set in my mind would begin to work on me, trying to make me quit. Our inner monkey is a lazy bugger and doesn't want us going out there taking on hard work if it doesn't have to. Humans adapt to demanding challenges by consolidating new neural pathways and muscle strength. But in the beginning you've got to resist the urge to give up. There are many emotional states the inner monkey has to attack your resolve, frustration, exhaustion, fear and humiliation being just some of them. What I realised is that I needed a safe place mentally I could go to regroup. When studying sports psychology later in life I learnt athletes do a similar thing.

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In my case I would think about the state I wanted to achieve and how that could be represented. I thought about the mountain and its ability to remain stoically impervious to whatever weather battered it. It was I thought the epitome of resilience and I had to tap into those qualities within me. I then affirmed that stoic resilience with a chant.

*"No matter what they do they can't stop time, keep moving and it will end"*

I would repeat this over and over or shorten it to: *"keep moving"*

I would then visualise myself getting back on the transport, having successfully completed the march.

Then with a deep breath I would push on and complete the course.

I later developed this into a tool I call:

### **Stop – Pause – Back to SAFE Mode**

When your inner monkey is beginning to get the better of you, just **stop** and take a **pause**. Then think about the ideal physical and emotional **state** you need to perform optimally. Often a peak state requires being relaxed and focussed on the task at hand. Then make that state an **affirmation** which you can repeat over and over. Doing this stops the inner critic from intruding on your thoughts. Then **focus** on what you want and not what you don't want e.g. completing the task at hand. Then **exhale** completely because this forces you to take in a deep breathe afterwards, making you more conscious of your breathing. When we're stressed we breathe from the top our lungs and gasp. Breathing deeply releases feel good endorphins as we begin to relax.

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This simple six step process can be applied to many situations:

- 1) **Stop** – what you're doing, mentally at least
- 2) **Pause** – create a gap in the inner chatter
- 3) **State** – think about a peak state such as being: *relaxed and focussed*
- 4) **Affirmation** – mentally or verbally; chant “*relaxed and focussed*”
- 5) **Focus** – on completing the goal
- 6) **Exhale** – then after a full exhale, take a deep breath and carry on

If you want to learn more on the subject of resilience then the [Metris Leadership Resilience course](#) will help you learn practical steps to improve your ability to persevere in the face of challenges and uncertainty in life and work. Ideal for leaders and team members alike. You'll be learning from former members of the Special Air Service and an Olympic athlete and sports psychologist.

I always like to remember Mark Twain's quote when facing tough challenges ahead:

***“It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog.”***