



## Being Mentally Tough (and Considerate) in Stressful Situations

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Are you or others you know mentally tough? No matter how difficult the problem, they remain focused on solving it rather than becoming stressed out or cynical. They don't let urgent matters make them nervous or uptight.

How about people you know who are mentally tough, yet also sensitive and caring? No matter how difficult the circumstances, they remain calm and considerate. They care about people, but don't let people's criticisms upset them or weaken their self-confidence. They don't let other's negative feelings or moods impact how they feel. They are secure in themselves and don't depend on others for validation.

In contrast, consider people you know who aren't tough minded. They are easily angered. When confronted, they are quick to defend themselves and may even go on the counter attack. They struggle with stressful situations. They don't handle adversity well. Rather than react calmly to challenging circumstances, they become upset. Rather than listen to opposing opinions, they react with criticisms of their own. When someone else says "Can I give you my candid feedback?" they immediately tense up. They are insecure in themselves.

Being tough minded is hard enough for most people, but to also be sensitive and caring at the same time can be impossible. The two qualities seem incompatible. It would be relatively easy to be tough if you didn't have to also be considerate and caring. However, there are people who do it and are richly rewarded for it. They are able to handle most any situation without becoming harsh, negative, or cynical. They care about people, but don't let people upset them. They have a high threshold for adversity and difficult circumstances that would otherwise be stressful for others.

If you are in a position of significant responsibility or expect to attain a position of significant responsibility, your ability to handle difficult circumstances without becoming anxious or stressed is critical to your success. Particularly if you are a senior executive, your ability to handle customer complaints, co-worker conflicts, project mistakes, and media criticisms will determine how well your organization performs.

Consider these principles when you need to be tough minded while at the same time maintaining your composure and compassion for people:

- Set your own standards, priorities, and goals. Formulate your own values. Determine what is important to you and the people you care about.
- Confront your adversity if it is "a battle worth fighting." Rather than ignore an issue or hope it goes away, engage it as quickly and constructively as you can.
- Develop a written plan so you have a roadmap that takes you where you want to go and away from any troubling circumstances that you may be dealing with.
- Execute your plan and realize that as long as you are making progress against your plan that you will eventually arrive at your desired destination.
- Live in the present moment. Set goals and plan for the future, but live for the current day. Give today your best and be satisfied that you did all you could.
- Leverage your circle of trusted advisors. Seek wise counsel from those you respect. Use your allies as your sounding board. Validate your plans and be reassured that you are doing the best you can.
- When criticized, consider the source. Know when you are dealing with hecklers and ignore them. Don't reinforce bad behaviors by giving hecklers your attention. Don't lower yourself to their level.



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- Realize that if someone you don't respect says something negative towards you, you should be glad for it. If they said something positive about you, it could mean that you are like them. Like attracts like. Be glad when people of dishonorable character don't like you.
- Accept yourself. Accept your past and look toward the future. You are not perfect and neither is anyone else. Don't let your lack of perfection dampen your confidence. Quit comparing yourself to others. Realize that your unique combination of genes, nurturing, experiences, education, and knowledge make you truly special.
- Listen to the opinions of others whom you respect. Learn from them, but don't let them weaken your self-confidence. Don't outsource your self-esteem to anyone. Don't ride on the emotional roller coaster of other's opinions and moods.
- Recall all the great work you have done. Review your accomplishments and past positive testimonials. Review thank-you notes from past projects. One mistake or failure doesn't undo all your past successes.
- Be grateful for what you have. Focus on the positive aspects of your life. Put your adversity into a broader perspective. Your adversity is likely a small matter compared to all else that you are involved in.
- Spend time with people you respect and who respect you. Engage in activities you enjoy. Get your mind off of your problems. Go to the gym and let your frustrations out on the training circuit.
- Appreciate the learning and experience that comes with adversity. While you might prefer prosperity, that isn't where the best learning comes from. Learn the lessons to be learned and be grateful for the experience.

Apply these principles and enjoy the success that comes with being tough-minded without losing your caring nature.

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Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com](http://www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com)), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches ([www.ScopeOfLeadership.com](http://www.ScopeOfLeadership.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corp ([www.AlpineLink.com](http://www.AlpineLink.com)), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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