

Realistic optimism

When you put realism and optimism together you have to imagine them sitting at opposite ends of a child's seesaw. When optimism goes up too high, it becomes blind enthusiasm. When realism goes up too high it becomes gloom and despondency.

For example, look at how the world of finance has recently swung from the top of the seesaw with the sub prime mortgage crisis, where money was over optimistically lent to people who had no hope of paying it back. These mortgages were then sold on as 'products' to other financial institutions. Once the bad debts started to build up, the whole banking world went into free-fall.

The seesaw has now tipped in the other direction and banks are operating from a gloom and despondency mode. Some consequences of this are that it's difficult to borrow money, often making it impossible to start a new venture and many viable businesses have crashed and burned because lending has become so 'safe'. Hopefully, a realistically optimistic balance will eventually be achieved in this arena!

For the individual, it's a good idea to keep the seesaw level and in balance.

Tips to help you be realistically optimistic

Make plans you are excited by

Work out what you want to do and why. To start with anything else is like jumping into a taxi and telling the driver to take you 'somewhere else'. Not an effective strategy!

Use whatever method works for you, some people make [mind maps](#), others prefer to brainstorm with friends or colleagues. Another great tool is to make a clear and compelling visualisation of where you want to be in 5 or 10 years time. Just make sure you set aside the time to identify your key goals or targets. If you do this but don't really care about the goals you've come up with, start again until you do!

Create a path

Once you know where you are going, it's much easier to start working out what needs to happen to get there. You don't need to be too precise about the medium- and long-term steps, because things may need to be adapted when you get there. You do need to be very specific about the things you are going to do in the next week, and fairly specific about the next month. Then it's time to get started.



How to stay motivated

Some people are great at getting new projects off the ground, but are not so good at getting them finished. Staying motivated can be about how you structure the individual tasks you need to do to get where you want to go.

If you allow your action list to become disconnected from your overall vision, it will very likely become harder to keep going. If you can clearly identify each and every task as another distinct step that takes you closer to your goal, and one less thing you need to do to get there, your action list will become much more compelling.

How to keep getting back up when the hard knocks come

There will always be hurdles along the way. What makes the difference to your success rate is how you handle these. As comedian Lily Tomlin says, *"The road to success is always under construction."*

One of the most important strategies is to recognise that everything that happens to you, good or bad, provides you with useful feedback. This means you can learn, even from your biggest disasters.

If you swap any internal suggestion of failure for the concept of feedback, you will stay resilient because receiving feedback keeps you engaged and active. Responding to 'failure' is a dead end. What's important is that you keep trying. Or, as the catch phrase from the film *Galaxy Quest* says: *"Never give up, never surrender!"*

Tracking your progress

Set yourself milestones and plan lots of small and a few big rewards. Use completed action lists to see what you have done. Track your activities in your diary. Compare where you are now to where you were six months ago. Once you start to see the progress you are making, you will feel even more motivated to keep going.

Be your own flexible friend

Not all plans work out exactly how you wish. It's important that you register that everything you do and have done is useful. You will have had incredible amounts of feedback from which you'll have learned lots. You will always have that experience and knowledge. It will be useful to you in the future if you remember to use it constructively. You carry it with you into whichever new venture you decide to take. Never underestimate that.

Sometimes in life we have to imitate a tree in a strong wind. The trees that are brittle and unyielding snap over, the truly strong ones, bend in the wind and weather the storm.

Stay optimistic

Finally, it is important to believe that if you keep trying, stay flexible, keep it real, and steer your course in the general direction that inspires you. It will all work out, just not necessarily the way you expected!



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