

# **Didn't get the job? – How to bounce back and move on**

**by Michael Licenblat**

Do you become stressed when you have been rejected, turned down or knocked back? The very reason why rejection damages so many egos, breaks so many hearts, and steals so many dreams may lie in how resilient you are to pressure.

Resilience is characterized as being able to adapt to, and bounce back from, tough situations without compromising your objective. Being able to bounce back quickly from rejection, instead of dwelling in self-pity, allows you to get on with your life and keep working towards your target.

So, how do you develop resilience to the emotional stress of rejection?

When you cut yourself, your body instantly goes to work to clot the blood, seal the wound and fight any infection. If you break a bone, your body immediately goes to work on protecting the area with inflammation, healing the bone tissue, and restoring circulation. Your body is innately resilient and bounces back from setbacks because it adapts itself to restore balance and health.

In nature, the willow is a strong, resilient tree that can tolerate strong weather conditions because it bends easily in the wind without breaking. It adapts to its environment in order to not just survive, but thrive.

The degree to which you are prepared to adapt yourself to rise above rejection, instead of getting sucked into self-pity, will determine how quickly you bounce back and get on with the next job interview. Here's how you can bounce back from rejection with glory...

## **Focus on the upside**

Why does rejection hurt so much? Is it because it makes you feel like a failure? Is it because you feel as if you are *not* good enough, and that no matter what you try you aren't going to succeed? No. Rejection hurts when you focus your mind on the pain. Have you noticed how well people can cope with pain or injury well until they see blood?

In one study, three groups of participants were asked to soak their arm in a bucket of freezing cold iced water for as long as they could stand it. During the submersion, the first group watched funny movies and told jokes to each other, the second group practised a relaxation technique, and the third group just sat there in silence. Groups A & B were able to increase their pain threshold by 50%, whereas there was no change to the pain threshold of group C.

By refocusing your mind on the empowering aspects of the interview, instead of the painful ones, you will bounce back from setbacks and rejection.

Dr. Maxwell Maltz, a renowned plastic surgeon, began research into the human mind. He noticed that with some people, once the bandages were removed after receiving cosmetic plastic surgery, if their *internal* self-esteem had not changed, then no matter how perfect a job he did, they still felt ugly. What they focused on, regardless of the reality, is what they experienced as true.

After a job interview, what you focus on, regardless of whether you get the job or not, will determine whether you feel confident and self-assured or irritable and depressed.

**Tip:** Pay attention to the aspects of the interview process that you felt *good* about. Focus on the aspects that *did* go well. Did you present yourself well? If so, then be pleased that you did that! Were you proactive in the interview, talking about your strengths? Well, that takes courage, so if you did that then be proud of yourself. Did you give your best effort in the job interview? Then, that's all you can ask of yourself, so acknowledge yourself for having the confidence to be your best.

**Tip:** Acknowledge how you feel, but don't dwell on the rejection. Why waste your time doing focusing on something that hurts? It won't get you any closer to the job. It sounds harsh (because it is) but you have to tell yourself 'Get up - Get over it – Get on with it'.

### **Is it a disaster or a learning experience?**

Dr Rich Allen (Ph.D. in educational psychology) has studied how the brain receives, processes, stores and recalls information. In a leadership program of 80 participants, a 60-second movie clip was shown of a car traveling down a dirt road and then colliding with a barn. Immediately after the clip the group was given a list of questions about what they had just seen. Two different questionnaires were then distributed. Half the participants were asked 'How fast was the car moving when the car *bumped* into the barn?' The other half were asked 'How fast was the car moving when the car *smashed* into the barn?'

The group that was asked to describe the collision as 'bumped' reported an average speed of 42km/hr. The group that was asked to describe the collision as 'smashed' reported an average speed of 67km/hr. The alteration of a single word produced a significant change in the participants' perception of the film clip.

In the same sense, if you describe your 'rejection event' as a personal reflection of your self worth, then you will probably feel like a failure and give up. Rejection feels painful and you will feel worthless if you describe it in terms of 'you'. Comments like 'It's all my fault', 'I always achieved what I set my mind to - why can't I just get the damn job?', 'What's wrong with me?' is an invitation for self-pity and misery. Even the word 'reject', which is defined as 'to refuse to accept or use; to throw away; to discard' conjures up images of worthless garbage tossed away into the bin. What a ridiculous way to describe a human being!

Putting yourself down reduces the effort you put into your next interview. Research has found that people with lower self-esteem set lower expectations for their performance<sup>i</sup>, underestimate their capabilities and set less challenging or mediocre goals<sup>ii</sup> which leads to putting in less effort than those with high self esteem<sup>iii</sup>. In short, taking rejection personally can lead to not trying as hard at the next interview.

However, describing the event in terms of the ‘learning’ you gained from it, allows you to feel empowered that this situation will make you either smarter, stronger, and one step closer to a ‘Yes’.

Look at rejection is as a stepping-stone that points out the path to where you want to go. In that sense, rejection is actually a helping hand that shows you the way that *didn't* work, so that you can find what path that *will* work. Without knowing what doesn't work, how can you expect to grow and improve?

As a child, you would have fallen over many times before you finally took your first steps. As I watch my own children grow and learn how to walk, I notice how each failed attempt teaches them how to improve, adapt and overcome. Each false step is actually a step closer to the right step. Rejection is your arena to learn how to improve, optimize and strengthen so that you can get what you want.

**Tip:** Describe your rejection experience in empowering terms instead of ‘put-down’ language. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, look at how it is showing you the way to getting the job you want. Ask yourself:

*‘What can I learn from this?’*

*‘How can this situation make me stronger, smarter or happier in my life?’*

*‘What do I know now, that I didn't know before the interview?’*

*‘How will this outcome help me improve in the interview process?’*

Is that being a Pollyanna, pie-in-the-sky optimist who is less in touch with reality? To a certain degree, yes. Will being positive and optimistic help you bounce back from rejection faster, keep your self-esteem intact and your motivation strong? Absolutely!

Becoming resilient to pressure is a choice of how you wish to react to the obstacles, such as rejection, that life throws at you. Now it's up to you decide whether you will let rejection stop you in your tracks and wallow in self-pity, or whether you will see the positive learning and focus on what you have done well, so that you can keep on trying until you get that job.

It's your move.

Michael Licenblat B.Sc(Psych)  
Resilience Expert

<http://www.PerformanceSolutions.com.au>

For more tips, strategies and techniques on how to become resilient to pressure go to <http://www.StressManagementSuccess.com>

---

<sup>i</sup> Coopersmith, 1967; Kiesler & Baral, 1970,  
<http://adtimes.nstp.com.my/jobstory/2001/may19a.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> Heatherton & Ambady, 1993, <http://adtimes.nstp.com.my/jobstory/2001/may19a.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> Diggory, Klein, & Cohen, 1964; Wattenberg and Clifford, 1964,  
<http://adtimes.nstp.com.my/jobstory/2001/may19a.htm>