

A COLLEGE STUDENTS GUIDE TO MENTAL STRENGTH

7 steps to build resiliency and self-efficacy



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Building Muscle Books presents

A College students guide to Mental Strength

7 Steps to Build Resiliency and self-efficacy

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Me being perfect never helped anyone

During my 11-year college journey, I suffered from and overcame impostor syndrome, identity crisis, the death of family and friends, and also severe mental health issues. I bounced from house to house and parent to parent as a kid. I grew up in poverty and in the projects. Most of my friendships growing up were superficial with the exception of a few people in whom I am still close to because I attended 9 different public schools. It was difficult to really sustain solid friendships. As I grew older I lost friends to gun violence and drug abuse. I'll never forget the day of my 8th-grade graduation when my Dad shared this with me. He pulled me to the side after my graduation and said "look son here's the reality, while you're in high school some of your friends won't make it. Some will go to jail, some of the girls will become pregnant and have babies while in school, and unfortunately some of your friends will die." This was a reality check that I wasn't necessarily ready to receive. I honestly didn't believe my Dad at first but his theory would prove to be right as I witnessed what he told me at my 8th-grade graduation, unravel over the next 4 years of high school.

I grew up in neighborhoods where men in particular never talked about their emotions. We could talk about anything else under the sun (women, sex, sports, food, music etc...). You literally could be disrespected and called out your name for speaking on your emotions. I've seen guys be called punks, suckers, soft and much worse for trying to be vulnerable or for displaying weakness. Being in this type of environment for the majority of my life caused me to hide my emotions and kept me from being vulnerable. It took until I was an adult in my late 20's to really address my hidden emotions and take off my "*mask of masculinity*" as Lewis Howes called it. Years of trauma, anger, and fear hid behind that mask along with my tears and pain.

During my collegiate journey, I lost two full-ride athletic scholarships. My family and I were evicted from our home and I was almost homeless. I lost my best friend and grandfather to an incurable disease. I attended 5 different colleges and I'm not proud to say this but I was close to committing suicide. These are just a few things that barely scratch the surface when it comes to issues I've faced in my life. Now, I don't say all of this to overwhelm you with some Lifetime Movie Network sob story and I also don't want a "*pity part.*" I never use my story for sympathy, I only use it for inspiration. What I want you to take away from this is that I persevered to become the man that I am today

by building resiliency. I learned critical life lessons while I navigated through college that I believe will add value to every student who reads this book. This book is a resource for you to build resiliency and to thrive as a student and far beyond that. Use this as a guide that you reflect on weekly, monthly, or as you need it. My goal is to put out into the world, that which I did not have. A book such as this would have helped me overcome my mental health issues as well as my insecurities while I was in college.

Step 1

Stop trying to avoid adversity, it's the weight that you need to build resiliency

"Me being perfect never helped anyone." A question that I ask students often when I speak is this, "what is your favorite movie and why?" I usually get a multitude of answers. Most of the movies that the students share have similar morals. The bulk of the movies shared were based around someone facing major adversities and overcoming them. I noticed that as humans, we love a good story of someone triumphing over tragedy. Adversity provides a sense of connection between us and the characters in the movie. For me, the "Pursuit of Happiness" was and still is my favorite movie. This story of adversity multiplied displayed resiliency at its finest, and the mindset as well as heartset (coined by Robin Sharma) that it took to overcome and excel with every chip possible stacked against you. I was inspired by both the resiliency and the emotional strength it took for the main character (Will Smith) to persevere through his storm while fighting to provide a better life for himself and his son. See, what I am reminded of when I watch that movie is that adversity is inevitable but building resiliency is the great equalizer. The moment you realize that adversity and trials are unavoidable is the moment that you can focus on the art of building resiliency. Resiliency also attributes to respect simply because they both have to be earned. Resiliency is not our birthright, it's earned through perseverance against an opposing negative force. As you build resiliency you now can earn more respect because you give others something that is measurable.

Blue-collar workers like my parents and grandparents always received the utmost respect from me. The reason not being that they were my family, but they earned a living honestly by working extremely hard day in and day out, while supporting their families and making time to spend with their families. Simply put they didn't allow their 9-to-5 to hold them back from taking care of their families and spending time with them. I'm sure there were many more days than not where they may have wanted to quit their jobs, not go in, or just run away from all of the pressure but they didn't. They displayed resiliency and made no excuses. They earned the respect of everyone who knew them because of how resilient they were. If anyone at this time is in a position to truly build resiliency it is college and university students. Between the social pressures from peers, financial

pressures for those of you who are paying for your education by working a job, classwork pressures, and even the pressures to know exactly what you want to do with your life upon graduation. Colleges and universities are battlegrounds for resilience. How will you dominate the battle to ensure that you grow mentally and emotionally while continuing to grow once you graduate? How will you build resiliency for the long run? Below are a few quotes to utilize as reference points while you're on this journey of building resiliency and becoming mentally and emotionally stronger.

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- **Stop trying to avoid adversity**
 - **Embrace adversity and reflect on what you can learn from it moving forward**
 - **Reflect on what you learned and apply what will serve you**
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Step 2

Never let your negative emotions guide you

I remember having a conversation with my business partner about decision making and emotions. We discussed the topic for a few minutes and he hit me with some insight that was game-changing. He said to me "don't make decisions when your emotions are high." Meaning that when your emotions are high, your decision making is low. It makes so much sense right? When I was at my first of five colleges (Lemoyne-Owen College in Memphis, TN), I would operate off of my negative emotions often. As an incoming freshman on a full-ride scholarship with no real guidance, I did what I wanted to do. Also, I didn't do what I did not feel like doing which most of the time meant not going to class. I would almost religiously skip my science class because I didn't feel like being there. As you could assume I was failing the class after the end of the first semester. Years later when I really got to the root of why I would skip class I realized that I didn't understand the science being taught, which made me feel stupid and I internalized that. With me internalizing that, I felt stupid and because I felt this way I seen no need for me to keep going to class. My emotions had won and instead of me seeking assistance in this subject matter, I allowed my negative emotions to guide me all the way to a failing grade. My emotions had replaced my logic and I went with what I "felt like" doing.

Ask yourself, how many times have you allowed your negative emotions and lack of self-worth guide you to make a decision that ultimately hurt you. I have many stories similar to this where I allowed my negative emotions to guide me but that would be an entire book by itself. However I do have a few principles that I do want to share with you. What I don't want to happen is for you to not take these principles seriously and make the same mistakes that I made. Take some time to write down or screenshot these principles and review them three to five times a day. Also think of how you can apply them to your current situation today.

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- **Don't be moved by exhausted emotions**
 - **When you are tired you cannot trust your emotions**
 - **When your emotions are high, your decision making is low**

- **Positive thinking might work but negative thinking ALWAYS works**
 - **"I don't feel like it," is code for "I don't really want what I said I want"**
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Step 3

Stop being addicted to approval and affirm yourself

I posed a question on my Instagram story once and that was, “ if Instagram got rid of the *likes* and *followers*, would you post who you really are?” As you could imagine I did not receive a lot of responses. There is a scripture that says, "First pride, then the crash, the bigger the ego, the harder they fall; *Proverbs 16:18 MSG*." I believe that the reason no one would respond to my question was due to pride protection. Most people would rather think of what they should do instead of actually doing it because putting your pride in places that requires you to be vulnerable is scary for a lot of people especially Millennial's' and Gen Z. However, we all know that pride comes before the fall which means that many of us are setting ourselves up to crash & burn mentally and emotionally at our egos expense. Once you can learn how to release your ego and lower your pride you can feel more comfortable in your own skin.

Social media has been one of the main, if not the main agent in increased insecurity levels of people, mainly teens and young adults. Many Millennial's' and Gen Z suffer from the disease to please. The problem with this is that the disease to please only impacts the person who has it. Pleasing comes from a place of fear. It's one of the most common diseases but it's one that seems to be the most difficult to get rid of. Anxiety and worry are derivatives of fear. Fear is kin to the disease to please which ultimately stems from the need for approval and attention from peers, professors, staff, and/or family. Seeking to please in fear of losing acceptance from peers, an approval from a professor or staff member, or love from family or a spouse. I see students all the time who may want to join a fraternity or sorority or hang out at the bar with people who they don't share values with, or even do drugs because of the need for approval and attention. For many students in whom I come in contact with I find out from them that it is important to fit in than it is for them to stand out. The issue is when you don't fit in you feel a sense of isolation and loneliness. So then you try to make some more changes to who you are and what you believe in terms of your values and morals to fit certain groups values and morals. You then no longer exist on campus as yourself but as a minion. You no longer become the priority in your life so your grades take a hit, then your social life becomes

nonexistent, then you forget who you are as a person. The crazy thing is that being around more people and following crowds won't make you feel less alone. It may make you forget about it for a moment or two but eventually that feeling of loneliness will rear its ugly head back in your vision. Take control of your negative emotions and don't allow them to control you.

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- **Stop seeking approval**
 - **Take control of your negative emotions**
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Step 4

Release your negative self-talk

I was a personal trainer for a number of years and something that stood out to me when I first started training was the negative self-talk that clients would share. "You know, I'm out-of-shape and I don't want you to kill me with this workout." "Ugh, I can't do that! It's too hard." "I'm too fat to go up and down the steps." I have plenty of examples just like this and these are just some of the things that clients would share out loud with me. Now imagine the level of negative self-talk that went on in their mind for them to be able to say these dis-empowering things out loud. As a result many of these clients who I started out with made a little bit of progress but soon reverted back to where they started when they first signed up to train with me. I could not be with them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year which hindered any positive impact that I may have had on them during their time with me in the gym.

When it comes to your negative self-talk I have learned that you cannot lose it, however you can release it. When you aspire to "lose" something (weight, bad habits, negative self-talk) you actually are searching for it. Think about it, say you lose your car keys and you need to get to work. What would you do in this situation? You would look for the keys. Anything that we lose, we end up looking for. Now catch this, when we release something what do we do? We allow it to go away. The things that we release, we no longer look for. Small changes in your language will allow you to make the adjustments necessary to release your negative self-talk. What I want you to take action on is affirming the release of your negative self-talk. Say this affirmation below whenever you feel that your self-talk is making a turn that does not serve you. Repeat this affirmation for a minimum of 10x's or until you feel an emotional shift about yourself.

"I am releasing my negative self-talk and making room for more self-love"

Some people may see affirmations as useless or they may see them as something that only "wooh wooh" people do and talk about. I know from my personal experience that affirmations have power but only when they are intentional. This affirmation that I shared with you isn't a magic cure and it won't change your life instantly. It can however with

consistency, transform your mind and how you show up as a better version of your self daily. You owe yourself to show up and make strides to be better daily. Think back to when you were a child, maybe 5 or 6 years old. You never talked to yourself the way that you currently do. Your imagination was vast and all you could think about was doing things that brought you joy and made you feel excited. The thing is this, that kid that you were is still inside you and every time you allow your negative self-talk to take over, you are dismissing and disrespecting that child. Yeah you grew older but that child and every year prior to the age you are now is still inside you. You're the same person with more knowledge and experiences which have shaped the ways you view the world and yourself.

I want you to take control now! Give yourself the love that you yearn for. Self-love doesn't require you to get another person and it definitely doesn't require you to post a quote saying that "I'm practicing self-love today" on Instagram. All it requires is that you be present with yourself, release your negative self-talk and make the decision to do what is in your best interest. Do what serves you and whatever does not, release it with your negative self-talk.

Step 5

Create new habits

Every New Year, people set resolutions to achieve better health, earn more money, and build their business, live a better quality of life, travel more, etc.. The list is extensive. However statistics show that the majority of people who set resolutions never achieve them. Why is that? Are the goals unobtainable? Do people not really want what they say they do? The conclusion to these questions that I came to was that people have a goal but they haven't adopted new habits to obtain that goal. So when things don't go as planned (which they never will), people revert to their habits. The unfortunate thing about this is that their current habits are not the habits that they need to achieve what they set out to achieve. They soon then quit on their goals and go back to making the same resolutions year after year.

In order for you to increase your mental health and build mental strength you will have to adapt and be consistent with maintaining some new habits. New habits may include taking some time to meditate daily for 10-15 minutes. They may include reading 5-10 pages of a book daily to stimulate your mind. These habits may even include taking a 15-minute walk daily as a tool to re-center your thoughts. There are many different habits that you can adopt that will help you with your mental health, it's up to you to figure out what those habits for growth are.

Take some time after reading this to reflect. This will require a level of honesty with yourself about who you really are and where you really are in life. Not who you think you are or where you want to be. You have to start with your reality. It can become uncomfortable but it's necessary for you to actually take inventory of your current habits and be real with yourself about what habits you need for better mental health and more mental strength. Some of these habits you may have been aware of and you may have known that you needed to work on them but you've allowed your feelings to prevent you from taking action. We spoke about feelings in STEP 2 and not allowing the negative, non-serving ones to guide you. I cannot guarantee that your life will make a complete 180-degree change by changing your habits but I can guarantee that you will be able to look up 3 months, 6 months, or even 1 year from now and see a significant difference in

your attitude and your mental maturity. I have a few points below that recap the importance of adopting and being consistent with new habits.

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- **Do an inventory of your habits and figure out which ones can still serve you and figure out which ones you need to release**
 - **Change only happens when you are consistently taking action with the habits that are facing the direction of your goals**
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Step 6

Put Yourself first

What is the most common response that you hear when someone is asked the question of “who is the most important person in your life?” Or “who is your top priority?” The politically correct answer to that question is usually my kids, my husband/wife, my father/mother, or something along those lines. It’s usually someone who you have a close intimate relationship with. Most people never think of themselves as being their priority and being the most important person in their life. If this describes you, it's okay because you are not alone. I want to help you shift your mindset so that you can become your main priority. When you prioritize your needs and health first, you can add more value to others.

This will be difficult at first but it's necessary. The quickest way to make this shift of prioritizing yourself is learning how and when to say "NO." This was a challenge for me at first, because my natural inclination was to say "yes" even when I didn't feel like it. I thought by me saying "no," that I was being selfish and that whoever I said "no" to would for some reason be angry with me. Both of these assumptions were true at first. I had been so selfless for so long that I didn't know how to be my priority. When I made this decision it wasn't just an overnight switch. It took me being very intentional with my self-care. Every day I would have to ask myself this question multiple times, "is this the best decision for me to make to improve mental health?" Being honest with myself and asking that question helped me to figure out what served me and what didn't. Prior to having this level of awareness, I would try to squeeze the juice out of a lemon that was already squeezed. I would reach levels of burnout simply because I would stretch myself too thin to help someone else when I was the person who needed my help. This shift in my paradigm has allowed me to elevate my level of happiness, my confidence, and improve my self-efficacy. If you can place yourself first, then whoever comes after that on your priority list will be blessed because of it.

Step 7

Practice gratitude

The practice of gratitude is one that I urge you to practice daily without fail. Gratitude is the state of being grateful and appreciative of the benefits received. There are a lot of people who take things for granted instead of being grateful. There are also a lot of people who do not feel as if they have anything to be grateful for when in fact simply being alive is enough to express gratitude. This obvious truth is something that many people will roll their eyes at but it is our reality. With millions of people dying daily, how couldn't you be grateful? Practicing gratitude is not some super-spiritual experience that requires you to be in a room alone chanting. It's a simple practice of just expressing how grateful you are for someone or something.

My daily practice looks like this. I wake up and the first thing I do before I get out of bed is smile. Now at first the felt extremely awkward, and I'm glad that my wife wasn't looking at me. However after a week or so it started to feel less awkward and I noticed that I was smiling without even thinking about it. After I would get out of bed I would pray, read my bible, and while I walked my dog I said out loud what I was grateful for that day. Some days I would have a list of things that I was grateful for and some days I was grateful for just a few things. For example, I was grateful for my health, my wife, and the fact that I had a roof over my head every night. This expression of gratitude instantly shifted my mood into one of appreciation and abundance.

I know that practicing gratitude will empower you as well. By simply taking 3 to 5 minutes daily to express what you are grateful for, you are automatically putting yourself in a spirit of positive energy and high vibrations. The truth is that your mind can't focus on two things at once. You can't give thanks and be angry at the same time and this is to your benefit. Being that you can't do both, this will allow you to tap into a positive energy that will jump-start your morning and help you approach today with a perspective that serves you and anyone you come in contact with.

A mindset that is common with many people is "having" to do something. When you can realize that life is a gift, you will change your language from I "have" to do this, to I "get" to do this. You will start seeing your life as a major blessing. This one shift in

your mind is guaranteed to enhance your mood. So, I want to add more value to you as you prepare for the day to day rigors of being a college/ university student.

Utilize these steps below as a beginning guide to practice gratitude

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- **Before you touch your phone think about what you are grateful for**
 - **Write down 3 to 5 things in which you are grateful for daily (it's okay to repeat some of these daily)**
 - **Read them aloud 10 times, once in the morning and once in the evening**
 - **Be aware of your language (instead of "have to," say I "get to," "I'm blessed to")**
 - **Screenshot or write your gratitude list in your notes and take 1 minute to review it when you feel as though your energy is being thrown off throughout the day**
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In conclusion...

These steps, as you already may know do not just apply to your time in college or at university. These steps are tools that I apply to my current life daily, I just obtained them throughout my collegiate journey and I wanted to bring them to you in a format that was short and concise. With this guide you now have the tools to build resiliency and self-efficacy.

While you use this guide and take action on these steps to enhance your life, keep me posted on your progress! Share your progress with me in the

Facebook group: Building Muscle Mastermind Group

Which step had the most impact for you?

Which step did you share with someone else?

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