

Principle 12

Life will test you -Never give up

Life is both a complex and vibrant journey, encompassing growth, experiences, and interactions from birth to death. It's a rollercoaster ride of experiences, emotions, challenges, and joys. It's full of twists and turns, ups and downs and comes with jaw dropping challenges. It tests our mettle to the very core and sometimes leaves us feeling like the universe has conspired against our very existence. Despite the chaos and the uncertainty, there are stories of triumph and resilience that remind us of the remarkable strength of the human soul.

Let me tell you the story of Annie, a tenacious human hailing from the vibrant city of Cork. Her tale begins with a painful separation from her partner, a heartache that left her with the responsibility of caring for her two young children. Determined to make ends meet, Annie embarked on a remarkable journey—one that would change her life forever.

In the depths of her struggle, Annie discovered a hidden passion for baking. She began crafting mouth-watering apple cakes, a delightful delicacy that would soon help her in her financial struggles. Word spread across the neighbours of Cork as Annie ventured door-to-door, selling her

creations to those craving a taste of joy. The demand for her apple cakes soared, propelling Annie's business to new heights.

But life, as it often does, presented Annie with an unexpected hurdle. The health department caught wind of her unlicensed home kitchen, promptly shutting down her operations. Despite the setback, Annie refused to abandon her dream. She teamed up with her friend Alan, forming a partnership that would not only ignite their commercial spirits but also led to a romantic relationship and eventual marriage.

Together, Annie and Alan poured their hearts and souls into their shared vision. They persevered through the challenges and built their business from the ground up. Step by step, they expanded beyond their humble beginnings, opening not one, but two additional locations across the County. They were living the good life, feeling content and accomplished.

However, life took another dip, testing the mettle again of the couple. The moment their dreams were beginning to take flight, tragedy struck. Alan received a devastating diagnosis: stage four lung cancer. Their world fell apart, yet they pressed on with remarkable bravery. Alan was sick, but he still did chemo and continued to work on the business.

Just when they thought they had weathered the storm, a tempest of global proportions arrived on the scene—the COVID-19 pandemic. Business plummeted, threatening to dismantle all they had built together. Tragically, Alan lost his battle to cancer six months later, leaving Annie to venture into the business alone.

It was an incredibly hard year, but Annie refused to give up. She persevered, not just for herself and her children, but for the memory of what Alan meant to her. And her tenacity paid off.

Today, Annie's Apple cakes stands as a shining beacon, one of the fastest-growing small business brands. Annie's story is a testament to the human spirit's resilience and the power of perseverance.

Life is unpredictable, and we're all going to face challenges and setbacks. There will always be difficulties, crashes and burnouts. Despite the suffering, we are remarkable creatures; we are stronger than we think we are.

So you're probably wondering how to push through the hard times and bounce back from those low moments that life throws. There's no blueprint or magic formula for a smooth ride through these trials. Yet, there are tools, mechanisms of coping, and the unyielding spirit of a champion that can guide us through even the most turbulent journeys. By embracing these lessons, by cultivating a mindset that refuses to surrender, we discover the untapped reservoirs of resilience within ourselves—the very essence of what it means to be human.

Lesson 1. We are all going to face some horrible years.

Life is a relentless mental game of ups and downs that takes us to the highest peaks and plunges us into the deepest valleys. It's a path marked by both moments of pure joy and heart-wrenching

sorrow that will shake the foundations of your being. Queen Elizabeth used the term "annus horribilis" to describe a terrible year. Not every year will be a good year, but one terrible year here and there shouldn't mean the end of your story. We will all experience difficult times in our lives, ranging from devastating events to unfortunate circumstances. These challenges will test us physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

That's just how life goes. Your life is going to be difficult and sometimes complicated beyond your control and it will definitely happen in your future if it hasn't already, or you may be experiencing it right now. At some stage of your life, you will face unfortunate situations, such as a job loss, a health scare, an illness, a natural disaster, a relationship may end or someone very close to you dies.

These emotionally devastating moments will cripple you for a while. Some moments will become unbearable, so unbearable that it may turn you against life and drive you to thoughts of giving up, thoughts of revenge, anger beyond rage, feelings of inadequacy and your self-esteem will take a significant hit. But hear this reality; nobody will have a smooth path in life and devastation will invade. One day you'll be on top of the world only for it to come crashing down in an instant. And to overcome that avalanche of loss and grief is when you'll have to dig deep and hold on with faith, hope and pure grit.

I challenge you to find a single adult soul who hasn't gone through moments of hell. Every human being, without exception, has faced moments of self-doubt, despair, and hardship. As I mentioned in the beginning of this book, I, too, have been caught in a downward spiral countless times, particularly when confronted with the tragic loss of 3 of my beloved brothers. Their untimely departure shattered my world, leaving me adrift in a sea of self-pity and despair. I lost my sense of direction for more than a year and almost gave up. During the chaos, a beloved friend suggested a counsellor who became a beacon of hope, putting me back on the good track. I realised that life was too short to be shackled to the chains of misery. I reached out to the pillars of support, friends, family, and professional guidance and discovered the strength to carry on. I find comfort in knowing that tough times eventually lead to better days.

Yes, life is a kaleidoscope of breath-taking moments, filled with joy and ecstasy. But it's also laced with thunderstorms of chaos and uncertainty. To attain true strength, one must accept both the wonderful highs and the brutal lows of life.

Lesson 2. Setbacks will humble and shape you.

Life involves both losses and gains. We need to figure out how to handle both. Loss is not something I like to accept, but it's a hard truth I needed to hear. Given that setbacks and losses occur more frequently than wins, 99% of us will quit new things within the initial year. These setbacks or losses, regardless of what we call them, make us want to abandon our dreams. However, the biggest lesson I ever learned overtime is those setbacks are not the end game. It's just a sign that we need to adjust our approach.

Faced with setbacks, we have two options. We can give up and let our dreams die, or we can rise

up and use the setbacks as opportunities to grow and transform. One individual who transformed incredibly from setbacks and shaped him into a better person was Steve Jobs.

Throughout his life, he experienced both the soaring heights of success and the crushing depths of defeat. He could sometimes be seen as a contrary and a difficult man to work with, especially during the early years of building Apple. Even in his personal life, he had challenges, including denying his first daughter, Lisa. At first, he thought becoming a father would hinder his career goals and dreams of Apple, so he contested the paternity claim. However, he eventually embraced his role as her father. Then another setback in his career occurred in the 1980s when he was ousted from the company he started. But instead of giving up, he used this setback as motivation and ventured into fresh territory, creating NeXT and acquiring Pixar. Eleven years later, Apple acquired that company NeXT, reuniting Jobs back to his beloved old company.

Steve Jobs spoke of these tough times at Harvard and said, "I am pretty sure none of this would have happened if I hadn't been fired from Apple. It was awful tasting medicine, but the patient needed it." This teaches us that setbacks are not the terminus of our journey, but rather opportunities to learn from them. Experiencing these setbacks made him more humble and made him a better person. Today, his story illustrates the complex back and forth of losses and gain in life.

As I mentioned in Principle 6, winning feels fantastic, but it's the losses that teach us the most. Each setback becomes an opportunity to dissect, adapt, and refine our approach. True success isn't found in avoiding misfortune; it's through refining and defining that the ordinary transforms into something extraordinary. As one says, adapt, improvise, and overcome is the anthem of the unbreakable human soul.

Remember, everything you've experienced in the past has shaped you into the person you are today. In the words of Steve, "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards." Setbacks will make you stronger, wiser, and more resilient than you ever thought possible, shaping you into the person you were always meant to be. This perspective encourages us to trust the process of life, remain open to new experiences, and have confidence that the dots we create today will, in time, form a meaningful and coherent picture of our entire journey.

Lesson 3. Use your purpose as a compass to keep on track.

Our purpose is more than just a concept - it serves as the ultimate solution to unravel the very core of our being. When life gets tough, our purpose keeps us grounded. It makes everything we do matter and pushes us to keep going, even through the most difficult moments. When faced with challenges, we rely on our purpose to shield us. This strong bond motivates us to persevere. People who identify and adopt their life's purpose not only survive, but triumph over adversity. A notable example I know is Serena Williams, who has endured years of discrimination but still persevered.

Throughout her career, Williams has been the target of numerous racist attacks. One remarkable example of her resilience and determination occurred during the 2001 Indian Wells tournament. Following her semifinal victory, Serena and her family were subjected to a barrage of racist

comments and derogatory gestures from the crowd during the final match. Despite facing such blatant racism, Serena refused to be deterred from her main purpose. Instead, she did something better. She won the final and then both sisters boycotted the Indian Wells tournament for 14 years out of principle against the racial abuse they had endured.

While absent from Indian Wells, Serena used her purpose as her guiding light, excelled in her career and utilised her platform to advocate for equality and justice. She honoured her purpose and understood that her journey was not just about herself, but also about the positive change she could make in the world.

Anchoring your aspirations to a deep sense of purpose is the compass that guides you through the darkest moments. When your goals are intertwined with a cause greater than yourself, quitting becomes inconceivable. The desire to make a lasting impact fuels a fire that refuses to be extinguished by temporary setbacks. Remember, the true measure of success lies in your ability to navigate the twists, turns, and uphill battles with more determination.

I'm not sure if you've ever heard of the classic hero's journey. It's something that has helped me immensely get through life, facing the storms and coming out the other side. It's a theory used by many people around the world and I now love and understand the journey more and accept the battles we will face along the way.

A hero's journey was coined by Joseph Campbell who was an American writer and professor. It examines the stages of the hero who goes on an adventure, faces a crisis and wins, then returns victorious. It probably sounds so familiar to you because every memorable movie or story follows a similar narrative. The hero has a crazy idea. People doubt her. She leaves the village to pursue her vision. She faces untold obstacles, falls into an abyss, barely escapes death, but manages to come out the other side with whatever she was looking for and continues on her journey to an eventual triumphant return.

Serena Williams' journey mirrors the classic hero's journey in many ways. From her beginnings as a young, aspiring athlete facing obstacles and doubts, she heeded the call to adventure in a sport dominated by stereotypes and prejudices. She faced fierce competitors and personal challenges, embodying the hero's initiation. Through the crucible of countless matches, racism, and setbacks, her story serves as a testament to her transformative journey, proving that the hero's journey is not confined to mythology but is alive and well on the world stage, where Serena Williams stands as a modern-day hero who has inspired generations and stayed through to her purpose.

Final thoughts, and empowering resources to help implement this theory

Life is beautiful and chaotic and is always shifting. There will be moments of sheer bliss, but there will also be times of unbearable pain. And in those darkest hours, it is imperative to remember the importance of self-care. Nurture your mind, body, and soul and seek solace in activities that bring you peace, whether it's through meditation, exercise, or the simple act of indulging in self-reflection. By prioritising your well-being, you empower yourself to weather the storm and emerge stronger on the other side.

You also need not face life's trials on your own. There may come a time when the weight of adversity becomes too burdensome, when the battles waged within your soul cry out for guidance and support. In these moments, I wouldn't hesitate to seek support. Remember that seeking

assistance is not a sign of weakness. We all need advice from professionals, counsellors, or trusted mentors who possess the knowledge and tools we need to guide us through the jungle of challenge. Embrace their wisdom, for it is through their guidance that we find the resilience to endure.

I will not end this principle with a book or movie. I can only end it with one powerful true story. In a world that often tests the limits of human strength, there is a woman named Peggy who stands as a steadfast beacon of strength, a living testament to the unbreakable spirit of the human soul. Peggy's journey is one etched with challenges that seem insurmountable, yet she demonstrates time and again that resilience is the bedrock on which triumph is built.

Peggy had a good life. She was an orthopedic nurse and had friends and a great boyfriend. When she got married though, Irish law made her quit her job. Birth control was also banned. See, Ireland had strict laws governing contraception and divorce for much of its history, limiting women's control over their reproductive choices and independence. Women faced significant challenges and discrimination, but Peggy adapted and got on with living.

However, life's path took an unexpected turn in her 40's as Peggy's marriage ended, leaving her to bear the weight of raising eleven children on her own. Undeterred by the daunting responsibilities, she rolled up her sleeves and returned to work, tirelessly toiling to put food on the table and provide for her beloved children. The hours were long, and the nights were short, but Peggy's determination never wavered.

She faced health scares, financial crashes, stress, and burnout, which tested her to the very core. But each time, Peggy fought back with a tenacity that defied the odds. The trials of her own life did nothing to dampen her capacity to be a beacon of support for those around her. Nursing and her children were her calling, her purpose, and her lifeline.

Over the years, tragedy struck with a merciless hand, claiming three of Peggy's sons through accidents and illness. The pain of loss was a weight that could have crushed a lesser soul, but Peggy channeled her grief into her nursing to fuel her journey forward. Caring for others became her source of strength, an anchor in the tumultuous sea of life. Her work enabled her to heal not only others but herself as well. Her days were a symphony of caring gestures, countless silent acts of kindness that touched the lives of those around her.

Peggy's involvement with community and the Legion of Mary also showcased her devotion to helping others. She became a pillar of strength, a source of comfort and support for those in her community, embodying the very essence of service. Through every trial and tribulation, Peggy's work and kids provided her with the strength to persevere. She became a master at handling life's many challenges.

I stand witness to this remarkable journey. Peggy taught me life's most profound lessons: the art of living, survival, the resilience to face adversity head-on, and the mastery of navigating turbulent moments with grace. Her words echo in my heart: "Ride out the storms, for the clouds will eventually clear, revealing the sun once more." She understood that setbacks and losses are a part of life, but her faith in purpose illuminated a path of hope. She showed us that losses will outnumber victories, yet the power to persevere lies within. Through her experience, Peggy taught me to find purpose as she did, using it as a compass to steer through life's uncertainties. Her story

reminds us that resilience, love, and purpose can guide us to triumph over the most trying circumstances. Peggy is not some random hero story. Peggy is my mother.