

Why you need to be resilient to run a small business

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Fitness business operators can strengthen their personal and commercial resilience by adopting some simple strategies writes workplace performance and wellbeing specialist Andrew May.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of Australian industry. Accounting for [nearly 98 per cent](#) of businesses in the country, they fuel our economy and, [spanning every sector and demographic](#), they employ [about five million](#) Australians.

Small businesses are typically more innovative, more agile and more creative than large corporations and are finely woven into the fabric of our community, not only servicing locals, but adding to the heart and soul of neighbourhoods around Australia.

Running a small business is challenging at the best of times. Owners often experience cashflow issues, personal debt from bankrolling their business, and the stress of carrying all the risk and working long hours with sometimes little reward.

Adding to these challenges are unexpected hits to business, which the past twelve months delivered relentlessly. Before the COVID-19 shutdown and corresponding economic downturn, many Australian businesses had already been impacted by bushfires, floods and drought.

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To survive and overcome such devastating setbacks requires resilience; that is the ability to bounce back from setbacks and emotionally cope with crises and challenging situations.

According to a recent study of small businesses in Australia, 27% of leaders feel very stressed and 78% are feeling additional pressure as a result of COVID-19. Interestingly, the report found highly resilient small business owners tend to fare better, both personally and professionally, than their counterparts and are more likely to be financially successful, experience job satisfaction and feel happier overall.

The positive news is that resilience is like a muscle that can be developed in a variety of ways. According to the Department of Health, you can build your resilience by:

- knowing your strengths and keeping them in mind
- building your [self-esteem](#) by having confidence in your abilities and focusing on the positive things in life
- building healthy relationships
- knowing when to put your hand up to ask for help
- managing stress and [anxiety](#) levels
- working on problem solving skills and coping strategies

More specifically, small business owners can strengthen their resilience and that of their businesses by following a number of strategies.

10 steps to build resilience

1. **Draw on your ability to endure.** Tough times begets mental toughness. Getting through hard times and discovering we can come out the other side in itself helps to build resilience and gives us an internal reserve of mental strength to draw from the next time we face a challenge. If you've done it tough before and come out the other side, know that you can do so again.
2. **Know the red flags.** Recognising the signs that you are not coping allows you to take action before they overwhelm you. Red flags include consistently not sleeping, having a short fuse, withdrawing from friends or family, experiencing muscle tightness or tension headaches, avoiding physical activity, drinking to excess and not looking after yourself physically or mentally.
3. **Prioritise self-care.** Ample sleep, regular exercise, hydration and good nutrition are the basic building blocks that support our body and mind, helping us to maintain health and cope during times of stress.
4. **Find healthy coping strategies.** These include practicing mindfulness or meditation; keeping a thought journal; getting out in nature regularly; breaking down challenges into small, bite-sized tasks; celebrating small wins and achieving goals; incorporating fun, laughter and play into your life; exercise, gardening and cooking.
5. **Spend time with loved ones.** Time spent with family and friends, as well as on self-care, can be one of the first things to fall by the wayside when the going gets tough, but is the very same thing that helps to relieve stress and provide us with support so we can stay the course. I ask my clients to put these important activities in their diary each week for accountability.
6. **Utilise available resources.** Whether it's accessing government stimulus packages or grants, engaging the expertise of business and financial professionals, or using mental health resources, drawing on help is a necessary step for successfully navigating hard times.
7. **Communicate.** If you have staff, give them information about your plans, check in with how they are feeling. Remember that good team morale will help you all as individuals, and as a business, to bounce back in the short and long-term. Communicate with your clients or customers, letting them know how your business has been affected and how this may affect your service.
8. **Connect with peers.** Connecting with other small businesses in your community, as well as industry associations, provides a unique source of support, the opportunity to share and receive advice, and an important sense of connection.
9. **Learn, adapt and grow.** Consider the various options available, whether it's changing the way you operate, moving your business online, upskilling yourself by enrolling in a new course, streamlining services or considering how you can rebuild your business so it's more resilient.
10. **Reflect.** Take the time to reflect on what can be learnt from the challenges you have faced and how you might make changes to minimise the impact of future ones.

Small business owners are some of the most resilient people I've ever met. But please don't think you become resilient just by going through challenging situations. You really can build your resilience muscle by employing all of the above strategies and, above everything, keeping perspective.

LISTEN UP!

In his chat with The Fitness Industry Podcast, Andrew May discusses resilience, daily pause points, scar tissue and why we need to unplug in order to reconnect with ourselves.

[Click here to listen to 'Resilience, rubber backsides and the importance of disconnecting from tech'.](#)



Andrew May

Andrew is a human performance strategist, CEO of StriveStronger and host of the NAB Business Fit Podcast, which is part of a free program to help SMEs and their staff become more resilient, transition to new ways of working and sustain physical and psychological wellbeing. Sign up at [NAB Business Fit](#).

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