



Morning Comment

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Five months, 28 days, and 16 hours ago I faced the biggest challenge of my life. I went from...

- being at the top of my sport
- almost reaching my goals
- being the fittest I've ever been

... to losing it all in a split second doing something I've done my whole life.

While sitting in the water I thought would I be able to row in the Maadi Cup. But as I later found out after being air lifted to Christchurch Hospital overnight, ever rowing again would be a lucky outcome.

Six months on I'm starting to get back into rowing despite everything I had been told. In this journey I have been forced to learn ways to overcome challenges.

For those that don't know my story:

After a long drive from Wānaka I went water skiing on Lake Brunner; something I had done many times without ever getting injured. Despite this I managed to come off the ski in such a way to snap my talus, the bone connecting my foot to the rest of my body. This presented many challenges that I learned from.

One such challenge I had to overcome was helplessness. After being a very capable sports person to a bed-ridden cripple is like going back to being a toddler.

I wasn't able to do anything the same. I couldn't even shower by myself. I tried to once, but fell and become stuck. Lying on the bathroom floor I felt helpless like I could not do anything by myself. It destroyed me to feel this helpless.

But, it made me learn how to ask for help. This is hard for teenagers who are moving into independence, but I learned there is no shame in asking for help



because no one has ever made it by themselves. Every successful person has received mountains of help.

Barak Obama said, "Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. I do that every day. Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength. It shows you have the courage to admit when you can't do something, and to learn something new."

So why was I so hesitant to ask for help? Stanford Social Psychologist, Xuan Zhao, says this is because we feel asking for help will bother other people. But the opposite is true, people want to make a difference in people's lives because they feel good about it. From my experience there is always help, you just have to ask for it. What is the worst that can happen from asking for help? You never know till you ask so just ask.

Another way I moved forward was through belief. After arriving at Christchurch Hospital at 4.00am, airlifted overnight, I was told that I would never play sports again and would likely need an ankle replacement. For someone whose biggest goals in life revolved around sports, this was soul-destroying. But I never let myself believe that this was it.

Your mind is very powerful – it can make you happy or sad, but it also affects you physically. Believing that I could overcome my injury and defy the doctors' prognosis not only helped me mentally feel happier, but I also believe it had some effect on my ankle's recovery. If you don't believe me, look at the placebo effect. The placebo effect is a well-documented phenomenon where patients experience real improvements in their health after receiving treatments that have no therapeutic value, simply because they believe they are receiving actual treatment.

Additionally, I set goals to look forward, instead of dwelling on the past. Setting specific recovery goals helped me strive to reach them instead of focusing on what had happened. This practice gave me a reason to push through the hard stuff because I knew it was bringing me closer to my goals. Research supports this approach: goal-setting has been shown to enhance motivation and improve recovery outcomes by providing a clear path forward and a sense of purpose.



Because I had life goals that involved sports, I did everything I could to aid my recovery. It gave me a reason to push through the hard times, knowing each effort was a step closer to achieving my dreams.

I also utilised perspective to overcome my struggles.

The best advice I have been given after breaking my ankle was from Ian, who after hearing about my ankle, walked into my room with two of the thickest books I had ever seen. I'll let all of you in on a secret; I do not read, I don't like it, I'm not good at it and I just never did it.

But Ian told me while I was injured I had to read both books. The point being that if I couldn't play sport while I was injured, I was going to get better at doing something else instead of using an injury as a excuse to scroll TikTok for six months. What I learned from this is instead of looking at something that has happened to you as positive or negative just look at it as change and make the most of the change. It's like the saying when one door closes another opens.

This approach ties into the concept of positive thinking, which means facing life's challenges with a positive outlook. Martin Seligman, a Positive Psychologist, explains positive thinking in terms of explanatory style. People with an optimistic explanatory style tend to be linked to many health benefits, including better stress management, enhanced psychological health, greater resistance to the common cold, increased physical well-being, longer life span, lower rates of depression, and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease-related death. For example, a study of 1,558 older adults found that positive thinking reduced frailty during old age. Another study published in *the Journal of Aging Research* found that a positive mental attitude was linked to decreased mortality over a 35-year period. People with a positive outlook were also more likely to exercise regularly, avoid smoking, eat healthier, and get quality sleep.

These are a few of the lessons I have learnt that has help me through my struggle and I hope that sharing them with you today can offer some insight and encouragement.

To anyone facing their own battles, remember this: You are stronger than you think. Embrace the lessons that come with adversity, believe in your ability to overcome, and never hesitate to ask for help. Your journey may be difficult, but it will also be incredibly rewarding. Keep pushing forward, and you will find that you are capable of achieving more than you ever imagined.