

## **SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN A CORPORATE CAREER**

### **[Sarah Stuart's NZ Herald Blog 8 July 2014](#)**

Surviving and thriving in a corporate career these days requires much more than just a good work ethic and a great CV. Increasing business complexity, a changing marketplace and industries undergoing rapid change challenge even the most optimistic of business leaders – or so I thought.

Actually optimism may be the thing that gets them through, though the optimism that builds resilience, deals to adversity and leads to greater levels of success is much more than just a sunny disposition.

It's actually about changing the way you think.

I spent two days last week learning how to do this on a Mental Toughness short course, part of the Executive Education department at the University of Auckland. There were two other MBA graduates in my group of 12, alongside a forestry worker, a sales director and an executive PA. A more diverse group of knowledge-seekers you couldn't hope to meet.

Talking us through his simple but immediately effective resilience programme was Jamie Ford, a motivational expert who coaches some of the country's top rugby players, broadcasters and business leaders.

Jamie is all about putting thought before feelings, and using thoughts to drive actions. We choose how we feel, he says. No one upsets you. You can only upset yourself, depending on how you think about the situation.

His formula for monitoring and changing your internal self-talk is designed to minimize difficulties and maximize your potential to succeed.

And it's the opposite of how we normally think.

Faced with a battle or a setback, it's human nature to catastrophise the event in your own mind. We see it as a very personal issue, something that will last permanently ("I always do this") and that affects all aspects of our life.

But when something good happens, we're quick to think of it as a very temporary success, one that is specific only to this situation and that is due mainly to external forces, rather than our own skill or talent.

Jamie sets out to reverse that thinking – externalizing the causes of difficulties and seeing problems as temporary and specific to the situation. Success is rethought to become a permanent and very personal achievement. It’s kind of like skiting in your own head. And it isn’t easy. In fact for many in our group it was the most difficult new thought to have.

This “explanatory” style of thinking is based on optimism expert Professor Martin Seligman’s decades of study, and has been proven, Jamie says, to make the successful more successful and to take the stress out of any situation.

It’s the kind of thinking that Americans have developed for decades and that Australians seem much better at doing than Kiwis.

Was I skeptical? Absolutely. But Jamie had me when he pointed out that John Key is a master of one of the most difficult concepts to grasp – externalizing and trivializing difficulties.

“Listen to what sports coaches or players say after a game,” he said. “You can tell whether they will go on to succeed by how they describe a win or a loss.” In fact, that’s what he’s been commissioned to do by US magazine *Golf Digest*, to predict whether 50 top golf players will go on to win or lose, based on how they react to setbacks.

In business, resilience is everything as it’s a precursor to persistence and persisting is what sets entrepreneurs and business leaders apart.

The best news is anyone can learn it, no matter how negative your self-talk is to begin with. And you can start just by listening to what’s going on in your brain.

The next time I’m up at 3am I won’t be cursing the MBA workload and worrying about my next assignment, I’ll be using Jamie’s rethinking to make it a temporary, specific problem. The lack of time management will be blamed on fleeting outside forces.

Inside, I’ll be reveling in a recent grade achievement and congratulating myself on my dedication and persistence. Just don’t tell anyone about the show-off in my head.