

Self-Compassion

A Barrier or Boost to Career Success?

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In 2024, mental health has become a hot topic in Indonesia especially when the information about mental health is just a scroll away. This heightened awareness brings an intriguing diversity in how people interpret the intangible concept of mental health.

For instance, in the workplace, a “positive work environment” is widely considered a ‘green flag’. However, the idea of a positive work environment can differ from person to person. ‘Positive’ does not always mean ‘easy’ or ‘stress-free.’ In fact, a challenging environment can also be seen as positive, since demanding settings offer valuable opportunities for growth. Here, resilience becomes essential, benefiting both employees and the organization in the long term.



According to Rachel Goldsmith Turow, a psychotherapist from Seattle University, resilience refers to the ability to manage stress effectively. It does not always mean bouncing back to where you were before. Sometimes resilience reflects personal growth or new strengths developed during tough times. In the workplace, resilience equips employees to handle workplace challenges and conflict while also maintaining or increasing job satisfaction (Patrick, 2024). So, how can we develop self-resilience? Several factors contribute to resilience, including physical exercise, adequate sleep, supportive relationships, meditation, engaging in hobbies, and practicing self-compassion (Turow, 2024).

Among these, self-compassion is often misunderstood, sometimes seen as a weakness or self-centeredness. In professional settings, self-criticism is more commonly used as a motivator. However, self-compassion with the right amount can be a more effective motivator than self-criticism, as said by Dr. Kristin Neff an associate professor of Human Development and Culture at the University of Texas. The more we can accept ourselves, the more capable we are to change and take risks, and the less anxious we become about failure (Neff, 2024).

The Misconception of Self-Compassion

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Mindfulness, A Pathway to Building Self-Compassion

Practicing self-compassion can be particularly challenging for those who tend to self-criticize when faced with failure. During these moments, practicing mindfulness by focusing on present-moment sensations, such as breathing, and gently redirecting attention when it wanders, can be a powerful way to build self-compassion. The effort to refrain from self-judgment during moments of wandering thoughts gradually reduces self-criticism and fosters greater self-compassion (Turow, 2024).

Experiencing failure is normal, everyone in the world makes mistakes and that's what makes us human. Having compassion for ourselves means honouring and accepting our humanness (Neff, 2024). She also said that the very definition of being "human" means being vulnerable, flawed, and imperfect. When we practice self-compassion, we recognize that our suffering connects us to others rather than separates us

It's essential to allow ourselves time to process emotions, rather than ignoring our pain or harshly criticizing ourselves. Responding to life's imperfections with warmth and support—rather than coldness or judgment—can make a significant difference (Neff, 2024). A helpful approach is to ask, "What would I say to a friend going through something similar?" Offering this same kindness to ourselves creates a sense of safety, putting us in a better frame of mind to cope with challenges or make necessary changes.

Self-Compassion as a Tool for Resilience and Growth

Finally, while failure can be painful, it offers valuable lessons that strengthen us for future goals. Life is full of ups and downs, and by managing setbacks early on, we become better equipped to face future challenges, paving the way for a brighter, more successful future. Dr. Kristin Neff beautifully sums up the power of self-compassion in career success:

“Self-compassion helps us gain success, and it helps us deal with failure, which helps us succeed. The way you grow and learn is by dealing productively with failure. If you go into shame mode after failure, it disallows you to look at and learn from your failures. It's not going to allow you to grow or take risks. You can be vulnerable, learn and grow if you have your own back with self-compassion: *If I blow it and people ridicule me, I'll be okay because the bottom line is I'll be there for myself.*”

(Neff, 2024)

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