

## **Transcript - Podcast – Building Resilience**

**Host:** Katie Masheter

**Speaker:** Pennie Latin

### **Katie:**

Hello, this podcast has been brought to you by the University of the Highlands and Islands Careers and Employability Centre. My name is Katie Masheter and in this episode you'll hear from Pennie Latin. She'll share her thoughts and building resilience, you'll hear six practical top tips on how you can learn to bounce back and build your confidence Penny's actually worked at the BBC for over 25 years as a programme maker and presenter and has some really great experience to share with you all. So Pennie over to you

### **Pennie:**

As Katie said I come from a broadcasting background but I'm hoping that there'll be actually a lot of parallels to whatever it is you do and wherever you're coming from. Yes, I've spent 25 years working with the BBC, predominantly as a radio producer and presenter. What that involved, was ideas, working with ideas, all day, every day. That might have been pitching ideas, and developing ideas and formats, to commissioning editors for the likes of Radio 2,3,4, radio Scotland, now BBC sounds, but also working with ideas all day every day at the coalface down to the minutiae of how you step into a programme how you deal with particular items of the programme from day to day. So it was micro and macro, but it's all ideas. So what does resilience mean in relation to that, and where I'm coming to this whole subject from. In that setting, resilience, bouncing back means getting used to your ideas being rejected, a lot. In 25, years, trust me you've had a lot of ideas, knocked back. It means getting used to feedback on your programmes, for me it was programmes, for you it would be my whatever ideas you might be coming up with, but feedback to what you're doing and being used to being picked apart, sometimes pretty robustly, mostly pretty robustly. It means getting used to things going wrong, sometimes live on air, but productions not going according to plan. I think that involves resilience and being able to bounce back from that. It can mean getting used to personal comments on your particular skills. I had to put up with personal comments about my presenting skills, from the public, and internally in the BBC, that's quite an interesting thing to have to bounce back from. It also means getting used to a lot of change. You might be trotting along quite happily, thinking that you've got a long running series, it's all grand, and then suddenly something changes within the mechanics of the organisation, and they cut that particular commission. Bouncing back from that is pretty tough. It also, finally on this point, might mean having to cope with competing for jobs in a really competitive market, which means you're likely to get quite a lot of knock backs and I think resilience comes into that and how you compete for work in this kind of a field, in this kind of a marketplace. I think all of these areas, I hope are going to be applicable to whatever it is that you do, so do look for the parallels with your own experiences. So what I did is I thought about all these things and then I thought, well, what are the key things that I think help build resilience. And I came up with a list of those, they're not in a particular order, I'll put them to you as they came to me.

The first one on my list is do not take it personally. Okay. One of the fundamental building blocks of resilience is not to take it too personally. How you attribute the outcome of a pitch your ideas meeting, I think is fundamental to resilience. So for example if I said to all of you, I want to commission you to come up with an idea for whatever it is. And I send you a way to come up with an idea, I'm going to have to knock back all of you bar one, because I'm commissioning one. And you could sit in a camp that says, Pennie didn't like my design or my idea because I'm not very good at

design and it wasn't that good an idea, and you know what, I'm a bit rubbish in general. So what's the point. Or you can sit in a camp that says you know what Pennie didn't choose my design but actually I think it was quite a good design, but it didn't suit her needs. It's nothing to do with the quality of my work, my ability. But on this occasion, it wasn't a good fit. Now those are extremes, but I think that as individuals we quite often sit somewhere on that continuum, in terms of how we attribute a knock back, failure, if you want to call it that. I've tried to avoid calling it failure. I think it's really useful if you have a look at yourself, think about where you sit on that continuum and the more you can not blame yourself and not take it personally and move yourself to the position of realising that it's, it's more about it doesn't fit on that particular occasion, you will find yourself much more resilient. So first one, don't take it personally and have a little think about where you take it at the moment, and how you deal with things at the moment.

My second one was connected to that, and it's park your ego. We fear failure and rejection because it hurts, it dumps our ego, and we think it reflects on who we are and our value maybe. It doesn't. What reflects who you are, I think, is much more connected to how you deal with it, not the fact of being knocked back in the first place. Interestingly, a little example is when I first presented, I used to present the kitchen café, I designed this food programme and I presented it for about the first three years. When I first came to doing it, I worried constantly about what the audience might think because I loved food and I like cooking but it wasn't an expert. And I've worried about where to position myself and the people would think that I was just talking a load of rubbish basically, and it certainly got in the way of my presenting because I was so self-conscious.

The then head of radio Scotland said to me, I like it best when you admit you don't know. I took away that it was a little passing comment. But I took that away and I thought, I don't mind admitting I don't know something at all. In fact, that's much more comfortable. And actually that allowed me to just sort of park my ego and not worry about it anymore. And I think it made me a much better presenter, and actually transformed everything I did in terms of presenting. And when I went on to present brainwaves, the science stuff, which was lots of really tough stuff, but I was always happy then to hold up my hand and say, I don't know, this is not my area of expertise, and I connect that to being able to park your ego. If you can learn to park your ego and not be afraid of just being who you are, I think you'll do well, and the less you depend on someone else's opinion of you, the better. Resilience comes from believing in yourself as you are. Good luck with that one. I think that's quite a tough one to park your ego. But I think it's worth thinking about.

My third one, there is gold in tough feedback. Never be afraid to go mining for it. Early in my career I dreaded feedback, I think it's entirely normal and natural to be concerned about feedback we all feel that way. But early in my career I was working at Radio 4 as a continuity announcer. And in the studio where I was working with something we called the batphone, it was literally a red phone beside me. I was live on air, all the time in between all the programmes, and every time I got something wrong, that phone would ring and the chief announcer would say 'What did you say', and it was excruciating. And the phone would ring and my heart would sink and I think I've got it wrong again. But you know, I learned so much from having to deal with that feedback. It made me so much better at attention to detail, I would check and check and check again. And I'd do anything to stop that phone ring, and it made me better. When I first moved to Inverness, to head up a team of programme programme makers up here. They dreaded feedback meetings. It became the kind of, it was called the Inverness, the infamous Inverness shit sandwich, where I've purr at them, boot them, and then purr at them again, and they hated it. But pretty quickly they got so used to it, that they would feel short-changed if they didn't get tough feedback, if they didn't get a thorough discussion about their programme. They started to see feedback, as me showing them respect for their work.

They're knocked their pan in putting this together and they deserved a thorough discussion. So I think there is always stuff to be learned from the feedback, always, always, always. If you struggle with feedback, and that's entirely natural. My advice would be headed off at the pass. And by that, I mean before you go into a feedback situation. Look at your work. Look at what you've done, be really honest with yourself, and honest with yourself about that piece of work. You will know where you've done well, and you will know where you could have done a bit better. Maybe there's some weaker points. And if you go into that feedback meeting for armed with these are things I think went well, these are things that didn't go so well. This is how I do it again next time, that feedback will not hurt, it really won't. So the more you can be honest with yourself and feedback to yourself before you get anyone else's feedback. You've already started the discussion, and you'll end up sort of sitting alongside the person who's feeding back to you, and it will be much less painful, and then you can use that feedback to grow. Try not to be defensive, feedback is gold. It really is. And you can get to the point of it not hurting.

Next one, see change as opportunity, whatever industry you're going to be working in, we move with trends, we move with changes of opinion, changes commissioning editor, change happens all the time. And that can be quite painful, it can be quite difficult. Expect change, try and seize it, see it as opening up a new gap. That's not always easy to do. A personal example I, as I was saying earlier, developed and presented the Food Programme 'the kitchen café' for Radio Scotland, suddenly out of the blue, for lots of valid reasons at the time, I was dropped as a presenter, and it kept going with someone else and that hurt like hell. I mean it really did. Even though I knew the reasons behind it, which weren't personal. But I picked myself up, I dusted myself down and I looked for what else I could do to fill that gap. As it was, there was an opportunity to develop a new science series. I waved my hand and said I'd like to be involved in that. And that was how brainwaves was born. And that has been a much bigger part of my broadcasting career and creative career, then actually 'the kitchen café' was, and was much better suited to me and what I wanted to be doing. And even though leaving 'the kitchen café' behind was painful. Actually, the opportunities it opened up are great. So see change is opportunity.

Next one, remember it's not life and death. Keep a sense of perspective, step back and realise it in the grand scheme of things, it's not that important. It's important that you care, which is great. And it's important that you invest in it, but actually overall is not that important. Okay. And if you can enjoy the ride, enjoy the process, enjoy the whole experience, creative experience of getting to whether it's pitching that idea, or whatever its endpoint is that you're, you're worried about being knocked back in, then you'll find that you're much more resilient as well. So enjoy the ride. Being knocked back for whatever reason, is never nice, but being resilient is a brilliant quality to have, if you can try and build up all those things I've been talking about. But actually, what would be best, is to not have to dip into your resilience reserves at all. Far better, sure know how to be resilient, but actually just save all that for a day when you really need it. So, the best way I think of being resilient is to avoid resilience. And to do that, do your homework. Right. If you are asked to do a piece of work. Read the brief, know your audience inside out. Listen, read, research. Read thoroughly, get resources and stats to back up your idea. Make sure you know no one else has already thought of it, again do your research, look for gaps in the market. If you demonstrate all of that, you will be much, much less open to rejection, and you won't have to dip into your resources, and your resilience, because you're going to be winning through. So do your homework, and you might not need to be so resilient at all.

So don't take it personally, park your ego, feedback is gold, change is opportunity, keep it in perspective, and do your homework.

**Katie:**

Pennie thanks so much for your time, and for sharing six really meaningful nuggets of advice, that we'll all be taking on board. For our students and graduates tuned in, don't forget our careers and employability centre offer a graduate for life service, so you can check-in with a careers advisor at any time for 1-2-1 appointments, skills building workshops and much more. For more information please visit the University of the Highlands and Islands website and search careers.