

- REPORT -

# Q: CAN YOU EMERGE STRONGER FROM A CRISIS?



**A:** Even in the most adversarial times, it's possible to flip a problem on its head and find a new perspective

By FRANCES HEDGES

**T**here's something rather comforting about the revelation that even an elite athlete such as Dina Asher-Smith occasionally succumbs to a can of Coke and a McDonald's apple pie in the face of disappointment. For while few of us have had to contend with quite so crushing a blow as the cancellation of the Olympic Games, we have almost all been dealing in recent months with an unexpected shifting of the goalposts – whether in the form of a redundancy, an enforced pay cut or leave of absence, or simply a drastically altered working routine – and with that has come the urge to retreat into hibernation mode, preferably with a stiff gin close to hand.

The instinct to surrender all responsibilities when confronted with a major change in our external circumstances is entirely natural, says Dr Nicola Bunting, the in-house life coach at London's private

members' club Home House. 'When everything is up for grabs, the temptation is to freeze or flee – or simply watch Netflix and drink a lot – but this moment also offers an opportunity to think about who you really are and what you want to be,' she explains. 'To flip that panic switch, it's important to be systematic, because otherwise you'll feel overwhelmed. I recommend giving yourself some kind of creative outlet – maybe get a journal or buy some art supplies to make a vision board – and allocating, say, 40 minutes a day to compiling your "life inventory": a list of your key needs, strengths, values and what inspires you.' Not until you have that overarching vision can you begin to plan your next move.

The psychologist Pippa Grange, whose new book *Fear Less* charts her personal battle with anxiety (as well as documenting some of her professional success stories, including taking a reinvigorated England football team all the way to the World Cup semi-finals in 2018), agrees that distinguishing pragmatic from emotional concerns is vital. 'There are some worries you might be having that are perfectly constructive, such as around your finances, but it's the deeper fear of not being good enough that's really draining,' she says. 'You need to work out what, rationally, you can control or fix – for instance, negotiating a mortgage adjustment with a bank or discussing what would be a practical return-to-work scenario – rather than getting lost in how you feel. Then you can give some of that conserved energy to more imaginative thinking about what good possibilities could come out of this. That's the definition of resilience – the ability to bring a challenged mindset to a scenario you haven't chosen.'

For the entrepreneur Lavinia Davolio, it was focusing on practicalities that helped her see beyond the immediate uncertainty when, in 2013, she was made redundant from her senior role on the trading floor at a leading investment bank. 'It happened in a brutal way, and all the positives I thought I had in my life seemed to crumble,' she recalls. But rather than concluding she was worthless, or putting herself through the pain of applying for positions at competitor firms, Davolio decided to pursue a new path in the food industry, drawing on her long-standing love of cooking. 'It isn't easy starting from scratch, but I broke things down in my mind to work out what I needed to do: go to culinary school; learn about food regulations; study some basic coding to build a website for my fledgling business.' Seven years later, that start-up has evolved into Lavolio, a confectionery brand that has been stocked in department stores such as

Harvey Nichols and Fortnum & Mason, and Davolio is bringing the same resourceful spirit that inspired its foundation to bear during the current crisis. Having swiftly pivoted towards online sales through Amazon, she is sanguine about the future. 'As an entrepreneur, it's normal to have fears, and I don't think those will ever go away,' she says, 'but I try to use them to deal with stresses head-on.'

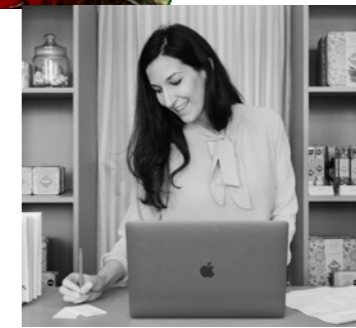
Getting a handle on those fears can take time, as can the long process of adapting to change, whether mentally or physically. The pattern-maker Lisa Todd, who had to give up a 20-year career in interior design after an accident triggered a rare neuromuscular condition, speaks poignantly about the way she slowly rebuilt her life through a rigorous health regime, diligent networking and a commitment to learning. 'I really wanted to work in pattern design, so I took online classes in painting and digital printing, found a mentor who could teach me about printed textiles, and gradually became part of an international community of artists,' she says. 'Later, when I came to start my business, I faced even more daunting challenges, from launching a website to designing packaging and monitoring stock levels – all using a mobile phone, because my neck problems prevented me from working on a computer screen. The one thing I learnt was not to be afraid to ask for help.'

Even without the shock factor of a sudden change such as redundancy or ill health, any decision to readjust your priorities or take your life in a different direction can be a testing experience. The author Jessie Burton remembers grappling with the realisation that, by her late twenties, she had become disillusioned with the idea of becoming an actress; it took 12 months of 'waiting for the phone to ring' for her to admit that her energies might be better directed elsewhere. Only then did she begin working on what was to become her best-selling novel *The Miniaturist*, written over four years while she was earning money temping in the City. 'My advice to anyone switching track is, don't chuck all streams of income in the bin at once – it might sound romantic, but you'll end up miserable,' she says. 'The journey takes longer than you think, but the groundwork you do in that time is so valuable.'

It comes down to a willingness to view our achievements in a less linear way, argues Pippa Grange. 'So many business goals are about rising, whereas most true gains are about going broader or deeper,' she explains. 'Instead of always pushing to move upwards, we should be thinking about maturing or ripening. Whatever your situation, I guarantee that you have more say in what this change means for you than you realise.' □



Left: Jessie Burton. Below: Lavinia Davolio. Bottom right: Lisa Todd



PHOTOGRAPHS: REGAN CAMERON, LARA DOWNIE, ADAM KANG, MARC LILIUS. SEE STOCKISTS FOR DETAILS



Diffuser, £375  
Fornasetti



Notebook, £69  
Smythson



Ballpoint pen, £235  
Cartier



Candle, £31  
Byredo



Pin board, £165  
The White Company



Plant and pot, £25  
Patch Plants

## TOOLS FOR TRIUMPHS