



# Psychological Capital: Build Your Mental Strength & Flexibility

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**P** psychological Capital (PsyCap) – the powerful combination of our resilience, optimism, hope, and confidence – helps us to keep our competitive edge while managing the stress of lawyering. Research links high levels of PsyCap with better job performance, a greater ability to overcome obstacles, higher job satisfaction, and elevated well-being (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011; Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, & Avolio, 2015).

PsyCap can be thought of as positive mental strength and flexibility. It can be developed by building these four mental capacities:

- **Resilience:** Being able to cope, sustain, and bounce back to attain success when challenge strikes.
- **Optimism:** Having a positive expectation about your ability to meet challenges and succeed now and in the future.
- **Hope:** Having the ambition to persevere toward goals and, when necessary, to change direction to reach goals in order to succeed.
- **Confidence (or Self-efficacy):** Having the belief you can successfully take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks.

While each of these capacities individually contributes to our positive mental strength, when combined and used together they become stronger than the sum of their parts.

This worksheet will help you build each PsyCap capacity by having you work through a real-life adversity. You will identify new ways to look at your issue and challenge basic assumptions you might

have about your ability to overcome it. Then, you will take an inventory of the resources you have to help you successfully resolve the problem and use your critical thinking skills to see if you've overlooked anything. Finally, you will set a S.M.A.R.T. goal, devise multiple ways to reach it, and anticipate ways to overcome any obstacles to your success.



## STEP 1:

**Describe a challenging situation that is not going as well as you would like.**

## STEP 2:

**Reflect on your mindset.**

Take a minute to understand the nature of your mindset when the situation first occurred, and you initially assessed the risk. How did you respond? Were you energized and ready to rise to the challenge? Or, were you overwhelmed? Defeated? Something else?

**STEP 3:****Frame the situation again in terms of its actual impact.**

- A. What is the real risk? Is this risk something in or out of your control? What are your options? Is it possible your initial mindset colored your first assessment?
- B. Are there any different ways to look at the situation that will allow you more options or control over your success? [Note: if you get stuck, it can help to get a colleague's viewpoint. They might see it differently than you.]

**STEP 4:****Identify helpful skills and resources.** *[Note: these can include your knowledge, work ethic, legal skills, colleague networks, ideas from others, finances, creativity, past experience, and the like.]*

- A. List the skills and resources you have used to respond to the challenge.
- B. Are there other resources available you haven't considered?

**STEP 5:****Set a goal that is directly related to overcoming your challenge.**

- A. Write down your goal using S.M.A.R.T. criteria – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely. [Note: pick a goal you want to achieve rather than avoid.]
- B. Break your goal into manageable small steps and list them in sequential order.

**STEP 6:****Identify multiple ways to goal accomplishment.**

- A. Write down all the paths you can think of that could realistically lead you to reaching your goal.
- B. For each path make a list of the skills and resources you will need.

**STEP 7:****Identify and plan ways to overcome potential obstacles.**

- A. List the obstacles that could get in the way of each path you identified in Step 6.
- B. List how you can deal with each of these obstacles. Are there ways around them? Be specific.

**STEP 8:****Take time to visualize your success.**

Set aside 10 minutes every day to think through the steps of this worksheet and visualize your success. Really get into it. See each step with as much detail as possible. Imagine using your resources to navigate the different paths toward your goal with you confidently getting around any obstacles in your way. Then, visualize yourself reaching your goal and imagine celebrating your win!

**REFERENCES**

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## RESOURCES

*Contributed by Anne Brafford*

### Reading Recommendations

- Martha Knudson, [Building Attorney Resources: Helping New Lawyers Succeed Through Psychological Capital](#)
- Fred Luthans, Carolyn M. Youssef-Morgan, & Bruce J. Avolio, *Psychological Capital and Beyond*
- Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism*
- Karen Reivich & Andrew Shatte, *The Resilience Factor*
- Shirzad Chamine, *Positive Intelligence: Why Only 20% of Teams and Individuals Achieve Their True Potential*
- Russ Harris & Steven Hayes, *The Confidence Gap: A Guide to Overcoming Fear & Self-Doubt*
- Louisa Jewell, *Wire Your Brain for Confidence: The Science of Conquering Self-Doubt*
- Katty Kay & Claire Shipman, *The Confidence Code: The Science and Art of Self-Assurance--What Women Should Know*
- Amy Cuddy, *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self To Your Biggest Challenges*
- Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*
- Cary Cooper, Jill Flint-Taylor, & Michael Pearn, *Building Resilience for Success: A Resources for Managers and Organization*