

Is high Mental Toughness a good thing?



Mental Toughness is defined as

“A narrow, plastic personality trait which helps to explain how individuals respond to stress, pressure, opportunity and challenge, irrespective of circumstance”

Peter Clough and Doug Strycharcyk

The more we can stand up to stress, pressure and challenge sounds good; so, is high Mental Toughness a good thing?

If we dig beneath the surface of our definition, we find; Control, Commitment, Challenge and Confidence

Control is about “can do”

Commitment is about “stickability”

Challenge is about “have a go”

Confidence is about “self-belief”

Being confident to take up a challenge and sufficiently in control to achieve your commitments sounds good; so, is high Mental Toughness a good thing?

Each of the 4C's is made up from two sub-dimensions

Control is made up from Emotional Control & Life Control

Commitment is made up from an Objectives Orientation & an Achievement Orientation

Challenge is made up from a Risk Orientation & a Learning Orientation

Confidence is made up from an Interpersonal Confidence & Confidence in Capacities

Being emotionally in control, deciding where you are going in life, being self-confident, taking the occasional risk and learning as you go sounds good; so, is high Mental Toughness a good thing?

High Mental Toughness is often seen as a kind of Holy Grail; however, I am not sure

Those with high Mental Toughness need to be aware that there is a thin line between, determination and stubbornness, between risk and recklessness, between assertiveness and arrogance and between calm and cold

Those with very high Mental Toughness are usually very determined and can often push away negative thoughts, this means that when the SOS light is flashing, it is ignored; which can lead to burnout – yes, the mentally tough can burnout

Those with very high Mental Toughness need to understand that

stopping when appropriate is a greater indication of Mental Toughness rather than stubbornly and recklessly trying to achieve the unachievable

Having high Mental Toughness doesn't turn you into some kind of invincible warrior-like figure able to walk through walls without the slightest scratch

However, high Mental Toughness when combined with high self-awareness can enable you to push your limits, select your challenges and achieve more than you thought

"He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened."

Lao Tzu