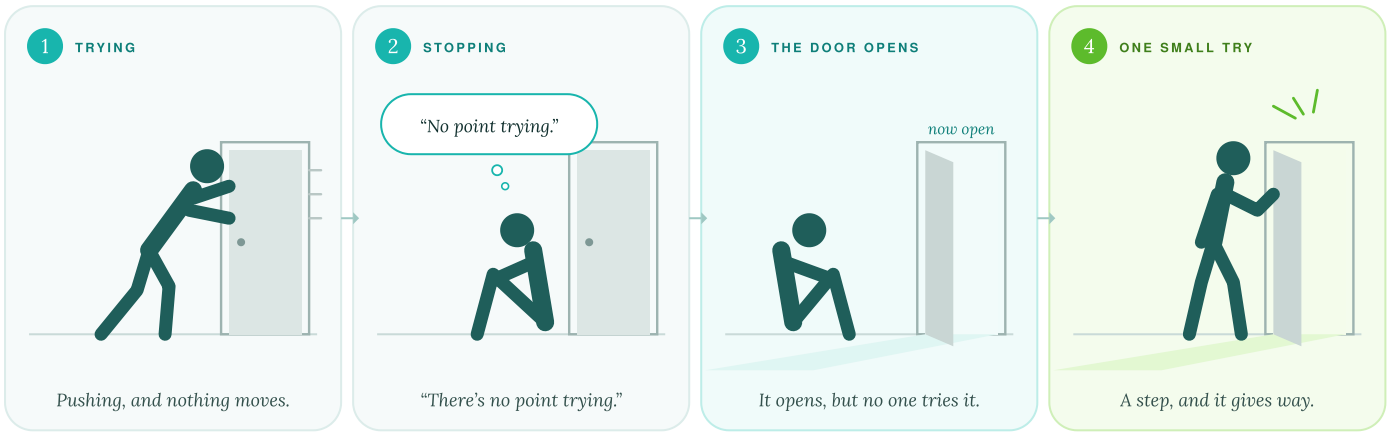
Learned Helplessness

MOTIVATION · CONTROL AND EXPECTATION

When experience teaches us that effort makes no difference

After repeated experiences where nothing we did seemed to change the outcome, it is understandable to stop trying. The difficulty is that this expectation can stay in place after circumstances change, so options that are now open may go untested. This form helps you notice where that may be happening, and rebuild a sense of influence through small, real tests.



The expectation can outlast the situation that taught it. *Small tries rebuild a sense of control.*

01 What the research has learned

from the original studies to today

THE ORIGINAL FINDING · 1967

Uncontrollable events, then passivity

Animals exposed to stress they could not control were later slow to escape stress they could control (Seligman & Maier, 1967). The idea was later extended to people and linked with low mood.

THE UPDATE · 2016

What we learn is control

Fifty years of later research suggests passivity is the default response to prolonged stress, and that experiences of control are what switch it off (Maier & Seligman, 2016). This points to a practical aim: build small, real experiences of influence.

02 How we explain setbacks

Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978

DIMENSION	A HELPLESS EXPLANATION	A MORE ACCURATE EXPLANATION
Personal *is it all about me?*	*"I'm useless. That's why I didn't get the job."*	*"My application had weak spots I can work on, and there were many strong candidates."*
Permanent *will it always be this way?*	*"I'll never find work."*	*"This search is taking longer than I hoped, and that is not unusual."*
Pervasive *does it affect everything?*	*"I fail at everything I try."*	*"Job hunting is hard right now. Other parts of my life are going reasonably well."*

Personal, permanent and pervasive explanations are linked with giving up more readily. The aim is accuracy, not blaming others or pretending things are fine.

03 Signs it may be operating

tick any that feel familiar

- ☐ "What's the point in trying?"
- ☐ Giving up quickly when something is hard
- ☐ Not applying, asking or trying at all
- ☐ Waiting for things to change on their own
- ☐ Assuming the outcome before trying
- ☐ Missing chances that others can see
- ☐ Feeling flat or stuck in one area of life
- ☐ Leaving decisions to other people

04 Rebuilding a sense of influence

practical principles

Start small

Successful experiences, even modest ones, are one of the strongest sources of belief in our own capability (Bandura, 1977).

Notice your part

When something goes a little better, name what you did that contributed, not only the luck or help involved.

Separate effort from outcome

Some efforts will not work. Judge an experiment by what it teaches you, not only by whether it succeeds.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS

The neuroscience of the 2016 update comes largely from animal studies, so its application to people is an informed inference rather than settled fact. In humans, the way setbacks are explained is one factor among many in persistence and low mood. Some situations genuinely offer little control; the aim here is to find where influence is still possible, not to deny real limits.

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05 Where I have stopped trying

areas such as work, health, relationships, money

AREA OF LIFE	WHAT I USED TO TRY *before I stopped*	WHAT HAPPENED *at the time*	WHAT I CONCLUDED *the expectation that formed*

06 Re-examining one explanation

mark where it sits now

The setback, and how I explain it

Personal	*it is all about me*	*circumstances played a part*
Permanent	*it will always be this way*	*this time, or for now*
Pervasive	*it affects everything*	*it affects this area*

A more accurate explanation

what part was mine, what part was circumstance, what might be different next time

07 What I can and cannot influence

in the same situation

WITHIN MY INFLUENCE
even partly, even a little

OUTSIDE MY CONTROL
to accept or work around for now

08 A ladder of small tests

each step builds evidence of control

	WHAT I WILL TRY *small, specific, within my influence*	PREDICTION *chance it makes a difference*	WHAT HAPPENED *the facts, after trying*	WHAT THIS SUGGESTS *about my influence here*
1 *smallest*		____ %		
2 *a little more*		____ %		
3 *a stretch*		____ %		

SOURCES

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