

3 Mental Toughness Techniques for Recovery & Setbacks

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From injury recovery to forced retirement—the mental skills that separate those who come back stronger from those who stay stuck

WHY MENTAL TOUGHNESS MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS COURSE

Here's something nobody tells you about setbacks:

The physical recovery is manageable.

- Six weeks. Eight months. A year. Whatever it takes.
- But the MENTAL recovery?
- That can take years—if it happens at all.

I'm Christine Reeves Belezny. I've competed at world-level pairs figure skating across 22 countries. I've been injured. Sidelined. Forced to retire before I was ready.

And now I coach Olympic-bound athletes on the mental skills that determine whether they come back stronger—or stay stuck.

Here's what research shows:

- Athletes with higher levels of fear and anxiety during recovery are 13 TIMES more likely to suffer a second injury within two years.
- Not 13 percent. 13 TIMES.
- Your MIND determines your recovery speed more than your physical therapy.
- And yet most athletes never address the mental side.

This guide gives you 3 core techniques that elite athletes use to bounce back from setbacks—whether it's injury, forced retirement, career transitions, or life disruptions.

These techniques are trainable. Not personality traits. SKILLS.

And once you build them, you'll use them for the rest of your life.

Let's get started.

Christine

TECHNIQUE #1: THE EMOTIONAL RESET

HOW TO FEEL YOUR EMOTIONS WITHOUT GETTING STUCK IN THEM

THE PROBLEM:

Most athletes try to suppress emotions during setbacks.

- "Stay positive!"
- "Don't be negative!"
- "Just push through!"

But you can't suppress grief, fear, frustration, or anger and expect them to disappear. They go underground. And they leak out as:

- Lack of motivation in rehab
- Physical tension that slows recovery
- Anxiety and depression
- Irritability with loved ones

The result? You stay stuck.

THE SCIENCE:

Neuroscience research shows that suppressing emotions actually INCREASES their intensity over time. Your brain needs to *PROCESS* emotions to move through them. When you acknowledge an emotion without judgment, you activate your prefrontal cortex (the rational part of your brain) which helps regulate the emotional response. In other words: naming the emotion reduces its power over you.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The 10-Minute Emotional Reset Protocol

This technique gives your emotions space without letting them take over your entire day.

- Step 1: Set a timer for 10 minutes.
- Step 2: During those 10 minutes, give yourself FULL permission to feel whatever you're feeling. Angry? Be angry. Sad? Be sad. Scared? Be scared. Frustrated? Be frustrated. Journal it. Say it out loud. Cry if you need to. No judgment. No "I shouldn't feel this way." Just: "This is what I'm feeling right now."
- Step 3: When the timer goes off, take ONE deep breath. Then say out loud: "I've acknowledged this. Now I'm choosing to move forward."
- Step 4: Immediately shift to ACTION. Do one small thing toward your recovery: Your PT exercises Reaching out to a teammate Researching your next step Anything that moves you FORWARD

WHY THIS WORKS:

You're not suppressing the emotion (which keeps it stuck).
You're not living in the emotion (which keeps you paralyzed).
You're PROCESSING it—giving it space, then redirecting your energy.
This is how elite athletes stay mentally strong during recovery.
They feel everything. Then they act anyway.

PRACTICE SCHEDULE:

Daily for the first 2 weeks of recovery.
Then as needed when emotions spike.
Most athletes find that after consistent practice, the emotional intensity naturally decreases.
Not because you're "tougher."
Because you're PROCESSING instead of suppressing.

CHRISTINE'S NOTE:

I used this technique during my own forced retirement. Some days I was angry. Some days I was devastated. But by giving myself those 10 minutes—And then choosing to move forward—I prevented myself from spiraling into months-long depression. It works. Trust the process.

TECHNIQUE #2: MICRO-PROGRESS TRACKING

HOW TO MAINTAIN MOTIVATION WHEN PROGRESS FEELS INVISIBLE

THE PROBLEM:

Recovery isn't linear. You'll have good days and bad days.

Days where you feel stronger. Days where you feel like you're going backward.

If you're only tracking BIG milestones—"Can I train yet?" "Am I cleared?"—you'll miss the daily progress.

And you'll lose motivation.

Most athletes quit mentally long before they quit physically. Why? Because they can't SEE progress happening.

THE SCIENCE:

The brain is motivated by EVIDENCE of progress, not just the hope of progress.

When you track small wins, you activate your brain's reward system (dopamine release), which fuels continued effort.

This is called the "progress principle" in behavioral psychology. Small, visible progress = sustained motivation.

No visible progress = burnout and quitting.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The Micro-Progress Journal

This is a simple daily tracking system that keeps your brain focused on what's WORKING, not just what's broken.

Step 1: Get a notebook or notes app on your phone.

Step 2: Every day, write down 3 types of progress:

PHYSICAL PROGRESS: "What did my body do today that it couldn't do yesterday/last week/last month?"

Examples:

- "I increased my range of motion by 5 degrees"
- "I walked without limping for the first time"
- "I did my PT exercises without pain"

MENTAL PROGRESS: "What did I do today that shows mental strength?"

Examples:

- "I stayed connected with my team even though it was hard"
- "I managed my fear better than last week"
- "I didn't complain during PT"
- "I asked for help when I needed it"

ACTION PROGRESS: "What did I DO today that moves me forward?"

Examples:

- "I completed all my exercises"
- "I showed up to practice to support my team"
- "I researched my next career step"
- "I reached out to my coach for guidance"

Step 3: At the end of each week, review your entries.

Look for PATTERNS of progress, not perfection.

WHY THIS WORKS:

You're training your brain to look for evidence of growth, not just evidence of limitation.

Over time, this shifts your entire mindset from:

"I'm broken and nothing's working" TO "I'm healing and getting stronger every day—even if it's slower than I want."

CHRISTINE'S NOTE:

When I work with athletes recovering from injury, this is the FIRST tool I give them. Why? Because without visible progress, motivation dies. Athletes who track micro-progress recover faster.

Not because they're more talented. Because they can SEE that the work is paying off—even when it doesn't feel like it.

TECHNIQUE #3: THE COMEBACK NARRATIVE

HOW TO REFRAME YOUR SETBACK AS PART OF YOUR STORY (NOT THE END OF IT)

THE PROBLEM:

When injury or forced retirement happens, it's easy to see it as:

- "My career is over."
- "I'll never be the same."
- "This is the worst thing that could have happened to me."

This is called a **FIXED NARRATIVE**.

You've decided the story is already written—and it ends badly. But here's the truth:

You don't know how this story ends yet. And the narrative you tell yourself RIGHT NOW determines whether you come back stronger—or stay stuck.

THE SCIENCE:

Research in narrative psychology shows that people who reframe setbacks as "chapters" rather than "endings" have:

- Faster recovery times
- Lower rates of depression
- Higher resilience in future challenges

Why? Because your brain BELIEVES the story you tell it. If you tell yourself "This is the end," your brain shuts down options. If you tell yourself "This is a chapter," your brain starts looking for what comes NEXT.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The 3-Chapter Reframe

This is a journaling exercise that helps you see your setback as PART of your story—not the end of it.

Step 1: Write down your CURRENT narrative (the story you're telling yourself right now).

Examples:

- "My injury ruined my career."
- "I'm never going to be the same athlete."
- "Everything I worked for is gone."

Don't judge it. Just get it on paper.

Step 2: Reframe it using the 3-CHAPTER structure:

CHAPTER 1: The Build

"I spent [X] years building my skills, my identity, my career. I achieved [accomplishments]. I became [who you were]."

CHAPTER 2: The Setback

"Then [injury/retirement/setback] happened. I lost [what you lost]. I felt [how you felt]. This chapter was hard."

CHAPTER 3: The Comeback (This is the chapter you're WRITING RIGHT NOW)

"Now I'm in a new chapter. I don't know how it ends yet. But I'm learning [skills you're building]. I'm becoming [who you're becoming]. This chapter is about [resilience/growth/discovery]."

Step 3: Read your 3-Chapter Reframe out loud.

Notice how it FEELS different. You're not denying the pain of Chapter 2. But you're also not ENDING your story there.

WHY THIS WORKS:

Your brain needs a narrative to make sense of chaos. When you give it a narrative that includes GROWTH after setback—Your brain starts looking for evidence of that growth.

You begin to notice:

- Skills you're developing
- Strength you're building
- Options you didn't see before

PRACTICE SCHEDULE:

Write your 3-Chapter Reframe once at the beginning of recovery. Revisit it every 2-4 weeks and UPDATE Chapter 3 with new evidence of growth. Over time, you'll see: "I'm not stuck in Chapter 2. I'm LIVING Chapter 3."

CHRISTINE'S NOTE:

When I was forced to retire, I thought my story was over. But that was just the end of ONE chapter. The next chapters—coaching, mental performance work, writing—Have been just as meaningful as competing. Different. But not lesser.

Your story isn't over. It's just changing.

WHAT'S NEXT? CONTINUE YOUR MENTAL PERFORMANCE TRAINING

YOU'VE LEARNED 3 CORE TECHNIQUES.
NOW LET'S BUILD THEM INTO YOUR RECOVERY.



LISTEN TO THE PODCAST:

The Anti-Fragile Mindset
Weekly episodes on mental performance, resilience, and bouncing back from setbacks.

Available on:

- Spotify
- Apple Podcasts
- YouTube

Search: "The Anti-Fragile Mindset"

WORK WITH CHRISTINE 1:1:

These 3 techniques are just the foundation.

In my coaching, we go DEEPER:

- Graduated Exposure Protocol - Systematically address fear of re-injury
- Identity Reconstruction Work - Rebuild who you are beyond your sport
- Transferable Skills Inventory - Discover your value outside athletics
- Personalized Comeback Roadmap - Custom strategy for YOUR situation
- Ongoing Support - Weekly accountability and troubleshooting

I work with:

- Athletes recovering from injury
- Athletes facing forced retirement
- Business professionals navigating career setbacks
- Students recovering from academic failure
- Anyone facing an unwanted transition

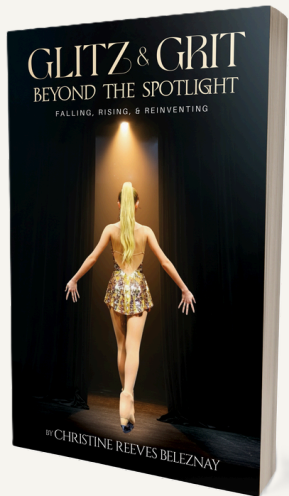
Book a FREE 20-minute discovery call:

christinereeves.ca/coaching

Let's talk about where you are and how I can help.

[MORE INFO](#)

READ THE BOOK "GLITZ & GRIT: BEYOND THE SPOTLIGHT"



A memoir about the three phases every high performer goes through:

Phase 1: BECOMING (Building the dream)

Phase 2: PERFORMING (Living the dream)

Phase 3: TRANSITIONING (When the dream ends—and what comes next) Most stories end at Phase 2.

This book is about Phase 3. Available on:

- Indigo
- Barnes & Noble
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[MORE INFO](#)

MEET ME IN PERSON: FREE MENTAL PERFORMANCE Q&A + BOOK SIGNING

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Daily mental performance tips and real talk about recovery, resilience, and bouncing back.

QUESTIONS?

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THANK YOU!

YOU ARE MORE THAN YOUR LAST PERFORMANCE.

You are more than your injury.
You are more than what you've lost.

You are who you're BECOMING.

- Christine