What is the secret sauce of the greatest people in the world (GOATs)? I believe it ultimately comes down to one key but rare skill – grit aka resilience – the ability to get up after being knocked down.

A close friend described how he was planning to quit his teacher training because of the extremely long commute, a racist supervisor, no pay, little learning and potentially low prospects. When he shared the desire to leave the training programme with his mother, she replied “If you want to quit, then quit everything. Nothing good comes without some difficulty.” It seems to be increasingly often that we give up on the sight of anything even slightly challenging – like a FIFA or Fortnite game, we quickly hit the restart.

The amazing and greatest people in the world shared this one common trait.

Pele (João Ramos) better known as “Dondinho,” struggled to earn a living as a soccer player, and Pelé grew up in poverty. Still, he developed a rudimentary talent for soccer by kicking a rolled-up sock stuffed with rags around the streets of Bauru. He persisted until he was allowed to train with a team and went on to be the worlds greatest footballer.

J.K. Rowling had just gotten a divorce, was on government aid, and could barely afford to feed her baby in 1994, just three years before the first Harry Potter book, Harry Potter and The Philosopher’s Stone. It was rejected dozens of times until finally Bloomsbury, a small London publisher, gave it a second chance after the CEO’s eight year-old daughter fell in love with it.

Thomas Edison failed over 10,000 times to invent a commercially viable electric lightbulb, but he didn’t give up. When asked by a newspaper reporter if he felt like a failure and if he should give up, after having gone through over 9,000 failed attempts, Edison simply stated “Why would I feel like a failure? And why would I ever give up? I now know definitely over 9,000 ways an electric lightbulb will not work. Success is almost in my grasp.” This is also the same person whose teachers said he was “too stupid to learn anything,” and fired from his first two employment positions for not being productive enough. However, Edison, through his failures, is also the greatest innovator of all time with 1,093 US patents to his name, along with several others in the UK, and Canada. This is someone who refused to ever give up no matter what.

Even Prophet Jesus – peace be upon – was rejected where he had been brought up - at Nazareth, despite performing miracles by the will of God (SWT).

LeBron James father had an extensive criminal record and was not involved in James’s life.
When James was growing up, life was often a struggle for the family, as they moved from apartment to apartment in the seedier neighborhoods of Akron while Gloria struggled to find steady work.

Cristiano Ronaldo failing to score in his first two Serie A games.

Muhammad Ali was imprisoned for his refusal to fight in Vietnam – he was stripped off his title and humiliated. After 6 long years of imprisonment, he came back to win the heavyweight title of the world against all odds.

After his arrest in 1962 for peaceful protest against apartheid, Mandela was sentenced to life in prison and he was held on the remote Robben Island. He endured long stints of solitary confinement, often going without sleeping or toilet facilities. Finally released in 1990, he went on to become president of South Africa the coming year.

“It’s your reaction to adversity, not adversity itself that determines how your life’s story will develop.”

Sadness gives depth. Happiness gives height. Sadness gives roots. Happiness gives branches. Happiness is like a tree going into the sky, and sadness is like the roots going down into the womb of the earth. Both are needed, and the higher a tree goes, the deeper it goes, simultaneously. The bigger the tree, the bigger will be its roots. In fact, it is always in proportion. That’s its balance.

One day a farmer’s goat fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided the animal was old, and the well needed to be covered up anyway—it just wasn’t worth it to retrieve the goat.

He invited all of his neighbours to come over and help him. They all grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the goat realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone’s amazement, he quieted down.

A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well. He was astonished at what he saw. With each shovel of dirt that hit his back, the goat was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up.

As the farmer’s neighbours continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and happily trotted off!
Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up. Each of our troubles is a stepping stone. We can get out of the deepest wells just by not stopping, never giving up! Shake it off, and take a step up.

How do you develop resilience?

1) Resilient people are characterized by an ability to experience both negative and positive emotions even in difficult or painful situations, she says. They mourn losses and endure frustrations, but they also find redeeming potential or value in most challenges.

“This means that for every heart-wrenching negative emotional experience you endure, you have to experience at least three heartfelt positive emotional experiences that uplift you. Three to one appears to be the tipping point, predicting whether people languish or flourish.

Allah(SWT) tells us in the Qur’an – Inna ma’al ‘usri yusraa – with every difficult there is ease, and this is repeated, because for every hardship you face in this life, you will get at least twice the ease after it if you persevere and trust in Allah(SWT).

2) Live to learn

“Pain comes to all of us in life,” says David Sabine, PhD, a clinical psychologist in Wichita Falls, Texas. “What I see resilient people do is immediately look at the problem and say, ‘What’s the solution to that? What is this trying to teach me?’ Looking at pain as an opportunity to learn and problem-solve — and building the confidence and the habit of moving toward the pain instead of running from it — goes a long way in terms of building resiliency.”

One strategy for cultivating a learner mindset is to use “question thinking,” a method of problem solving developed by psychotherapist and executive coach Marilee Adams, PhD. Question thinking encourages people to approach challenges and situations with “Learner Questions” — neutral, nonjudgmental questions such as “What is useful here?” or “What are my available choices?” — as opposed to “Judger Questions” like “What’s wrong?” or “Who’s to blame?”

Learner questions are empowering, and they promote more expansive thinking and acceptance. They also improve how you relate to others, and creating meaningful connections with others is yet another essential component of resilience. (For more on
Cultivate Forgiveness

If holding a grudge is holding you back, research suggests that cultivating forgiveness could be beneficial to your mental and physical health. If you feel ready to begin, it can be a powerful practice.

If you’re having trouble forgiving, Letting Go of Anger through Compassion is a five-minute forgiveness exercise that could help you get unstuck. Here, you spend a few minutes generating feelings of compassion toward your offender; she, too, is a human being who makes mistakes; he, too, has room for growth and healing. Be mindfully aware of your thoughts and feelings during this process, and notice any areas of resistance.

And lastly don’t forget those who got you here. You are standing on the shoulders of giants – your parents and teachers.