



**Failures and setbacks are ingredients for a great success story.** *-an iota of truth, pinterest*

What is back sliding? Is it a setback? Is it a failure? I understand no one likes to take a step back when making progress. Something I like to think about when I feel I'm moving in the "wrong" direction is this: Is this something I can learn from? The answer is pretty much always yes. I feel that if an opportunity to learn presents itself, and I use that opportunity for growth. It is not a setback. It is not a failure.

This spring I was able to take a step back and view my mental health from a different perspective. Each year I gain more insight as to what I need to be healthy. February and March are anniversaries of trauma for me. Add a little SAD (seasonal affective disorder) to the mix and that makes spring quite a difficult time of year to get through. Every year around this time my motivation depletes, and the depression sets in. I fear the proverbial downward spiral so much that it kicks in depression's good friend, anxiety. I don't want to get out of bed. I don't enjoy things that usually give me joy. I don't want to talk to anyone. So, what does one do to keep from going down that spiral and hitting bottom once again? While I don't have the ultimate answer that will work for everyone, I am learning what works for me through trial and error, and deep awareness of myself.

I have found that when I compare my tough season to seasons of the past, while it may not feel like progress at the time, I truly am making progress. For example: Last spring, 2018, was my first time working in the spring in almost seven years. I saw that having employment at all at that point was progress. I missed days of work. My mental health struggles came with physical symptoms of illness, and many days I did not want to get out of bed. I even considered quitting my job. I didn't though.

This spring, I have struggled with the same symptoms. I missed less work, and I sought help through resources resulting in extra support, a therapy sun lamp (which I feel has been a great asset and bring it to work daily), and I find that there are days I enjoy things.

At the beginning of the season, I felt like I was back sliding. I missed a day of work and I felt like a failure. I considered calling in the following day, and even contemplated what it would be like if I just quit altogether. So, I took a deep breath and said to myself, "self, just stand up. Don't think about the next step until you just get out of bed and stand up." Then I made myself shower. Then I ate breakfast. Then I took my meds. I did this until I was at work. This was a win for me. This wasn't a step back, even if the previous week I couldn't wait to get to work.

This is what mental health struggles and being diagnosed with mental illness does. It tricks you into thinking you aren't good enough and you are a failure. But even a step back is a step forward in the long run if you can grow and learn from that step back. Be aware of what works. For me, that was doing the opposite of what my depression tells me. For me, it is comparing myself not to others, not to myself last week, but to myself last year, or five years ago, or ten, etc. Use supports. Use resources. Use what works for you.

-Angie Ahles Peer Wellness Coach HIP

*We are the evidence; We hold the hope.*