

How to Power Through Your Power-Through Mindset

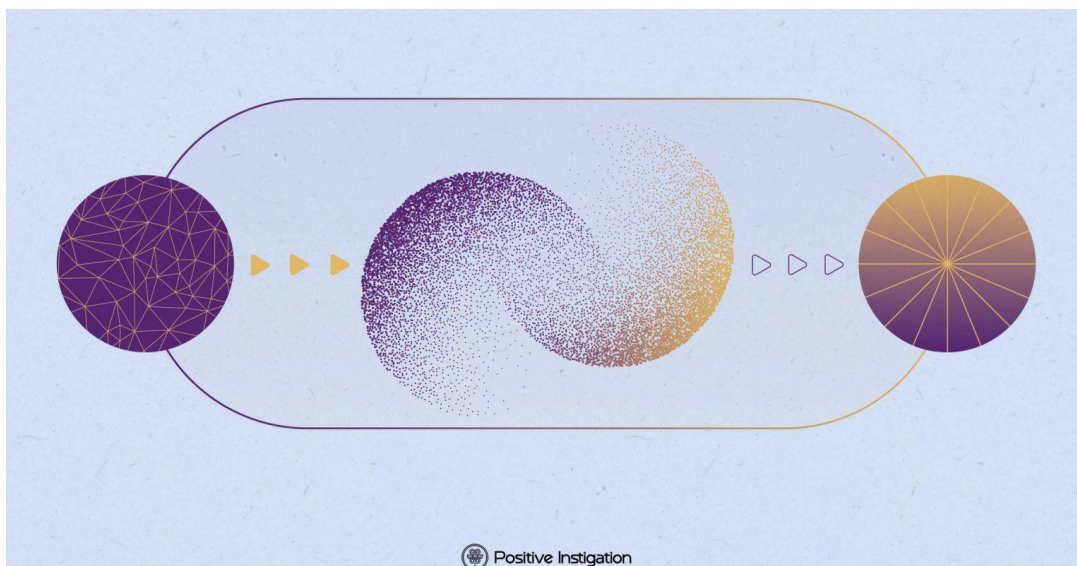
Working through pain, fatigue, or burnout is one path to success but has a cost.

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Key points

- Your power-through mindset can drive you to achieve great things.
- But working through pain, fatigue, and burnout in the name of success can come at a cost.
- There are four simple cues to help you recognize you are in a power-through situation.
- Ask yourself, what price tag does your power-through mindset carry? And is it worth it?



Last week, the right hip spasms came seemingly out of nowhere and ground me to a halt. The warning signs were there in recent months as I winced climbing stairs or on uphill walks. I didn't make it my top priority, instead, moving on to what I believed were more pressing issues, building and launching a coaching program, writing my next op-ed, attending a key business conference.

A few days later, as I limped through multiple doctors appointments, my phone rang. It was a close friend who was driving to her doctor for a backache she had attempted to ignore, as she focused on her intense new job, but now had her in its grip. "I've been powering through this for a few weeks," she said.

Are you afflicted with the power-through mindset, like golfer Tiger Woods, who just cratered again after allegedly crashing into a vehicle while taking high-dosage pain killers? Pushing through pain, be it physical, psychological or emotional, to reach your goals?

This mindset has been my key driver through not one but two high-intensity careers, first, as a journalist at major national publications, and then, advising and coaching tech CEOs.

The power-through mindset is a huge asset specially for leaders at the top echelons of their craft because it allows them to achieve extraordinary wins or cross difficult hurdles.

For example, in January 2023, the actor Jeremy Renner suffered life-threatening injuries after being run over by a snowplow. He survived, powered-through years of physical therapy, and is now acting again, despite coming inches close to death.

In medicine, you hear of surgeons who can put in punishing hours at a stretch into intricate, life-saving procedures, much like Renner underwent.

While a power-through mentality is often the key to pushing through enormous adversity, it's important to pace yourself and avoid a chronic state of powering through that makes you vulnerable to poor health outcomes.

The Price of Power-Through

In the business and tech world, no one represents the power-through mindset better or worse, depending on your perspective, than Elon Musk. Despite his acute and chronic back pain and other medical issues, Musk has infamously slept on the floor of his Tesla factories and works round the clock to make his futuristic cars, space dreams, and humanoid robots come true, aided by any number of painkillers and even illicit drugs, according to exhaustive reporting by major publications like The New York Times.

Musk also demands punishing hours from his leaders and his employees. He has changed the world many times over and generated extraordinary wealth not just for himself but also his investors. But at what cost to him and his workforce?

‘You Just Never Know What’s Going to Happen’

In sports, Olympic gold medalist and skier, Lindsey Vonn is an example of someone with a power-through mindset like few others in athletics or in life. Vonn came out of retirement with a long history of injuries and a 2024 right knee partial replacement to compete in the 2025 - 2026 World Cup and later in the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics.

Earlier this year, Vonn tore her left knee ACL at the World Cup. Still, she went on to the Olympics, just to finish the race. She suffered a terrible crash, requiring multiple surgeries, and, at one point, at risk of having her leg amputated. Devastated by her injury, her father, Alan Kildow, declared that “there will be no more ski races for Lindsey Vonn, as long as I have anything to say about it.”

And yet, weeks later, Vonn was documenting her recovery and saying on her Instagram account that she was down but wasn’t out of the game, saying she did not want to “close the door on anything, because you just never know what’s going to happen.”

It’s not just physical challenges. Former American champion swimmer, 28-time U.S. Olympic medalist, and arguably the greatest swimmer in history, Michael Phelps, has spoken candidly about powering through his career while battling severe depression, suicidal ideation, and drug abuse. Now a mental health advocate, Phelps told People

magazine that he never saw himself as a human his entire career, just someone with “a pair of goggles and a swimming cap.”

Now, that’s powering-through!

‘It Was Worth It’

The culinary world is replete with examples of top chefs, most recently René Redzepi of the acclaimed Noma restaurant, who are often abusive to their teams. Interestingly, many of these staffers say it was worth it for the career-making experience, just as many of Musk’s employees, including his senior leaders, say they wouldn’t have it any other way.

But there are many others across many professions who bear the scars of the power-through philosophy of their bosses and athletic coaches.

Of course, people less fortunate in life have little choice but to ignore their health and wellbeing in order to put food on the table or make ends meet. What else can they do but power through?

But for those of us who have the financial and social wherewithal do have real options on how to respond to situations.

How can we recognize a power-through situation and what can we do about it? Here are some simple suggestions:

1. **Observe:** Stop and listen to what your body and your mind may be whispering, before they become screams. Be attuned to patterns, be it pain or behavior.
2. **Acknowledge:** Set aside time to recognize what’s actually happening.
3. **Mobilize:** Make a plan to deal with the problem even if only in increments, instead of powering through it.
4. **Recognize:** Practice self-awareness moving forward and spot your avoidance and denial mechanisms.

If you are a leader, boss or a coach, set high expectations but give yourself and your team a break. Play the long game. Don't "Musk" your people. They are your most valuable assets.

What's the one thing you can acknowledge and tackle today that you have simply been powering through?