



What you have lost during the past year is immeasurable. What you face in the coming year and the years beyond is unknowable. How you respond is as yet undetermined. But look at it this way: You've earned your degree under the most challenging circumstances of any college students of the past century. You've done all the hard work and you've made all the sacrifices that are a common part of earning a degree, but you've done it during a pandemic. It may not feel that way now – in fact, you may feel discouraged and unsure of yourself. But the experiences you've been through and the milestones you've reached have made you and your generation tougher, more resilient and more determined than any college cohort in recent memory. In military terms, you are battle-hardened.

Keep that thought uppermost in your mind as you enter the post-COVID world. The restrictions have mostly been removed as I write this, which is obviously welcome news. But enormous challenges lie ahead, big changes are in the works, and the world that will emerge will be significantly different from the one we knew before. It's going to take a lot of flexibility, adaptability and creativity to function successfully in this changing environment, but those are the characteristics that have pulled you through the past year and a half. To put it in the simplest, most direct terms, you have what it takes. Even when it seems hard, believe in yourself and your future.

That's advice for the long term as well as the immediate future. It's possible to reach the heights in this life and then plunge into the depths. I say this from personal experience because I went from CEO of one of the hottest corporations in America to a less than positive position. What kept me going through all of it was the advice I was given many years ago to never lose at whatever I do, but to win or learn no matter what. And now I'm back on my feet.

I don't imagine that anything like that will happen to you – not even close. But I do expect you are going to encounter your share of failures, rejections, missed opportunities and painful disappointments because that's just part of life. And again, speaking from experience, I can tell you that as long as you reach down deep and tell yourself that you've overcome adversity before and that you'll do it again, you can adapt and carry on. That's the COVID cohort advantage you have. You're just starting out and you're already battle-hardened.

As Winston Churchill said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Dennis Kozlowski". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent initial "L".

L. Dennis Kozlowski