Resilience: Transforming Adversity Into Learning and Growth

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*Resilience: Powerful Practices for Bouncing Back from Disappointment, Difficulty, and Even Disaster*

*Bouncing Back: Rewiring Your Brain for Maximum Resilience and Well-Being*

2013 Books for a Better life award
2014 Better Books for a Better World award

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Mindfulness, Compassion, and Resilience

- **Mindfulness**: Clear seeing
- **Compassion**: Kindness and care
- Two of the most powerful agents of brain change known to science
- **Outcome:**
  - Mindfulness = Equanimity
  - Compassion = Resilience
- Can hold anything at all, can become a way of being

- **Resilience**
  - Process to deal with any level of disruption
  - Can hold anything at all, can become a way of being
Resilience: dealing with any level of disruption

- Barely a wobble
- Sorrows and struggles
- The overwhelm of “too much”
- Facing and dealing with adversity is how we learn to be resilient
- Mindfulness, compassion, resilience are learnable and trainable
- When we have the capacity, we have the responsibility

*How you respond to the issue...is the issue.*

- Frankie Perez
Resilience wisdom

All the world is full of suffering; it is also full of overcoming. – Helen Keller

The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem.

- Theodore Rubin

Mishaps are like knives, that either cut us or serve us as we grasp them by the blade or the handle.

- James Russell Lowell
Resilience Wisdom, cont.

Catch the moment; make a choice.
Every moment has a choice; every choices has an impact.
– Janet Friedman, Julia Butterfly Hill

Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching to mend the part that is within our reach.
– Clarissa Pinkola-Estes

I am no longer afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship.
– Louisa May Alcott
Resilience

“Resilience is not about being untouched by adversity or unruffled by difficulties. It’s about allowing stress to awaken in you these core human strengths of courage, connection, and growth. Whether you are looking at resilience in over-worked executives or war-torn communities, people in military deployment, immigrants or refugees, people living in poverty, battling cancer, or raising a child with autism, the same themes emerge....
People who are resilient allow themselves to be changed by the experience of adversity. They maintain a basic sense of trust in themselves and a connection to something bigger than themselves. They also find ways to make meaning out of suffering. To be resilient is not to avoid difficulty but to play an active role in how difficulty transforms you.”

- Kelly McGonigal, PhD, The Upside of Stress: Why Stress Is Good for You and How to Get Good at It
Meditation

- Presence
- A moment of safety and trust
- A moment of safety and trust with another
- A moment of receiving compassion from another
- A moment of courage, showing up
- Experience overall
Five Intelligences of Resilience

- **Somatic**
  - body-based tools to restore baseline physiological equilibrium of nervous system, sense of safety, range of resilience

- **Emotional**
  - Tools to manage disruptive emotions – work with, get message, take action
  - Cultivate positive emotions to antidote negativity bias, shift functioning of brain to reactivity and contraction to openness, resilience

- **Relational Intelligence within Ourselves**
  - Self awareness, self-acceptance, inner secure base

- **Relational Intelligence with Others**
  - People as refuge, as resource

- **Reflective**
  - See clearly, shift gears, discern options, wise choices
Somatic Intelligence

Basic responses to distress begin in our bodies
Breath, touch, movement – restore physiological equilibrium
Neuroception of safety primes neuroplasticity for learning and growth
Stress as a cue

*Stress is a biological state designed to help you learn from experience.*
- Kelly McGonigal, PhD,

*Box breathing in The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes – and Why,* - Amanda Ripley
Breath

- Breath regulates nervous system
  - Breathe in, sympathetic, mobilize
  - Breathe out, parasympathetic, calm down
- Breathe naturally - choose to return to range of resilience
- Box breathing – recover capacity to think
- Sigh – deep exhalation; choose to shift internal state
Touch

- Activates the release of oxytocin, hormone of safety and trust, direct antidote to stress hormone cortisol
- Regulate nervous system – touch with safe others
- Hand on heart
  
  Hand on heart, breathe in sense of ease, goodness, remember moment of feeling safe, loved and cherished; savor felt sense in body; portable equilibrium

* Own hand on own heart; partner’s hand on shoulder, on back

Choose to learn tools to be resilient
Movement

- Exercise – BDNF, grow new neurons
- Vigorous break-a-sweat exercise: 30 minutes/3 time/week
- 4-minute better than nothing workout
  - Wendy Suzuki, PhD, *Health Brain, Happy Life*
- Shifting posture shifts physiology, shifts state of nervous system, shifts emotions and mood
- Alternate tense and relax
- Power Posing
Power Posing

- Amy Cuddy TED talk
- Stand tall and straight, life arms overhead, like mountain pose in yoga
- Alternate postures of worry/anxiety and calm/strong; remain in calm/strong
- Practice before important meeting or interview

https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are
Sense and Savor Walk

- Walk slowly and mindfully
- Sense input from all five senses
  - see, smell, hear, touch, taste
- Stand still. Notice changes in light and shadow, movement and stillness
- Observe something at close range, then also the far horizon
- Notice shifts in mood, engagement with the world
Emotional Intelligence

- Simply living evokes emotion
- Emotions filter perceptions and guide responses
- Manage feelings rather than be hijacked or shut down
- Emotions can actually support resilience
Negativity Bias

- Evolutionarily hard-wired for survival
- Pay more attention and remember
  - Negative, unpleasant, dangerous
- Pay less attention and don’t remember
  - Positive, pleasant, safe
- “Velcro for the negative; Teflon for the positive” – Rick Hanson
Emotions Are Signals to Act

● “Pay attention! Something important is happening here!”
● *E-movere* – signals to move
● Adaptive action tendencies
● Emotions catalysts to behavior
Mindful Self-Compassion

- **Mindfulness**
  - Focuses awareness on experience
  - May I accept this moment, exactly as it is

- **Self-Compassion**
  - Focuses kindness on experiencer
  - May I accept myself exactly as I am in this moment

- **Common Humanity**
  - I am not alone; I am not the only one

- **Practice not just to feel better but to DO better**
  - Shift from reactivity and contraction to openness, engagement; measurable outcome is resilience
Self-Compassion Break

- Notice moment of suffering
  - Ouch! This hurts! This is painful.
- Soothing touch (hand on heart, cheek, hug)
- Kindness toward experiencer
  - May I be kind to myself in this moment
  - May I accept this moment exactly as it is
  - May I accept myself in this moment exactly as I am
  - May I give myself all the compassion I need to respond to this moment wisely

[Neff and Germer]
Gratitude

- Thankfulness for blessings and good fortune
- 3-minute gratitude free-write
- Gratitude journal, notice as go through the day
- Gratitude for bad things that don’t happen
- Sharing gratitude at dinner table, emailing with gratitude buddy; rose-thorn-bud

[Robert Emmons]
Sharing Kindness

Kindness is more important than wisdom,
And the recognition of that is the beginning of wisdom.
    - Theodore Rubin, American psychiatrist

Doing a kindness produces the single most reliable momentary increase in well-being of any exercise we have tested.
    - Martin Seligman,
      founder of positive psychology movement

Identify moment of receiving kindness
Share with partner(s)
Reflect on sharing and hearing
Neural synchrony

- Physical proximity
- Eye contact
- Shared positive emotions
- Mutual care and concern
- Felt sense of resonance
  - Oxytocin

Barbara Fredrickson, *Love 2.0*
ABCDE

- A = Aware, attune, allow, accept
- B = Be with, be-friend
- C = Compassion, connection
- D = Discern
- E = Equanimity, Empowerment
Relational Intelligence within Ourselves

- Shift responses of nervous system
- Manage and shift emotions
- Shift relationship to ourselves for having emotions
- Shift relationship to inner parts that are criticizing our coping or derailing our resilience
Befriending Many Parts of Yourself

- Invite characters to come onstage: Wiser Self, parts or traits of yourself that you feel good about, parts or traits that you view as negative
- Ask each character: their gift for you, their lesson for you, how they help you be who you are
- Thank characters for helping with this exercise
- Pause and reflect on shifts in view, in perspective
R.A.I.N.

- Come into sense of presence. Focus on inner experience, felt sense of experience
- RECOGNIZE a troublesome inner part or voice
- ALLOW and accept any part, any judgements about part
- INVESTIGATE relationship to part
- NURTURE inner part by wiser self, witness awareness, offer comfort, soothing; receive the nurturing
R.A.I.N on Blame

- Come into sense of presence. Identify moment of tension/conflict with another; evoke memory; focus on inner experience
- RECOGNIZE your emotions because of this experience
- ALLOW the feelings
- INVESTIGATE thoughts and unmet need
- NURTURE self; receive nurturing and care
R.A.I.N. on Blame, part 2

- Focus attention on other person
- RECOGNIZE what might be happening in other
- ALLOW and accept their experience
- INVESTIGATE and empathize with their unmet need
- NURTURE their inner self with your compassion; notice shifts in self and relationship
Resourcing with People
Compassionate Companions

The roots of resilience are to be found in the felt sense of being held in the mind and heart of attuned, empathic, and self-possessed others.

- Diana Fosha

- People who understand reality and believe in process of recovery
- People as refuge, safety and protection; compassionate companions
- Sharing story with those who understand, who have earned the right to hear it; normalizes and regulates, claim resilience and recovery
- Therapy and group therapy can be helpful here

Share your story with people who have earned the right to hear it.

- Brene Brown
Functions of Pre-Frontal Cortex
CEO of Resilience

- Regulate body and nervous system
- Quell fear response of amygdala
- Manage emotions
- Attunement – felt sense of feelings
- Empathy – making sense of experience
- Insight an self-knowing
- **Response flexibility**
- Planning, decision making

[Dan Siegel, UCLA]
People who are resilient... 

People who are resilient tend to be flexible – flexible in the way they think about challenges and flexible in the way they react emotionally to stress. They are not wedded to a specific style of coping. Instead, they shift from one coping strategy to another, depending on the circumstances. Many are able to accept what they cannot change; to learn from failure; to use emotions like grief and anger to fuel compassion and courage; and to search for opportunity and meaning in adversity.

- *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life’s Greatest Challenges, Steve Southwick, M.D.; Dennis Charney, M.D.*
Mindfulness Practice

- Conscious awareness to support A B C D E
- Integrate all functions of pre-frontal cortex
- Steps of mindfulness: notice sensations, emotions, thoughts, stories, beliefs, identities
- Cultivate resilience mindset
From Resilience to Resilience Mindset

*Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress.*
  
  - American Psychological Association

- Shifting perceptions and responses
- Mindset: belief system that shapes perceptions and response to experience
- Resilience mindset: beliefs about coping
- Mindset about threat effects how we cope with threat
Resilience Mindset
Research and concepts

- Carol Dweck  fixed v. growth mindset
  *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*

- Edith Chen  shift and persist mindset

- Kelly McGonigal threat v. challenge mindset
  *The Upside of Stress: Why Stress Is Good for You and How to Get Good at It*
Fixed v. Growth Mindsets

**Fixed:**
- Aptitudes, traits are fixed
- Success-failure is measure of worth
- Vulnerable to shame-judgment
- Setback: avoid challenge or risk, devalue effort
- Give up, retreat, lack of coping

**Growth:**
- Aptitudes, traits are starting point
- Learning through effort/experience is measure of worth
- Confront obstacles, embrace risk, persevere
- Develop missing skills/capacities
- Resilient coping
Resilience – not about being untouched by adversity...

“Resilience is not about being untouched by adversity or unruffled by difficulties. It’s about allowing stress to awaken in you these core human strengths of courage, connection, and growth. People who are resilient believe that no matter what the circumstances, they must continue making choices – ones that could change the situation or, if that isn’t possible, that could change how the situation affects them.”
Resilience: play an active role in how adversity transforms you

People who are resilient allow themselves to be changed by the experience of adversity. To be resilient is not to avoid difficulty but to play an active role in how difficulty transforms you.”

- Kelly McGonigal, PhD, *The Upside of Stress: Why Stress Is Good for You and How to Get Good at It*

Choice is the key to resilience mindset
Notice shifts in patterns of response

- Imagine walking down the street
- Notice someone you know walking toward you
- Wave “hello!” There’s no response. Notice your response to the lack of response
- The person notices you and waves “hello!”
- Notice your response to the response
- Notice any differences in your responses
Checking In:
What Story Am I Believing Now?

- Check in: what am I thinking about right now?
- How am I thinking about it?
- Record observations for a week
- Identify 5 most repetitive thoughts or patterns of thinking
- Choose one pattern to practice noticing, letting it go
Change Every Should to a Could

- Should, I have to, imply obligation, duty, right and wrong – the mind contracts
- Could, I get to, opens up possibilities and choice, shifts from burden to privilege
- Change every should to could, I have to – I get to
- Shift from performance/failure to pride in learning and growth
Shift Mindsets

- Fixed mindset: giving up in face of setback or failure
- Growth mindset: persevering in face of setback or failure
- Facing something new or unknown
  - Times when you operated from fixed mindset
  - Times you operated from growth mindset
- Resources for coming from growth mindset
- How could you have behaved differently in a fixed mindset?
- New situation: imagine coming from a growth mindset
Post-Traumatic Growth

- Post-traumatic growth = more than resilience; more than returning to baseline
  - New personal strengths
  - New opportunities and possibilities
  - Deeper sense of meaning and purpose
  - Deeper relationships, intimate and community
  - Greater appreciation for life *because* of process of recovery, not in spite of it

[Richard Tedeschi]

*Trauma is a fact of life. It doesn’t have to be a life sentence.*

- Peter Levine, developer of Somatic Experiencing
Factors of Post-Traumatic Growth

- Acceptance of Reality
- Resourcing with People
- Recognizing the Positive
- Finding the Gift in the Mistake
- Coherent Narrative
Find the Gift in the Mistake, the Lessons Learned

- Find the AFGO’s (another frickin’ growth opportunity)

- Find the silver lining, the lessons learned, gift in the mistake, the “teachable moment”
  - At any level of disruption, barely a wobble, serious struggles, trauma

- Claim the lessons learned and the growth experienced
Coherent Narrative

● This is what happened; these were the consequences.
● These were the resources, practices, tools and coping strategies I used.
● These are the resources, etc. I would use now if I could do this over.
● These were the lessons I learned, growth I experienced, positive meanings I found.
● This is how I re-entered the world and helped others.
● This is what I now appreciate because of the event.
Learning from Adversity

“From time to time in the years to come, I hope you will be treated unfairly, so that you will come to know the value of justice. I hope that you will suffer betrayal because that will teach you the importance of loyalty. Sorry to say, but I hope you will be lonely from time to time so that you don’t take friends for granted.

I wish you bad luck, again, from time to time so that you will be conscious of the role of chance in life and understand that your success is not completely deserved and the failure of others is not completely deserved either....
And when you lose, as you will from time to time, I hope every now and then, your opponent will gloat over your failures. It is a way for you to understand the importance of sportsmanship. I hope you’ll be ignored so you know the importance of listening to others, and I hope you will have just enough pain to learn compassion.

Whether I wish these things or not, they’re going to happen. And whether you benefit from them or not will depend upon your ability to see the message in your misfortunes.”

- John Roberts, Chief Justice, U.S. Supreme Court
Autobiography in Five Short Chapters – Portia Nelson

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I fall in.
I am lost...I am helpless
It isn’t my fault.
It takes me forever to find a way out.
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don’t see it.
I fall in again.
I can’t believe I’m in the same place
But, it isn’t my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.
III

I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in...it’s a habit. My eyes are open, I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately.
IV

I walk down the same street
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

-Portia Nelson
When This Is Over

When this is over,
may we never again take for granted:
A handshake with a stranger,
full shelves at the store,
conversations with neighbors,
a crowded theatre...
Friday night out,
the taste of communion,
a routine checkup,
the school rush each morning...
Coffee with a friend,  
the stadium roaring, 
each deep breath...  
A boring Tuesday,  
Life itself.  
When this ends,  
may we find that we have become  
more like the people we wanted to be...  
we were called to be....  
we hoped to be  
and may we stay that way...  
better for each other  
because of the worst.  

- Laura Kelly Fanucci