

Leading Ways: RESILIENCE

We all need some, but how much, and are we actually good at it? A recent New York Times article on the phenomena was titled, “The profound emptiness of ‘resilience’” and pointed out how overused the concept may have become, losing its vital meaning. Nonetheless bad things happen to good people and some seem to adjust easier than others. When our stress response to an inevitably changing world seems overwhelming, it is important to remember that this adaptability is something that can be learned and improved upon, even if some people seem to have a good “natural” skill set to deal with the most endemic of life challenges.

Here are some things that can help when the level of change may seem to be too much.

UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM/CHALLENGE

Humans do not like the unknown places where darkness and danger lurks. It is important to air out these challenges and involve others so that we do not lose all perspective. Even if the problem is impossibly hard, giving it a name and some rational analysis will help keep you focused. Your interpretation of what has happened or more often than not, might possibly happen, is almost always worse than reality.

IDENTIFY AND GATHER RESOURCES

You may not have all of the internal and external resources to solve this problem right away, but you almost always have more at your disposal than you realize. Think about times when you have faced other situations like this. How did you pull through? What in your character helps these challenges be met? What are the external resources you can call upon to help you frame the issue and then respond? Who do you know that has faced similar problems?

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

This is best done in a preventative way, hopefully long before the stressful situation arises. How can you make, sustain and build connections to others that can help you get a true assessment of the situation, not just your negative downward spiral? How might the resources of others help you address the situation? Relationships in your professional and personal life are both important to developing a resilient capacity to cope. Connecting to individuals, groups and organizations beyond your usual routine leaves you feeling and being more efficacious. Relationships are not just one way and as you reach out to others in need, not only will the tie be strengthened, but also you will be more resilient because you reached out and enhanced your sense of agency.

ACCEPT CHANGE

Life is impermanent. Things pass and things change. Ben Franklin reminded us that “When you are finished changing, you’re finished.” Engaging the world, accepting what is beyond your capacity to

influence and accepting the change with grace brings a peace of mind that is an essential part of resilience.

TAKE ACTION

Not everything can be changed, but that does not mean you should stop being engaged. Identify goals that can be achieved and may contribute to longer term goals, some of which may be beyond your reach. Doing things leaves us with a rewarding sense of agency and this will make you more capable of dealing with the uncertainty. Besides, if you are actively engaged in doing, there will be less time for overthinking and inaction, idle hands and all of that.

DEVELOP YOURSELF

People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect because of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, a greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, an increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality, and a heightened appreciation for life that can emerge, all from looking inward.

BE POSITIVE, GRATEFUL, AND HOPEFUL

This can be a challenging place to get to if things have become hard, but it can be enhanced by consistent practice. People learn to be negative, lack gratitude and lose hope, but practice can move you out of this. For a positive attitude just monitor your interactions over the course of a day. Reflect after each individual or group encounter and ask yourself, “was I as positive as I could be in this interaction?” You might even ask others that you are close to if you come across as positive in most instances? It is a very old trick but meditating for even a minute or two a day on things you are grateful for can begin to turn your attitude. Finally, there is almost always hope in any situation, but we cover it up with despair. Try finding it and holding it up even in the face of adversity.

REMEMBER YOUR BODY

Your physical well-being is also an essential part of coping. What is your best pattern for sleep, exercise and diet, and are you giving these the time and thought they need? Take time to yourself or with others if that gives you joy. Do activities that bring you pleasure. Be assured that the return on an hour invested in you will be greater than that twelfth hour of work.

All of these will leave you more, and eventually good, at being resilient.