

## Resilience: Changing Your Point of View

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Resilience is the capacity to bounce back, to persevere and adapt, when things go wrong or are very difficult. For individuals, resilience is the capacity to “bounce” back after a difficult or tragic event. Resilience doesn’t mean that you don’t have pain, that you aren’t emotionally wrought and that you don’t have bad days, but it does mean that you begin to recover and rebuild as soon as possible. For a community, after a natural disaster, people leap into action to first rescue one another and then to help, to provide necessary services and resources and eventually rebuild their community. For an organization, being resilient may mean shifting strategies when the product or service you offer no longer has a market, or shifting and offering new and different products and services to move the organization forward. Intel used to be a company that made semiconductors and memory chips but when Japanese manufacturers significantly reduced the profitability of that market, Intel was able to shift gears in the mid-1980’s and started making microprocessors instead. They have been so successful that today most people are unaware, or can’t recall that Intel ever made anything but microprocessors!

Becoming more resilient requires that you understand, appreciate and nourish your innate capacity and your own strengths and resources. Resilience relates to your belief that you can get through or overcome adversity. Most of us have encountered difficult or tragic situations and it’s important to acknowledge that no one person’s loss or tragedy is greater or more significant than anyone else’s loss. Some of us have been confronted with difficult situations that we could not imagine getting through – we might have said things like; “I can’t deal with this,” “How will I survive?,” “I can’t live without this person,” “I could just die,” or other equally dire statements. But then we survived, we endured and we came out on the other side, sometimes stronger and often wiser. Too often we don’t stop and

look back and identify the things (and let’s be honest, it is seldom just one thing) that helped us through those difficult times. The first step in building your resilience is to take an inventory of your strengths, those things that helped you in the past. You have these strengths within you – build on them. Knowing what has worked before allows you to more quickly access those resources in the future.

Another aspect of being resilient is to examine the way you think about difficult events. Karen Reivich, Ph.D. and Drew Shatte, Ph.D. identified three dimensions in their book, *The Resilience Factor*, which greatly influence our thoughts and perceptions. When we examine these dimensions and our perceptions of them, we’re better able to move through difficult times.

The first dimension is the “Everything vs. Not Everything” dimension. When confronted by adversity, do you believe that what has happened will ruin absolutely *everything* in your life or that it will affect a part of your life? The second dimension is the “Always vs. Not Always” dimension. Bad things happen. Most adversity does not last forever; however, some adversity does change things forever. Even when we are confronted by serious loss, difficult to believe as it is, we will start to feel better over time, things are not terrible forever. While it doesn’t diminish or minimize the loss we have experienced, our ability to adapt allows us to continue. Finally the third dimension is the “Me vs. Not Me” dimension. This dimension is difficult, in part because it requires that we summon the courage to be brutally honest with ourselves. When something bad happens, are you accurately able to assess what your role is in the situation? Do you share or own any responsibility for what has occurred? People who blame themselves for every bad thing that happens are constantly tearing themselves down.

Those who blame every bad thing on someone else are tearing others down

and missing an opportunity for self-evaluation. The unfortunate consequence of indulging in this “blame game” is that the “blamer” does not evaluate his or her own pattern of behavior or attitude that may be causing or contributing to the problem.

### Quarterly Quote

*“Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass... it’s about learning how to dance in the rain!”*

–Vivian Greene

So let’s imagine you’re driving to work and you get a flat. If you thought about this event in the least resilient way, you might say something like, “This new car is a piece of junk (*everything*), why does this sort of thing keep happening to me? (*always*), I’m sure my spouse just carelessly drove through a box of nails (*not me*), blaming.”

Wow, how do you come back from that?! No question about it, getting a flat stinks, but it doesn’t mean that your new car is a “piece of junk.” Getting a flat is probably going to be the worst thing that happens on an average day. So from a different point of view, the worst of your day is now over. Congratulations, your day is looking up! This is the kind of bad luck that happens to everyone from time to time. It doesn’t depict anything about the quality of your character or your car, nor can it foretell doom and gloom for your future. Certainly your plan for the day may have to change. You may finally get a chance to use that roadside assistance program you’ve been paying for all this time. You could get a ride with a friend and really enjoy the time catching up with each other, or maybe you’ll take mass transit and either enjoy the novelty

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Your feedback is greatly appreciated!



### Resilience, Continued

of the experience or regain a newfound appreciation and sense of gratitude for your car. The essential point being that resilient people are able to see and appreciate many more options than the less resilient.

Your resilience is determined by YOU and how you think about or interpret the events that go on around you. You can increase and improve your resilience. Those with high levels of resilience tend to adopt the perspective of “This too shall pass.” Whatever they are going through will have an end. Stressful experiences may only speak to one small aspect of

their lives (“Sure, exams are stressful but family, friends and biking by the lake awaits!”); and externalizing the “blame” after honestly assessing their role and responsibility if things do go wrong. (“Wow. My speech didn’t go well, but come to think of it, that was a really tough audience.” or “Wow. My speech didn’t go well, but that was my own fault since I left things until the last-minute and then stayed out late last night.”)

So the next time you encounter adversity, do your best to be very clear, accurate and brutally honest in your thinking and ask yourself three simple questions.

**1.** Will this adverse event last forever? It may change some things and you may have pain and sadness as a result of what has happened, but you probably have the capacity to adapt to the change.

**2.** Has this adversity truly ruined everything? Something may have been ruined or altered, but *everything*? Probably not.

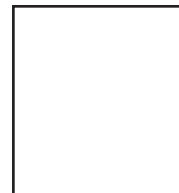
**3.** And finally, what role did I have in this event? Did I cause or contribute to what has happened? What can I learn from this incident that will allow me to do things differently in the future?

*Continued below*

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When building your resilience, there are a few additional factors that can help a great deal:

**Willingness to take action** – When confronted with adversity, you take action, you begin to find information, look for resources and do the things that you need to do to get started making things better.

**Belief** – Believe that what you do matters, that you make a difference and that what you have to contribute makes a difference.

**Support** – Reach out to your support network of family, friends, neighborhood and faith community. This network of people can lift you up, provide strength and encouragement. If you do not have a network, work to build one, it is a source of tremendous strength.

Remember your life is a work in progress. Every day you learn, you adapt and you grow. Be curious, try new things and view your life as a work in progress, you are getting a little better every day.

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