

Chapter 5

Resiliency: One Solution Toward Transformation of the Suffering Person

According to Adam Blatner (2012) (Personal communication, 2012b):

Resilience can be hard to define. I'm not sure if there is a clear line between me getting tough and coping in a less body-armored way. I think many people with sufficient group support can just live with their religion, customs, and primitive defenses alive and intact, gritting their teeth and hanging in there. Most pioneers and most people lived this way. Is resilience that? What is it? Can a spirit of spontaneity help?

Spontaneity needs a quieting of the fear shame guilt rage centers of the brain, access to the creative input of the forebrain - almost the opposite. Resilience---when shamed, or scared, "don't let it get to you," "don't let it show," hang in there. Military training builds automaticity for coping skills within the battle; suspicious, pull the trigger without qualms. Spontaneity to me is the activity of the mind that opens to creativity, it is a bit fragile, cannot warm up if there are strong feelings present.

“As studies of resilient children suggest, even a single secure/understanding relationship may be sufficient for the development of reflective processes and may ‘save’ the child” (Bowlby, 1980, p. 8). “Mindfulness has been found to boost resilience—that is, the ability to withstand life’s knocks and setbacks—to guide a remarkable degree” (Williams & Penman, 2011, p. 53). Greenberger and Padesky (1995) developed a therapeutic approach to help people reorganize their thought process as way of altering their moods. “How can we make sense of our moods? By identifying the thoughts we are having, our moods usually make perfect sense. Think of thoughts as a clue to understanding mood” (p. 47). Moods are often situational based. “Sometimes a little bit of additional information shifts our interpretation of a situation 180 degrees” (p. 89).

Consider a former professional football player: Randy Rasmussen, #66 of the New York Jets. Randy played offensive guard for 15 years for the team including 1969, the year the Jets won the Super Bowl. Randy is also a balanced and very likable person. He found much success on the football field extending back to his high school and college days. In fact, there is a high school football field in Nebraska named after him. After his football career, Randy became an insurance salesman.

This transition was possible because of his prior education and his strong abilities to connect with people and meet their needs for various insurance products.

Randy is resilient in the sense that he was able to make a smooth transition from a decade and a half of playing football to becoming a businessman. His attitude, demeanor, and affect remained positive throughout, and he never regretted leaving his athletic career behind—there is a time to retire, and he knew that time had come. Rather than mope about or languish, Randy demonstrated the ability to move on to another form of success in his life.

The resilient spirit does not lie down when obstacles require movement in an alternate direction. Instead, the person who is resilient thrives with the new challenge and defines a new path in life seeking fulfillment and purposefulness without looking back negatively at what was, but forward at what is and what can still be. Additionally, the thriving person passes on learned skills to either his own offspring or to others in the form of mentoring. In doing so, the qualities of the successful person can be emulated by others.

In another example, consider the crippled person who desires to participate in a marathon event. Though the person's legs will not accomplish the feat, the person obtains a wheelchair designed for an athlete to propel the chair forward using only upper body and arm strength. More importantly, the person has a resilient mindset targeting the marathon in the only way physically possible. The struggle, then, of such a person is admirable because of the special dedication they show the world because they will not let disability defeat their will and that their inner sense of determination supplants any notion of withdrawal from the zest of life. They continue to compete despite the limitations. Pride, therefore, invades the spirit of the person who is able to persevere to the limit regardless of obstacles. Realistically, not all handicapped persons will have the fitness capability to accomplish an athletic goal such as a marathon, but, perhaps any handicapped person who has a sense of resiliency can accomplish more than if they were not so resilient. Taking this notion further, we can extend the thesis of relevancy into the domain of resiliency and claim that having the quality of resiliency can enable a person to remain connected, therefore remaining relevant and avoiding the mental abyss that can cripple the spirit of the downtrodden beaten into nothingness due to a life situation, substance, or attitude.

If a person who finds himself or herself disconnected to life, perhaps they can be guided to examine the lives of others who found ways to cope and deal with life's unexpected calamities toward the goal of finding new ways to rediscover a sense of purposed connection. The loss of relevancy can be muted with guided effort to rise above the darkness and enter new light through courageous effort to consider the best possibilities available. The key to self-improvement may be to look for the highest reachable potentials and not the levels of success or attainment in the world, which are, in practical terms, unattainable. For example, the author, at age 52, may have desired to be an astronaut, but that is no longer attainable. It probably was never attainable even at a young age because of a general fear of open heights, a middle-ear infection at age 5 that left a condition where certain fast motion can be debilitating, and probably a few other limiting conditions. Nonetheless, the dream

that was never realistically achievable becomes acceptable as a construct that was never possible because of a sense of acceptance of such limitations. However, that one limiting issue was not severe enough to derail the quest for discovery of other possibilities. So, the lack of ability to achieve in one area or more than one area does not have to distinguish the internal fire blazing inside the thriving person seeking relevancy in life.

The homeless person who does not have any financial means to embark on grand missions of opening up a small business or going back to school may not be so lost in society that nothing is possible for him or her. But how can such a person move in any progressive manner given the daily desperate struggle to survive? If the person is not hampered by drug use or severe psychological malady such as psychosis and has a reasonably average level of intelligence, then, if that person can be fortunate enough to find social programs established to help such marginalized people find shelter, learn skills suitable for today's job market, and locate a job, even if all these take months or years, then the person can start to make advances in his or her life—a slow emerging leading to new potentials, therefore, new connections to active society. We can assume that the homeless person who feels hopeless also feels a loss of relevancy. It may be that such a feeling of loss is self-perpetuating and actually may justify the person's largesse. If there can be found a way to help a homeless person regain their dignity sufficient to propel them into available programs, perhaps they will seek ways on their own to connect better with society. A person who feels nonrelevant may not even care to be reconnected to life if they have a bitter feeling about society in general. For some, it may be easier to remain on the streets where there are no requirements, albeit there are certainly numerous challenges.

Being able to snap back from a setback can be viewed as a native skill, and it can also be learned. Either way, it is the decision of the person to rely on their ability to overcome obstacles or setbacks that will define their relative success in doing so. Those who do not have a natural ability to overcome obstacles or have not learned this skill will be far less able to move past a negative experience or climb out of a negative place in their life. Instead, this person is more likely to dwell in the negative place, the abyss for much longer and experience a much more severe period of time.

Journaling helps a person express the present moment and provides a unique opportunity to add creativity to the process of living. "Every time a person writes, it is an attempt to understand where one has been, and where one is going. The writing serves as an invaluable compass in understanding the geography of one's life" (Reiter, 2009, p. 256). A New York Times article (May 22, 2007) states, "Mental resilience relies in part on ... this kind of autobiographical storytelling, moment to moment, when navigating life's stings and sorrows." "Despite the disorder and chaos that often comes with change, creative coping holds seeds for a new existence. Resilience or hardiness is the ability to adapt to new circumstances when life presents the unpredictable" (p. 256). According to psychologist Salvatore R. Maddi (2004), "Hardiness or resilience comes through commitment, control, and challenge." Reiter (2009) adds that the creative process encompasses these three elements. The challenge first is for the self to have courage to write from the soul. Self-defeatism,

from the perspective of the failed introspective thinker, may include unwillingness to explore the depths of one's own thinking. Perhaps there are hurtful thoughts that may surface in the process of journaling, but once they are in the realm of a second dimension, there is potential for enlightenment.

Viktor Frankl (1905–1997) exemplifies the definition of a person who survived extreme circumstances and found an internal sense of survival. “Frankl was cast into the Nazi network of concentration and extermination camps. Miraculously, he survived” (2006, p. ix). Frankl disagreed with Freud's view that man's search was for pleasure and with Adler's view that man's primary search was for power. Instead, he saw several sources of meaning: in work, in love, and in courage during difficult times (p. x).

In his vivid account of life in the concentration camps, Frankl (2006) wrote about the prisoner turning inward as a means to cope with the horror of being persecuted. “The intensification of inner life helped the prisoner find a refuge from the emptiness, desolation and spiritual poverty of his existence, by letting him escape into the past” (p. 39). Frankl witnesses many people suffering from loss of identity. “The majority of prisoners suffered from a kind of inferiority complex. We all had once been or had fancied ourselves to be ‘somebody.’ Now we were treated like complete nonentities. (The consciousness of one's inner value is anchored in higher, more spiritual things, and cannot be shaken by camp life. But how many free men, let alone prisoners, possess it?)” (pp. 62–63). Fyodor Dostoyevski (1821–1881), a Russian writer and essayist, considered by many as a founder and precursor of twentieth-century existentialism, is credited for saying: “There is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings” (Tumblr.com, 2011).

Frankl believed that suffering and death contributes to a life being complete. “An active life serves the purpose of giving man the opportunity to realize values in creative work, while a passive life of enjoyment affords him the opportunity to obtain fulfillment in experiencing beauty, art, or nature. But there is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces” (2006, p. 67).

Synopsis of Chapter

1. Spontaneity opens the door to creativity.
2. Our interpretation of a situation can change if we alter our mood.
3. The resilient person thrives with new challenges.
4. The competitive spirit works through limitations.
5. Connectedness is the key to building resilience and maintaining relevance.
6. Viewing a setback as a springboard to a comeback will keep a person positive.
7. Journaling is a way to help a person express feelings and concerns.
8. Having courage through difficult times will propel a person.
9. A person's inner value supersedes the external challenges.
10. Existence encompasses both suffering and enjoyment.