

Resilience: Build It Up and Reap the Benefits (1,051 words)

Professionally, many people have had to deal with a lot of change and face a lot of challenges at work. Personally, with aging parents, adult children, and friends with serious health concerns, life can be overwhelming. We all need a dose of resilience. We need to define it for ourselves, appreciate the benefits, build it in ourselves, and move forward.

Defining Resilience: If you look up the word resilience in the dictionary it would say something like this: Resilience is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness, the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity.

The American Psychological Association describes resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means “bouncing back” from difficult experiences. Some purport that resilience is more like a virtue; a virtue that enables people to move through hardship and become better. If we have the virtue of resilience, from pain can come wisdom, from fear can come courage, from suffering can come strength.

Some experts believe resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves thoughts, actions, and behaviors that can be learned and developed by anyone. The word resilience reminds me what John Wayne used to say, “Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway.” I think resilience can be a choice. If we can monitor and manage our thoughts, understand our feelings, ask for a little help, and take action we can recover, better, stronger, and faster.

Benefits of Resiliency: Life isn’t always easy. Life is full of struggles. Change in our personal and professional lives doesn’t seem to be slowing down. There always seems to be something causing us concern. Resiliency is critical.

The benefits to resiliency are many. When faced with a challenge, resilience pushes us to gain the knowledge, to develop our skills, and hone our talents to overcome and grow. With resilience we can face the struggles and rely on our strengths and succeed. Maybe things won’t turn out exactly the way we would like, but resilience will give us the ability to accept the outcome and move forward in a positive way. Some experts claim, given the cycle of life, that we will face unexpected challenges or crises every 3-4 months. It seems to me that it would be a good idea to consider creating a guiding philosophy to drive your thoughts, assumptions, and actions, and be better prepared for the challenges.

A philosophy or life script provides the benefit of endurance with direction and we won’t throw up our hands and give up. Instead we know where we are headed, we take personal responsibility for who we are, we make decisions with confidence, and take things in stride. We will feel powerful rather than appear pathetic. Resiliency sounds pretty beneficial to me. To enjoy the benefits of resiliency, consider this: Know where you’ve been, know who you are, and know where you are going, and then setbacks will

turn into stepping stones to success.

Building Your Resiliency: Unfortunately, when it comes to building resilience, one size does not fit all. Developing resilience is personal. Since we are all unique individuals, we need to experiment and find our own unique combination of strategies to build up our resiliency muscles.

Here are some strategies to consider. Invest some time in relationships with people that genuinely care about you and get their feedback and support. These conversations can help you interpret and respond to challenges and changes differently. Consider what parts of the problem are controllable or at least negotiable. Focus on elements that you can impact or alter. You may not get exactly what you want, it could be even better. Start making small decisions and regain your confidence in your common sense and problem solving and decision-making skills. Find a simple problem solving or decision-making model that balances logic with emotion, and use it. Invest some time in rediscovering your strengths and abilities. Be kind to yourself and give yourself credit for past accomplishments and rebuild your self-esteem.

Remind yourself that you have managed to get through every other bad day you've had. You'll make it through this one, too. Sometimes we get knocked down. Resiliency helps us get back up. Resiliency helps us get our bearings, get back up on our knees, get back up on our feet, and get back to work on getting better.

Resilience Moves Us Forward: One of the best ways to move forward is to set some realistic goals, nothing outrageous, nothing sensational, just set some simple goals that are sensible. Start by taking care of yourself. Consider being well-fed, well-rested, and well-exercised. Small accomplishments in these three areas will rebuild your mind, body, and soul and propel you forward in life with a positive and hopeful outlook. Taking care of yourself will make it easier to absorb setbacks. Spiritual practices, meditation, or at least positive visualization, can help reinforce your resilience and will keep you focused on what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

Return to former activities and old interests that are easy to enjoy. Then continue to engage in those activities that you still find satisfying and relaxing. Some experts suggest journaling your thoughts and feelings, thus being able to track progress and review choices made. I have found that writing a good-bye letter to those things that have been lost or unable to recover helps to acknowledge the value of it and helps us accept the new reality.

It's important to keep in mind that some of these ideas will work for you and some won't. And as you recover, some will be unnecessary to continue as you regain your strength. Be open to new approaches and be flexible. Once you get back on your feet, it's time for you to take a step forward. Not a giant step, just a comfortable step, and then start moving back into a full stride. Chart your course, invest yourself fully, and be on your way.

Kit Welchlin, M.A., CSP, is a professional speaker and author and can be found at www.welchlin.com.