



Adaptability, Antifragility and Post Traumatic Growth

Key Takeaways

- 1 What Is Antifragility?
- 2 10 Ways to Go Beyond Resilience & Become Antifragile
- 3 Seligman's Explanatory Style
- 4 Deal, Feel, Heal, Seal for Post Traumatic Growth

Quote:

“Some things benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder, and stressors and love adventure, risk, and uncertainty. Yet, in spite of the ubiquity of the phenomenon, there is no word for the exact opposite of fragile. Let us call it antifragile.”

— Nassim Taleb

Diagnostic

Self-Compassion Scale

Happiness begins with self. A crucial part of post-traumatic growth lies in the way we look at ourselves.

The self-compassion scale by Dr. Kristen Neff is helpful for trauma survivors and distressed individuals to help them practice self-love and compassion.

The exercise comes as a self-scoreable worksheet consisting of 26 statements that describe our feelings and actions. The responses are scored on a 5-point Likert Scale; the summation of the scores indicates how compassionately we treat ourselves.

Here is a brief overview of the scale. You can also find the full version in our [Positive Psychology Toolkit](#).

Diagnostics

| Statements | Scoring (1=Rarely) | | | | |
|---|--------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. I'm disapproving and judgmental about my flaws and inadequacies. | | | | | |
| 2. When I feel low, I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that is wrong. | | | | | |
| 3. When things are tough, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through. | | | | | |
| 4. When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world. | | | | | |
| 5. I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain. | | | | | |
| 6. When I fail, I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy. | | | | | |
| 7. When I'm down and out, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am. | | | | | |
| 8. When times are rough, I tend to be tough on myself. | | | | | |
| 9. When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance. | | | | | |
| 10. When I feel inadequate, I remind myself that most people share feelings of inadequacy. | | | | | |
| 11. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like. | | | | | |
| 12. When I'm going through a tough time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need. | | | | | |
| 13. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am. | | | | | |

Diagnostics

| Statements | Scoring (1=Rarely) | | | | |
|---|--------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. When something painful happens, I try to take a balanced view of the situation. | | | | | |
| 15. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition. | | | | | |
| 16. When I see aspects of myself that I don't like, I get down on myself. | | | | | |
| 17. When I fail at something important to me, I try to keep things in perspective. | | | | | |
| 18. When I'm struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it. | | | | | |
| 19. I'm kind to myself when I'm experiencing suffering. | | | | | |
| 20. When something upsets me, I get carried away with my feelings. | | | | | |
| 21. I can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I'm experiencing suffering. | | | | | |
| 22. When I'm feeling down, I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness. | | | | | |
| 23. I'm tolerant of my flaws and inadequacies. | | | | | |
| 24. When something painful happens, I tend to blow the incident out of proportion. | | | | | |
| 25. When I fail at something important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure. | | | | | |
| 26. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like. | | | | | |

Exercise

Apply the Adversity Level up to a Recent Challenge

“ The excess energy that's released from an overreaction to setbacks is what innovates!

— Taleb

Whenever you suffer adversity—minuscule or immense—find a single, positive change you can implement as a result of that adversity. Use the pain of adversity as fuel for behavioral change, and build this habit so that adversity simply becomes a precursor for an intentional level up in your life.

Glossary

Fragile: Things which break when exposed to stress, chaos over time.

Robust: Things which remain unchanged in the face of chaos.

Antifragile: Things which become stronger when exposed to stress, chaos, and variability, up to a point.

“Antifragility is beyond resilience or robustness. The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better. This property is behind everything that has changed with time: evolution, culture, ideas, revolutions, political systems, technological innovation, cultural and economic success, corporate survival, good recipes (say, chicken soup or steak tartare with a drop of cognac), the rise of cities, cultures, legal systems, equatorial forests, bacterial resistance ... even our own existence as a species on this planet.” – Nassim Taleb

The Adversity Level Up: “The excess energy that's released from an overreaction to setbacks is what innovates!” – Taleb. Whenever you suffer adversity—minuscule or immense—find a single, positive change you can implement as a result of that adversity. Use the pain of adversity as fuel for behavioral change, and build this habit so that adversity simply becomes a precursor for an intentional level up in your life.

Barbell strategy: Taleb describes the barbell strategy as “a dual attitude of playing it safe in some areas and taking a lot of small risks in others, hence achieving antifragility.” Playing it safe reduces the potential downside of volatility and taking small risks exposes you to the potentially massive gains from the same chaos.

The Lindy Effect: The Lindy effect is a theory about the way non perishable things like technology or ideas age. It states that nonperishable things age linearly in reverse, meaning the older an idea or a technology the longer its future life expectancy.

Glossary

Via Negativa: According to Taleb, “the first step towards antifragility consists in first decreasing downside.” We do that through practicing via negativa – a Latin phrase borrowed from theology. Instead of focusing your time on adding things to your life to make it better, focus first on subtracting habits, practices, things, people that fragilize you.

Skin in the Game: People who have accepted risk and responsibility for their words.

Mode: A way or manner in which you do something you experience, express, or do things.

Explanatory Style: An explanatory style is a cognitive personality variable reflecting the way that people habitually explain the causes of good and bad events. There are three crucial dimensions to explanatory style: permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization.

- The dimension ‘permanence’ is about time.
- This dimension refers to whether the causes of an event are perceived as temporary or permanent.
- The dimension ‘pervasiveness’ involves the generalizability of an event; is the event believed to have a specific cause or a universal cause?
- The dimension ‘personalization’ is about who we believe is responsible for the event; ourselves (internal) or someone or something externally (external).

10 Ways To Go Beyond Resilience & Become Antifragile

1. Build in Buffer & Redundancy
2. Seek Optionality Instead of Forecasting
3. Suffer Voluntarily to Avoid Involuntary Suffering
4. The Adversity Level up
5. Use the Barbell Strategy
6. Be Aware of the Lindy Effect
7. Practice Via Negativa
8. Assess Skin in the Game
9. Develop Backup Modes & States
10. Invert Your Explanatory Style

Glossary

Deal, Feel, Heal, Seal for Post Traumatic Growth:

- **Deal:** Writing a Trauma Narrative. In the first step, you create the trauma narrative. The trauma narrative is your telling of the story of the traumatic experience(s).
- **Feel:** As the name of the main technique used in this step suggests, this is where the client is exposed to the traumatic memory in order to connect the fragmented cognitive and emotional aspects and facilitate catharsis. Imaginal exposure therapy is applied in this step, in which the client reads his or her trauma narrative and the therapist guides the client through processing of the event.
- **Heal:** In step three, the focus is on helping the client put the pieces back together, but in a new and stronger configuration than before. The therapist will emphasize three concepts to the client:
 1. Freedom of choice – The therapist explains that, while the client did not choose to experience the trauma that led them here, they are in control of their choices going forward. The narrative therapy concept of “rewriting the ending” is discussed to help the client see that he or she can create their own path.
 2. Finding meaning from the experience – The therapist discusses how the client can find meaning in their experience, however, is appropriate and feasible for them.
 3. The Hero archetype – Finally, the therapist walks the client through the transformative journey of the Hero
- **Seal:** The Mind as a Filing Cabinet. The final step of the PTGP involves tying up loose ends and putting the finishing touches on the reorganization of the traumatic memory. The “mind as a filing cabinet” metaphor is a great one to use in this step. In this metaphor, the memory of the traumatic experience is likened to a file that is unorganized, scattered throughout the filing cabinet that is the mind. Instead of each component being neatly sorted with the others, they are separated into dozens of different folders with no rhyme or reason, making it confusing and potentially disruptive when one of them is inspected.

Notes

Lesson Resources

1. Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder,
By Nassim Nicholas Taleb
2. Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself,
By Kristin Neff
3. Post-Traumatic Growth: Finding Meaning and Creativity in Adversity
4. Loss, Trauma, and Human Resilience Have We Underestimated the Human Capacity to Thrive After Extremely Aversive Events?,
By Bonanno, G., 2004
5. Six Reasons Why We Self-Sabotage
6. Perceiving Benefits After Adversity: The Relationship Between Self-Reported Posttraumatic Growth and Creativity,
By Forgeard, M., 2013
7. Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence,
By Tedeschi, R., Calhoun, L., 2004
8. Trauma characteristics and posttraumatic growth: The mediating role of avoidance coping, intrusive thoughts, and social support,
By Brooks, M., et al., 2019
9. Flourish,
By Martin Seligman
10. Transcend,
By Scott Barry Kaufman