



INTRODUCTION

How many times in the last week have you said to yourself, “I can’t take this stress anymore,” or “Why do I keep overreacting to such little things,” or even “Is this all there is to life?” Or maybe things are going “just fine,” but you keep thinking that something’s missing. If you’re like most Americans, burning the candle at both ends or just feeling worn out from juggling too many obligations, you’ve probably had thoughts along these lines recently. What you need is more resilience—the ability to persevere and adapt when things go awry.

Everyone needs resilience, because one thing is certain, life includes adversities. There are the inevitable daily hassles—work dumped on your desk at 4:45 P.M., children who need to be in different places at the same time, disagreements with your significant other. There are probably major setbacks too—a lost job, a failed relationship. And recent events have shown that our lives may also be touched by great trauma. But if you increase your resilience, you can overcome most of what life puts in your way.

It’s such an important concept that it bears repeating: Everyone needs resilience. More than fifty years of scientific research have powerfully demonstrated that resilience is the key to success at work and satisfaction in life. Where you fall on the resilience curve—your natural reserves of resilience—affects your performance in school and at work, your physical health, your mental health, and the quality of your relationships. It is the basic ingredient to happiness and success.

How resilient are you? Our research shows that most people consider themselves to be fairly resilient. But the reality is that most of us aren’t emotionally or psychologically prepared to handle adversity, which means that instead of facing our problems bravely and confidently, we risk giving up and feeling helpless. And even though you may be resilient in certain ways and in specific areas of your life, you may need help in others. Our

studies indicate that resilience is made up of seven distinct abilities, and almost no one is good at them all.

Can you boost your resilience? Absolutely. It's all about changing the way you *think* about adversity. For more than three decades psychologists have investigated how our thinking processes affect our resilience, and the role of resilience in achieving success and satisfaction. As therapists and scientists, we have focused on how to change people's thinking so they can build greater resilience, and we've had enormous success—enhancing the resilience of parents, of couples, of workers in the corporate world, and helping children at risk for depression and college freshmen who were underachieving.

In this book you will get to measure your own resilience, and we'll show you your resilience strengths and those areas on which you could improve. Our goal is to teach you the seven skills of resilience that we have developed over the last fifteen years. These seven skills will lead you to a thorough understanding of how and why you think the way you do. Armed with the self-awareness they provide, thousands of children, adolescents, parents, and corporate employees have used the skills to become happier, more productive, more successful, and more balanced in their lives.

A Thought Experiment

Would you indulge us for a minute or two? We ask that you vividly cast yourself as the lead actor in the following scene. Imagine, if you will, that you have been working longer hours than usual lately. While your job does have periodic project crunches that last a few days or even a week, this latest stint has been a marathon—weeks of ridiculously long days that have left you sapped and spent.

Today's been particularly trying. The tribulations began as soon as you arrived at the office at 8:00 this morning. Awaiting you were three voice-mail messages. The first was from a customer complaining that they still had not received a deliverable from your department that they had expected days earlier. A second was from your assistant, who glumly announced that the figures he gave you yesterday, and which you spent most of your day folding into your major project, had a "minor inaccuracy." The third came from your director, demanding to know when the work would be completed and reminding you, as if you needed reminding, that the project was already overdue and over budget. All this before 9:00 A.M.

The rest of the day is more of the same. When you finally call it quits at 6:30 that evening and point the car toward home, you're lost in a fantasy

about being with your loved ones and sinking into that big, comfy sofa. Your youngest child will already be asleep—this makes the second time this week you've missed her bedtime. Still, you'll read to your son for a while, have a bite to eat, and catch up with your spouse. But it's not to be.

As you walk through your front door, you can already feel the tension. You've barely had time to decompress when your spouse angrily says to you, "I know we both agreed that you should take this job, that it would be good for your career. But this is getting pretty frustrating. I'm stuck doing most of the chores around here and the kids really miss you."

What is going through your mind as you experience this scene? What emotions are you feeling? What would you do?

Likewise, what goes through your mind when you hear those persistent rumors of downsizing in your organization? How do you feel? What do you do? How do you react when you're making that lengthy commute and someone cuts you off on the freeway? What do you think, feel, and do when you catch your teenage daughter smoking? Or when the team you manage fails to meet its project deadline? When you lose your job or when your significant relationship falters? Or when you notice that the health of your aging parents is beginning to fade?

Are you quick to anger? Do you often feel guilty? Do you stifle your feelings and worry silently? Perhaps you often feel defeated. This book will teach you to identify your own *thinking style*. More than twenty years of research conducted around the world shows conclusively that how we analyze the events that befall us has a profound effect on our resilience. How you respond to situations like those just described reflects something called thinking style. Thinking style is like a lens through which we view the world. Everyone has such a lens, and it colors the way we interpret the events in our lives. Your thinking style is what causes you to respond emotionally to events, so it's your thinking style that determines your level of resilience—your ability to overcome, steer through, and bounce back when adversity strikes.

Building Resilience

We all know resilient people. They inspire us. They seem to soar in spite of the hardship and trauma they face. In fact, the most resilient people seek out new and challenging experiences because they've learned that it's only through struggle, through pushing themselves to their limits, that they will expand their horizons. They are not danger seekers, yet they don't wither when confronted with risky or dangerous situations. Resilient

people understand that failures are not an end point. They do not feel shame when they don't succeed. Instead, resilient people are able to derive meaning from failure, and they use this knowledge to climb higher than they otherwise would. Resilient people have found a system—and it is a system—for galvanizing themselves and tackling problems thoughtfully, thoroughly, and energetically. Resilient people, like all of us, feel anxious and have doubts, but they have learned how to stop their anxiety and doubts from overwhelming them. We watch them handle threat with integrity and grace and we wonder: Could I do that?

The answer is yes. Your capacity for resilience is not a genetically fixed trait like how tall you are, nor are there genetic limits on how resilient you can become. While you may be able to improve your time in a 5k run, if your body is not built for speed, practice will not transform you into an Olympic track star. But with practice, anyone can master resilience.

Resilience is under your control. You *can* teach yourself to be resilient. You can profoundly change how well you handle setbacks, how enthusiastically you approach challenges. In fact, you probably *need* to learn how to be resilient. Although some of us are born into circumstances that forge resilience early, most of us have to learn how to face adversity without shrinking. We have to learn how to think keenly when embroiled in conflict, how to derive knowledge and meaning from our setbacks and failures. And we have to learn how listening to our thoughts, our inner voice, can guide us through the havoc that life sometimes brings.

Resilience enables you to achieve at the highest levels at work, to have fulfilling, loving relationships, and to raise healthy, happy, successful children. It allows you to meet the needs of your job and still have time and energy to be there for your family. It is what enables you to bounce back quickly after a crisis at work or home. Resilience helps you handle the stressful moments with your adolescent, your ex, or your new partner.

Resilience is of vital importance when making quick and tough decisions in moments of chaos. What's more, it grants you the ability to do so with grace, humor, and optimism. Resilience transforms. It transforms hardship into challenge, failure into success, helplessness into power. Resilience turns victims into survivors and allows survivors to thrive. Resilient people are loath to allow even major setbacks to push them from their life course.

Who needs resilience? Is it important only for people who are struggling or had a tough childhood? No. Regardless of the amount of money you have, or the degree to which your parents were neglectful or caring, or how well you are doing at work or with relationships, you will benefit by increasing

your resilience. Resilience is not an either/or trait. It's a continuum, and no matter where you fall on that continuum today, you can increase your ability to rise to tomorrow's challenges with doggedness and spirit.

What makes one person resilient and another not is often determined during childhood. How we analyze events depends on thinking styles that we have learned over our lifetime and that operate reflexively, in knee-jerk fashion, when things don't go our way. Nonresilient thinking styles can lead us to cling to inaccurate beliefs about the world and to inappropriate problem-solving strategies that burn through emotional energy and valuable resilience resources.

So, how can we make you more resilient? We have spent the last fifteen years applying what was learned in the lab and in therapy rooms toward developing seven skills that anyone can use to think more accurately about themselves and their world. Mastering these skills will lead you to more fulfilling relationships, to a more productive career, and to feeling excited and energized in life. We have worked with corporate executives, parents, children, teachers, and athletes—and we have proof that the skills we teach work. This book will show you how to increase what is right in your life as well as fix what is wrong.

Scan the titles in the self-help section of any bookstore and you will find books that offer advice on how to overcome depression, forgive your alcoholic parents, or manage your child's attention deficit disorder or ADHD. Although these books are important, they are remedial. They are geared toward fixing what is broken. And while it's important to minimize the damage that depression, alcoholism, or ADHD cause, if you are stuck in a damage-control approach to life, you will never flourish. In this book we do not get stuck in fix-it mode. You'll learn foundational skills that you can use to overcome areas of weakness and, just as important, enhance areas of strength. You will learn how to develop your resilience and use it to live with vitality, curiosity, and inspiration.

Your Commitment to the Journey

Let there be no mistake: The skills imparted in this book can change your life, but they are not a quick fix. If we could offer a pill, or a catchy phrase, or a simple rule that would enable you to leap over the inevitable obstacles of life in a single bound, believe us, we would. But let's face it, in the real world it takes real work to change your life for the better. You won't put down this book and suddenly, magically, have a tenfold increase

in resilience. This is not a pump-up seminar in book form, where you leave feeling ready to conquer the world and then, three days later, can't quite remember how it was that you were supposed to do that. We may live in a quick-fix world, but quick fixes rarely last. Our research shows that everyone can increase their resilience—permanently—by learning the seven skills that we have developed and by putting them to use.

Increasing resilience will require work on your part. And it will require you to be honest about how you see yourself and others. It is going to take energy and commitment. Fortunately, learning the skills of resilience is not like dieting. Most dieters generally go through weeks of deprivation and frustration before seeing results that make them look and feel better.

Building your resilience is the opposite. As soon as you learn to fight off your negative thinking style, such as harsh, unfounded self-criticisms ("I'm so selfish," "I'm screwing up my kids," "I'm never going to make it in this job"), you can stop yourself from spiraling into a major funk, and that feels good—immediately. You like yourself better. You have more energy and you are ready to deal with your problems. Likewise, if your thinking style leads you to blame others or outside circumstances for your problems ("Hey, it's not my fault I'm not selling—the market's impossible" or "We're not getting along because she doesn't make *me* a priority"), once you use the skills to stop ducking responsibility, you put yourself in the driver's seat to solve the problem.

In this book you will learn to "hear" the nonresilient thoughts that run through your mind automatically when you are faced with a problem or under stress and to identify how this nonresilient thinking generates counterproductive feelings and behaviors. You will see that these thoughts and beliefs are like a ticker tape that threads through your mind, over and over again, reinforcing inaccurate interpretations of the adversity you face. You will learn how to override this tape so you can see problems more clearly and solve problems more effectively. You will learn how to recognize unproductive "rules for living"—such as "I must succeed in all things, at all times, or else I am a failure," or "If *he* doesn't love me then I must not be lovable"—that are unwittingly sapping your motivation and hindering your success. You will learn how to fight back against your nonresilient beliefs the moment they occur, so your time is not wasted and your energy is not drained. You will learn how to minimize negative emotions and increase your experience of positive emotions. Put simply, you will learn to build your resilience so you can reach your personal and professional goals. We guarantee that after reading this book and mastering these skills, you will have a better understanding of who you are and why you behave in the way you do than ever before.