

How to Bounce Back from Adversity

Soooo, life is humming along busily...sure, work can be stressful and finding family time is tough, but you are doing well financially, everyone is healthy, you have an active social life and a vacation planned...woohoo!! Then the Covid Pandemic hits. Maybe you lost your contract or job...maybe it was your spouse. Maybe you are in medical care and are pulling long grueling days struggling with the fact that schools are closed, and childcare is an issue. Maybe someone you love has the virus and you can't even support them the way you typically would. Maybe your business had to close and if this pandemic goes on for too long, you are at risk of losing everything you worked so hard for. Maybe most of your retirement was tied up in the stock market and now that it is time to retire you have lost most of your money that you need to live on. How do you stay positive through this and set yourself up to bounce back from adversity?

Whatever your initial reaction to our current state of affairs, the challenge is to turn a negative experience into a positive one by countering adversity with resilience. Psychological resilience is to respond quickly and constructively to crisis. (Seligman, 2018, p. 77). That may be easier said than done but how we handle the current pandemic will determine what our future looks like and will teach us how to bounce back next time we experience adversity because we will most certainly hit numerous roadblocks along our journey. Some may be small, some may be very personal but incredibly challenging like a family member or friend becoming very sick or passing, an accident occurring, an injury or illness ourselves, a divorce, a failing business, bankruptcy, a house fire, the list goes on. We protect ourselves and our families the best that we can with insurance policies, investments, and hard work, but life is full of surprises that can bring us to our knees. Other challenges may be more large-scale affecting communities as a whole like what we are currently experiencing. Resilience can be tough to muster for many reasons: fear, anger, and confusion can paralyze us. The human tendency is to assign blame rather than generate solutions. So what are some things that we can do to become more forward thinking and less fearful?

There are four lenses from which we view traumatic events:

- 1- **CONTROL**- When a crisis hits, do you look for what you can improve now, or do you try to identify all the factors that caused the event in the first place?
- 2- **IMPACT**- can you resist the temptation to find the origins of the problem at hand and focus instead on identifying what positive effects your personal actions may have?
- 3- **BREADTH**- Do you assume that the underlying cause of the crisis is specific and can be maintained or do you worry that it may negatively affect all aspects of your life for a long time?
- 4- **DURATION**- How long do you believe the crisis and its repercussions will last?

(Seligman, 2018)

The first two lenses capture our individual personal reaction to adversity and the second two examine our impression of the magnitude of the crisis.

What typically happens when adversity strikes?

There are two emotional traps that typically besiege us:

- 1- Deflation- Someone who has experienced a series of successes and powered through small obstacles can feel like a beast, able to conquer all and then something traumatic happens and they can feel like they have been backhanded and respond with a flurry of negative emotions.
- 2- Victimization- Many of us assume the role of helpless bystander feeling as though “others” have put us in this unfortunate position and no one understands us.

So, what does this mean?

The ability to bounce back from adversity hinges on understanding our feelings about it and shifting our response. You know the old adage, “You cannot control what happens to you, but you CAN control your response to what happens to you.” The capacity for resilience hinges on shifting from reflexive thinking to active thinking about how to respond.

So, if we go back to the four lenses from which we view traumatic events and create a RESILLIENCE REGIMEN, it may look something like this:

- 1- CONTROL- our reactions to stressful situations depend upon the degree of control we believe we have so how can we identify ways to exercise control?
 - a. Specifying- determine what you can directly influence to change the course or the result of the event
 - b. Visualizing-what would a mentor or someone I look up to do in this event?
 - c. Collaborating-who in my network or on my team can help me and how do I best engage with them
- 2- IMPACT- Our assumptions about what caused a negative event directly relates to our beliefs about whether we can turn things around
 - a. Specifying-How can I make the most positive impact on this situation
 - b. Visualizing-What positive effects may my efforts have on those around me
 - c. Collaborating-How can I mobilize the efforts of others
- 3- BREADTH-When we encounter a setback, we often assume that the causes of this setback apply broadly like poison that taints all that we touch.
 - a. Specifying-What can I do to reduce the negative impact of this event? What can I do to manage the potential upside?
 - b. Visualizing- What strengths and resources will my team and I develop from this?
 - c. Collaborating- What can we do collectively to minimize the damage and turn the situation into an opportunity?
- 4- DURATION- During times like our current state of affairs, the question of duration is unknown and therefore can create a tremendous amount of anxiety if we don't focus forward.

- a. Visualizing- What do I want life to look like on the other side of this?
- b. Specifying- What can I do TODAY to move toward that?
- c. Collaborating- What sequence of steps can we put together? What processes can we develop and adopt?

“How people approach trying circumstances influences both their ability to deal with them and, ultimately, their own success and well-being.” (Margolis & Stoltz, p.87).

Two questions tend to surface when I discuss the previous lenses with my clients. “How does this apply to me?” and “Where do I start?”

We all have different challenges with regard to resilience. Which of the above affect your capacity to bounce back from adversity the most? Are you someone who blames other people or things and undermines your own potential to contribute? If so, begin analyzing the lenses of IMPACT. Do you often worry that one adverse event will ruin all things? If so, start with BREADTH.

In the first week of this pandemic I lost 80% of my income. Did I have anxiety...yes. Did I watch Netflix and chill...no. I immediately took action to reduce my monthly expenditures and to service the clients who were sticking with me because their needs drastically changed. Once things calmed down and were more manageable, I began investigating what I want my business to look like when this pandemic ends and researched ways to further diversify. I am in the midst of changing my business and adding additional businesses both brick and mortar and virtual. My days are filled with plans for the future and I am excited for those adventures. Meanwhile, I am thoroughly enjoying life. I turned my initial anxiety into hope and opportunity, and you can too!! If you feel overwhelmed by your current situation and do not know where to begin in order to shift your mindset, I am happy to help!!