



by Stephanie Conn

Train to be resilient

This column is inspired by my recent attendance at a traumatic stress conference where resilience was the theme. Overwhelmingly, experts agreed that resilience isn't something you have, it's a process. Like officer safety, physical fitness, or sobriety, it's something that requires a daily commitment.

Ten key areas were identified:

1. Positive attitude,
2. Flexible thinking,
3. Personal moral compass,
4. Having a resilient role model,
5. Facing fears,
6. Active coping,
7. Supportive social network,
8. Physical fitness,
9. Regular emotional, physical and cognitive training, and;
10. Recognize and use your strengths.¹

Let's take a look at each of these.

Positive attitude is realistic optimism, which means that you acknowledge your adversities AND you maintain your faith that, despite this, you WILL prevail. I usually remind my clients of their ability to persevere by asking if they've ever NOT survived a day of their life.

Flexible thinking relates to being able to roll with the punches. When we fight the inevitable, such as change and failure, it amps up our stress

levels and limits our ability to move forward. Shift happens. You may not like it but, if you can't do anything about it, you have to accept that and see if there is anything to learn from the situation.

Having a personal moral compass may or may not be related to religious faith. It's about knowing your purpose in life and living according to it. What is your mission statement for life? Are you living according to it? If not, take the first step toward a life that serves your purpose.

I recently asked a large group of cops to identify their role models. Much to my surprise, they said they could identify who was not their role model but not who inspired them. Sometimes seeing who we don't want to turn out like is great motivation to take better care of ourselves and our relationships but it isn't enough. Having a role model – a mentor, if you will – to inspire us improves our resiliency.

Encouraging officers to face their fears seems unnecessary. Cops face fears that others run away from for a living. Let me be more specific. Face your personal fears, those difficulties you're having that you pretend don't exist because you do not know what to do about them. Maybe you've noticed that you're not doing well after a call and you've been ignoring some of the signs of it. It could be that you notice your marriage isn't what it used to be but you pretend that everything is

fine. Running from your problems is a race you will NEVER win. Face your fears instead of being chased down by them.

A related concept, active coping, entails taking measures to manage the stressor you're facing. It involves facing your fear and then determining what you can do to change the situation. If you can't change it, find ways to deal with it. It might mean asking for help from your support system or telling yourself something encouraging to deal with the situation, such as "I can get through this" or "This, like everything else, is temporary."

I can't say enough about having a strong support network. The more people in it, the merrier. Build a strong network when things are going well so that, when times are tough, you have many sources of support. Some people can support you emotionally while others offer practical support. Sometimes you want to talk to someone. Other times you just need to get a break from your stressful situation, like going camping. One friend may be great at listening while another lifts your spirits by just being there with you at the campfire. Try to include people from various sources so you have a wide array of interesting people in your life and diverse sources of support.


Physical fitness is critical to being resilient. Sometimes we don't need to talk about our stressors, we just need to burn off stress and get some endorphins to feel better. Building physical strength often results in emotional strength and better clarity and focus. Taking a break from worrying about our problems, getting out of our head and into our bodies, can be the best thing for us.

A related resilience factor is emotional and cognitive training. Keeping our mind sharp, including our emotional intelligence, helps us to manage situations where we may not be able to change anything but our reaction. Staying active by engaging in challenging activities across various interests will keep us sharp. For instance, you could coach a hockey team and learn a craft like wood carving or cooking.

The last resilience factor, recognizing and using strengths, is a challenge for many. Our tendency is to focus on our weaknesses. This is unfortunate, as it limits rather than inspiring us. Interestingly, you would point out strengths your friend could use to make it through a difficult situation.

Try this with yourself. Do you have a track record of being creative when helping others get through tough times? Harness this strength to help you through your current situation.

I hope you find something you can use and best of luck in training to be more resilient!



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1. Charney, D.S. & Southwick, S. M. (2012) *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Challenges*. Cambridge University Press.

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