



What is Resilience?

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Have you ever found yourself wondering “Why do I take things so hard?” or “Why do these things always happen to me?” Do you find yourself lying awake at night ruminating about something that happened at work. Do you find yourself wishing you had handled that situation better?

Most of us find ourselves thinking these thoughts from time to time. In times of stress, they can seem to take over our lives. These are the times that we need Resilience. **Resilience is the ability to persevere and adapt when things aren't going the way we'd like.** It is the ability to mentally step back, accurately examine a situation and determine the best course of action. When we are acting resiliently, we are acting from a proactive place of power instead of a reactive place of being a victim.

How We Keep Ourselves from Being Resilient

The principle obstacle to being resilient is how we view a situation and what we tell ourselves about the situation. Shakespeare wrote, “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” The point of this quote is that it is not an event or person that causes problems in our life. It is **what we tell ourselves about the event that determines our feelings about it** – both positive and negative. And how we choose to interpret the event triggers the action we take in response to it. **Our emotions and behaviors are triggered not by the events themselves but by how we interpret those events.**

Resilience Is Under Your Control

Fortunately, Resilience is under your control. It is a skill that you can learn and improve. As you learn to become more resilient, you will profoundly change how well you handle setbacks, you will learn to enthusiastically embrace challenges and will have more confidence about stepping outside your comfort zone.

Although some of us are born into circumstances that forge resilience early, most of us have to learn how to face adversity and build our resilience. We have to learn how to think accurately when embroiled in conflict. We need to derive knowledge and meaning from our setbacks and failures instead of just beating ourselves up or blaming someone else. And we have to learn how to listen to our thoughts, our inner voice, and use it to guide us through the havoc that life sometimes brings.



What's Your Thinking Style?

When adversity happens, do you tend to blame yourself or do you tend to blame others? Do you tell yourself things like “this always happens to me” or “things will never change?”

The way we choose to look at a situation and the things we tell ourselves about that situation depends on our thinking style. Our thinking style is the manner in which we habitually explain to ourselves why events or adversities happen. We have developed and learned our style of thinking over our lifetime.

Often, our thinking style has become a habit that may have served us well in past times of crisis and adversity. These habits may not be getting us the results that we want today. Quick interpretations that we apply to tense situations can prevent us from being flexible in new situations. We see things through a lens that distorts what is going on and impacts how effectively we achieve our goals because we are applying old ways of coping to new situations. We cling to inaccurate ways of seeing reality which leads to inappropriate responses and ineffective problem solving.

Research by Dr. Martin Seligman has clarified the direct connection between a person's thinking style and how she explains negative events. Seligman describes the research in his book, *Learned Optimism*. (The book is listed in the resource section of my website and there is a link to Amazon to review the content and order the book.) Seligman discovered that there are three dimensions people use to explain adversity.

Dimension #1

Personalization: Internal vs. External

(me – not me)

When adversity strikes do I blame myself or do I blame other people or circumstances?

Dimension #2

Pervasiveness: Universal vs. Specific

(everything – not everything)

Do I see the negative event impacting every aspect of my life or is the impact isolated to that specific event or person?

Dimension #3

Permanence: Ongoing vs. Temporary

(always – not always)

Do I see the event as persisting in my life or do I see it is short lived?



What's Your Self Talk?

What we tell ourselves-the words that we use in our mind to describe a person or situation-I am labeling as "self talk". Self talk is a powerful component of resilience. Our self talk is largely determined by our thinking style. When adversity happens, what do you tell yourself? Do you give yourself a pep-talk or do you tear yourself down?

People who are low in resilience explain negative events as:

- "It's all my fault;" (Personalization)
- "This is going to ruin my life." (Pervasiveness)
- "It will always be this way." (Permanence)

People who are high in resilience are able to:

- Accurately assess their contribution to the adversity and the contributions of others. They also recognize when an event is beyond their control. (Personalization)
- Specifically identify the extent of the impact the adversity will have in their life. They do not catastrophize or minimize. (Pervasiveness)
- They can tell when something is temporary and when they are going to have to cope with something long term. (Permanence)

Resilience and Leadership

If you are failing to reach your potential or aren't having the impact that you want as a leader, it probably isn't due to your lack of commitment to achieve results. If you are struggling to understand why you are coming up short, the main obstacle may be your lack of resilience that is caused by your thinking style-by how you explain situations to yourself.

The goal is to have your emotions and behaviors be productive, appropriate responses to the reality of the situation that you face.

In Part II, we will discuss how to systematically identify and challenge your thinking style.

I am in the process of writing an eCourse on specific skills and exercises you can use to improve your resilience. If you would like to take the eCourse, let me know.

All the best until next month.



John Cronkite works with leaders faced with the challenge of implementing change that will be sustained over time. Sustaining change requires effective leadership and top performing people. John will provide you with practical, hands on coaching and consulting to build your confidence and effectiveness at providing this leadership and bringing the best from your people. To contact John send an email to cronkite@dirigoconsulting.com and for more information about John and his work visit his website at www.dirigoconsulting.com.