



'Complex to  
Simple'

## 2. Resilience Do You Feel Lucky?



by

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## OPTIMISM VS PESSIMISM

In my last article I looked at how people react to adversity and what can be done to be more resilient when things don't go as you'd like.

I'd now like to look at resilience in more general terms, and I'll start by asking two questions:

1. Are you an optimist or a pessimist?
2. Do you feel lucky?

I'll start by looking at your answer to question one first. Do you consider yourself an optimist or a pessimist? Or did you look at the question and think, "I'm neither, I'm a realist?" If you responded in this way I'd like you to consider a quote I came across some time ago which said "A realist is just a pessimist who likes to say I told you so!" Joking aside, as with most things in life it's not as clear cut as are you an optimist or a pessimist. It's actually a scale with realist residing somewhere in the middle. A resilient answer to the question would therefore be "I'm a realistic optimist!"

*"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way"*  
Victor Frankl

Let's take a look at realistic optimism in action.

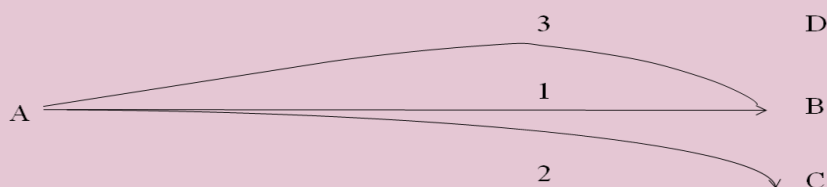
I was faced by a challenging life decision when I decided to leave my long held job to become self-employed. I assessed the risks involved and put measures in place to best manage them, but still found I was reluctant to make the move. I asked myself, "What is the worst that can happen?" to which I replied, "I fail as self-employed and have to get another job, so I'm no worse off." This seemed a reasonable approach. However, someone pointed out that I was focusing on the worst-case scenario, and as I

mentioned in “What is Resilience?” your brain will go out of its way to find evidence of whatever you feed into it. In this case my brain was looking for evidence of my worst-case scenario.

I decided to take a more resilient approach, in other words approach the situation with realistic optimism. I then asked myself, “What will be the most likely outcome?” To which I replied, “It will take a lot of hard work, but if I keep my support network around me, I’ll make a go of it.” Already by asking this question I was filling my brain with a more positive scenario for it to find evidence of.

The psychiatrist Victor Frankl survived the Nazi death camps. His most famous book is “Man’s Search for Meaning”. A keen pilot, he tells the following story:

When he started learning to fly light aircraft, he had to learn how to plot a course. The picture below illustrates that when planning a journey from A to B, you do not set a course direct along line 1. Cross winds affect the path the plane takes, so setting out along line 1 would in fact result in a flight path along line 2, which would result in you arriving at point C, many miles from where you want to be.



What you should do is set a path for point D, resulting in a flight path along line 3, and you reaching your desired destination of point B.

Victor Frankl then drew parallels between plotting the flight plan of a light aircraft with setting goals in your life. He said you should aim high as life’s “cross winds” are bound to have impact on your plans and at least by aiming high you will still achieve a good result, and not find yourself miles from where you want to be.

*So why not aim high and ask “What’s the best that could happen?”*



## REALISTIC OPTIMISM IN ACTION

Taking the learning from Victor Frankl’s story I then decided to moved along the scale a little more, remaining realistic, but with a pinch more optimism and asked another question, “What would be a really good outcome of becoming self-employed?” Now remember I retained the realism so didn’t get carried away, but my response became, “I’ve got a really good business idea that I’m sure there is a market for, and I know I can find a niche and be successful!” I was then filling my brain with a positive yet realistic scenario for it to go and find evidence of. E.g. it will be focused on identifying potential niche markets, and I made the leap!

You may be very rightly thinking or saying, “You’re absolutely right, but it’s not that easy.” I agree, so let’s look at what you can do to make it easier.

I discussed strategies in my first article, and optimistic and pessimistic outlooks are just another strategy we’ve developed over time to protect ourselves when things go wrong, “If you approach a situation hoping for the best, you can only be disappointed. At least if you’re pessimistic you may be pleasantly surprised.” Some will argue that it’s also personality driven. I could get into a long discussion about whether we are born a particular way, or did we develop over time. The discussion, while interesting, would not help us to become more resilient, so I’ll leave it for now and instead concentrate on what you can do.

## DO YOU FEEL LUCKY?

In order to examine the positive action you can take, we must first look at question two, and in fact the title of this article, “Do you feel lucky?”

*“Leap and the net will appear” Julia Cameron*

Successful people generally consider themselves lucky and conversely unsuccessful people consider themselves unlucky. An obvious statement I hear you say, and you’re right. The other element to this is that the people who consider themselves lucky take considerable action to increase their luck.

Here are a couple of examples:

There is a woman who regularly wins five or six magazine competitions every week – very lucky – however, what is often over-looked is that she enters dozens of competitions every week.

There is another woman who consistently wins new business from people she bumps into on the train. Again, how lucky is that! However, she does spend three hours a day on the train, and rather than burying her face in a book, or listening to an I-Pod, she talks to her fellow passengers.

This leads to a simple concept:

Do you live your life believing you are in control and that your actions ultimately shape the results you get, or do you view life as something that happens to you and you enjoy or suffer the consequences?

Those who live life believing they are in control are generally optimistic, they take action and believe themselves lucky. Those who believe life happens to them tend to be pessimistic, sit back and wait for things to happen and are therefore generally not as lucky.



## PERSONALITY OF A LUCKY PERSON

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Extroversion        | <p>Lucky people like spending time with people. They enjoy meeting lots of new people and keeping in touch with people.</p> <p>The more people who know you and know what you do then the greater the opportunity for lucky encounters or your name being mentioned to someone potentially important.</p> <p>As we've already seen, a strong network is also a great resilience strength when things go wrong.</p>  |
| Emotional Stability | <p>Evidence shows that the more relaxed you are the more likely you are to spot opportunities, in other words be lucky. This ties back to our first question on optimism and pessimism - lucky people are optimistic.</p> <p>So if you want to be lucky and resilient, find times to relax. Take some time every day when you sit and relax. Ideally you should not watch, read, or listen to anything. This will give your brain time to sort the jumble of information it receives. Once you are relaxed, fill your head with positive thoughts and carry on with your day.</p> |
| Openness            | <p>Lucky people are open to new experiences and enjoy varied lives.</p> <p>This openness not only brings luck, but also increases your resilience because when faced by major change your mind will be more open to whatever the future may hold, and therefore potential anxiety reduced.</p>  |

Richard Wiseman has conducted considerable research into luck, and I would strongly recommend you read his book, "Luck Factor".

## SUMMARY

Fill your head with as much positive intentions as possible so your brain can get out there working positively for you. Be optimistic.

Realise that not everything in life will go exactly as you hope, so you want to aim high. Then when life's "cross winds" hit you you'll still achieve a good result.

Take action and generate luck for yourself. Resilient people know that they are in control of their life so they get out there and talk to as many people as possible. They are open to new experiences, and yet in amongst all this activity, they are able to find time to relax.

Next time I'll look at the next element important to being resilient – Controlling the Controllables.



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If you’d like any further information on developing Resilience or Resilient Leadership, please contact [nick.cooke@cts-consulting.co.uk](mailto:nick.cooke@cts-consulting.co.uk)

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