



'Complex to
Simple'



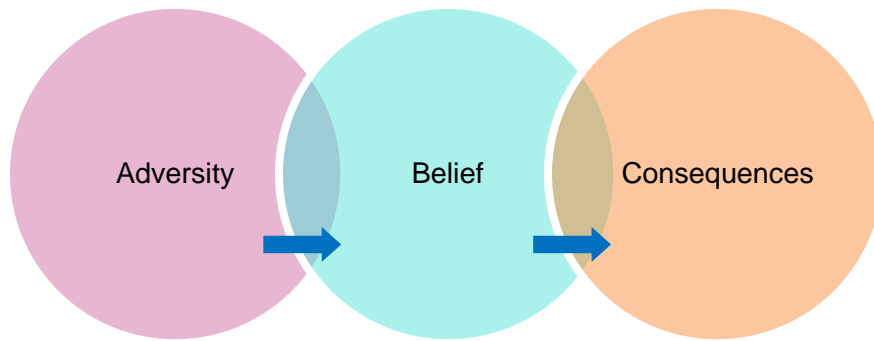
1. What is Resilience?

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WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

In a nutshell it is the ability to continue to operate, perform, survive and prosper, regardless of what goes on around you and to you. That isn't to say you let things wash over you, or that you take the guise of a punch bag, it is about having the tools and techniques, coupled with the right attitude to enable you to cope with whatever life throws at you.

"Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall" Confucius

Any discussion on resilience generally starts with a conversation around handling adversity. So we must first understand what is meant by adversity. I will use it to mean any situation you face where the outcome or circumstances do not meet with your desired state. This could mean a meeting that doesn't go to plan; a piece of business you fail to deliver; a reward that is not forthcoming that is deserved based on your expectations. It could even be an interaction with a loved one that doesn't turn out as you wish.

Whatever the situation, it is how we choose to respond that gives the best indication of our personal resilience, and that is the first crucial learning when exploring resilience, "It is not the situation that makes us feel as we do, but how we choose to react to the situation." So, if we have a bad customer meeting and feel really annoyed afterwards, we are making a choice to feel annoyed. There is no external factor that says we must feel annoyed. So at the point of feeling annoyed, you have another decision to make – shall I continue to feel this way and let it ruin my day, or shall I do something about it?

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy refers to this as your ABC.

A – an Adversity occurs, B – we interpret the situation based on our Beliefs, C – we take action based on this belief and we reap the Consequences .

RESILIENT PEOPLE CHOOSE TO DO TWO THINGS

- First they reflect on what has occurred, take whatever learning there is to be taken, e.g. in the case of the customer meeting maybe they didn't prepare well enough. Once they have noted the learning, the experience is filed away, as just that, an experience.
- This then frees the mind to focus on more constructive things, one of which is to reconnect with previous successes. In other words think back to similar situations that have gone well and remember what you did and how it felt. *This may not always be possible, say in the case of where you are trying something for the first time. In these situations you have no previous success to connect with and may therefore give up, or feel reluctant to try again. In these situations think back to a different activity where it didn't work the first time you tried, but ultimately you were successful.*

"People are not disturbed by events but by their view of these events" Epictetus

The next thing resilient people do is *never suffer alone*. Having a strong support network around you is essential for building resilience. This can be made up of friends, family, your boss, work colleagues, a coach or a mentor. A support network provides many services that are critical to being resilient. Dependent on the situation they can listen, ask questions, be a shoulder to cry on, give advice, or remind you of your strengths when you are feeling deflated.

When dealing with adversity less resilient people can fall into several thinking traps. Let's take a look at how this comes about. As people grow and develop, they create strategies for dealing with every situation they may be faced with, e.g. when you arrive at a party and there is a room full of people, do you:

- Dive right in?
- Slope off to the kitchen looking for a drink?
- Search the room for someone you know and head for them?
- always make sure you arrive with someone else, so you're never alone?

These strategies are developed over time based on our personality, preferences and experiences in similar situations, and our brain uses them as it believes it is the best way to get a positive outcome from the situation.

Unfortunately, not all strategies we develop are good for us. Let's take a look at a situation most of us have faced at some point.

Many people find first dates awkward, so in order to relax they have a few drinks, this can however lead them to say or do things they wish they hadn't leading to a bad first date experience. When next faced with a first date they remember first dates being awkward and embarrassing, so they have a few drinks to relax themselves, and so it goes on.....

When dealing with adversity there are some common thinking traps that non-resilient people can fall into (see the box below). You may find it useful to discuss these with a member of your support network to identify which traps you fall into.

COMMON THINKING TRAPS

Common Thinking Trap	Possible solution
Jumping to conclusions	Slow down your thinking
Tunnel vision	Focus on the bigger picture
Magnifying the bad & minimizing the good	Look for balance
Personalising - Attributing all aspects of the situation to you.	Look outside yourself – who else was involved
Externalising – Attributing all aspects of the situation to things beyond you	Look inwards – what was your input?
Overgeneralising (e.g. this always happens to me)	Make a true assessment of this specific situation
Mind reading – in other words assuming you know what others are thinking	Communicate more – ask questions.
Emotional reasoning (e.g. I feel bad therefore the situation must be bad)	Analyse the situation more clinically

Now comes the hard bit. Whatever action you are currently taking when faced with an adversity, you are doing for a reason, and that reason is always a positive one. It may be that we feel we are protecting ourselves, or we may think that others expect us to react this way. It can be incredibly hard to find the positive intention behind the reaction and in a lot of cases looking for it mightn't help with the situation. Acknowledging that there are negative side effects to this behaviour, negative side effects you would like to be free of, is the important step.

The next step is to identify what positive impacts you would gain from changing your approach.

The phrase, “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks”, comes from the fact that the older you get , the longer you may have been using strategies, and therefore whatever benefits you attribute to the behaviour are really deeply embedded. Therefore, in order to change you must find a really compelling reason to do so. You should therefore take time to consider the negative impacts of the behaviour, and the positives you will gain by changing. Once again, look to your support network for help in doing this.

Developing new strategies to handle adversity, in other words choosing a more positive way to react to adversities, is the first step to becoming more resilient.

In my next paper I will explore building longer term resilience by looking at your outlook and your views on how lucky you are.

Blitz Story

During the Blitz the people of London faced bombing raids night after night. One survivor described that after three weeks of feeling terror every night people realised they could not go on like this. Their choice was simple, they accept that this was the way things were going to be for some time, or they give up and die. The people of London decided to accept their situation and make the best of things. In other words they chose a strategy of survival and making the best of the situation, over continuing with the strategy of being terrorised and not able to function. This, experts believe is why the Blitz failed.



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Man's search for meaning – Victor Frankl

Feel the fear and do it anyway – Susan Jeffers

If you'd like any further information on developing Resilience or Resilient Leadership, please contact nick.cooke@cts-consulting.co.uk

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