

COPING WITH STRESS AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

PART 4: BUILDING RESILIENCE

When you have a higher resilience to things going on around you, you are able to not only endure challenges but also thrive and grow. As you are learning what your stressors are, different approaches in facing them, you can during this time build your resilience towards them.

There are 5 dimensions that drive resilience:

- **Cognitive agility.** This is the ability to adapt or change our thought processes for the benefit of ourselves and others.
- **Emotional regulation.** This is the ability to regulate our emotions; to stay calm and collected.
- **Self-compassion.** This deals with how we are compassionate with ourselves during times of high stress, tensions, and change.
- **Optimism.** This is the ability to remain optimistic about the future.
- **Self-efficacy.** Is our self-control of what we feel over our lives and the events that we are experiencing.

Cognitive Agility

What is cognitive agility? It basically the means **“we are able to shift our thought processes to change what is a negative into a positive”**. When we feel like something is not fair, there is a loss, self-pity, or wanting to blame, cognitive agility helps turn that around and finds the positive in the situation. It allows you to take that “negative” situation and start to create different creative solutions, changing behaviors and mind-set.

Those that have a high (positive) cognitive ability are able to change from:

- Feeling victimized to becoming empowered in any situation.
- From feeling resentful to what’s lost to appreciate what is still around
- From feeling stuck with no options to being creative about new options
- From seeing plans ruined to taking information and problem solve into a new plan

One of the ways to start this process was developed by Alexander Caillet, an organizational psychologist and coach. Mr. Caillet stated that there is a connection between your thoughts and behaviors. Using his method, the “Thinking Path”, can help you start your journey in creating outcomes that you want.

		FROM	TO	
↑	RESULTS	<i>A feeling of disconnect</i>	<i>A feeling of closeness and appreciation</i>	↓
	ACTIONS	<i>Retreating, looking for opportunities to escape</i>	<i>Identify opportunities to capitalize on opportunities for connection</i>	
	FEELING	<i>Sadness, loss, resentment</i>	<i>Gratitude</i>	
	THINKING	<i>I have lost the image of my girls’ retreat that I had envisioned.</i>	<i>I have gained unexpected opportunities for my family to bond as a unit.</i>	

By starting at the bottom of the “from” (left) side and working your way up you can document what you are going through from the event you are experiencing. Now look at the right side and work your way down to change that negative into a positive and put it in place.

Cognitive ability is important as it will help you face any disruptions that comes your way and will help you learn to take that “negative” situation and make it positive. This may not come naturally or quickly but with enough practice, it will help you thrive instead of struggle or “stress-out” when those changes come.

Emotional Regulation

Are you stuck in a “rut” of negative emotions? Do they breed uncertainty and dictate your thoughts and actions? ***You are being overwhelmed by your emotions instead of working with them.*** Think of it as the old “flight, freeze, or fight” dynamic. It will depend on how well you are prepared to face the challenge/situation. Emotional regulation will help in this.

So what is emotional regulation? It is the ability, as the title states, to regulate your emotions during times of high stress. Sometimes our emotions need to be re-trained because we have become stuck on the more “negative” emotions (anger, impatience, frustration, etc.), which are easier to learn. These “negative” emotions will detract from what we are trying to do and can lead to more stress instead of trying to move beyond, to a less stressful situation.

There is a simple techniques to use in learning how to regulate your emotions. Using the phrase of “Just like me” at the end of a sentence/situation will help you begin to regulate your emotions, as you create a connection with the other person.

“Jane is having a bad day that is why she is snapping at people, just like me.”

When we create a connection with another it is a quick way to create empathy with the other person and create a more supportive interpretation of what is going on.

Pause and get curious another way to regulate your emotions. Take a deep breath and ask a question – “what is happening?”. This pause gives you a few seconds to decide how you are going to respond to the answer rather than responding without thinking things through.

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

-Viktor E. Frankl

Self-Compassion

During times of stress, we sometimes feel like we need to do everything we can to make a positive impact when in reality it can do more harm than good. With this heightened awareness we tend to be more self-critical which adds pressure and more stress. We start to implement negative self-talk which tends to bring us even more stress. There are three (3) components to self-compassion, these are:

1. **Self-kindness.** Becoming a better friend to yourself, learning to be kind to yourself.
2. **Common humanity.** Instead of letting self-criticism spiral out of control, with common humanity, we can remember that everyone suffers disappointment. This can create a connection with others.

3. **Mindfulness.** Mindfulness is simply (though it takes practice) noticing what you are feeling and then looking at it in a peaceful way. So if you have a critical thought within yourself you can look at it, acknowledge it, and push it away.

Optimism

Optimism is the term we use when our stories are hopeful, positive, and confident about the future.

When we have our “stories” filled with gaps, we tend to fill in those gaps with worst-case scenarios which leads to pessimistic stories. Pessimism tends to magnify stress and negative thinking/feelings.

Optimism sometimes has to be learned because being pessimistic can be easier for us to explain. To “learn” optimism start making a list of what you are feeling or thinking. Here are some steps to consider.

1. Only write down the facts of the situation. Do not fill in the gaps with any type of “assessments” because they can be not based in fact, you can write them down in a different column.
2. In the second column write down your “assessments.” Are there questions about them that you can look more closely at? Ask the following questions:
 - What has caused your feelings or reactions to the situation?
 - Are you really failing?
 - What are others saying about the situation?
 - What has your boss stated about the situation?
3. Then in a third column write down “what else could be happening along with this situation?” A lot of times your perceptions of what is going on are based tainted past experiences that you have had. What you are seeing and what is actually happening can be two totally different “stories”.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the notion of your control over events. It is your confidence in yourself to make changes in your situation. It is the difference between “I can” and “I can’t”.

Sometimes self-efficacy has to be built by acknowledging what we can actually control and what we cannot control. When we accept the situations that we can control, it can improve self-efficacy. Using a 4-step technique to help with this will help you in determining what is within your sphere of control.

Step 1. Draw a circle on a piece of paper. In the middle of the sphere write “What I can control”. Write down everything that you can control.

Step 2. Next draw another circle on the paper that goes around the smaller one. This sphere is labeled “Things that I can influence”. In this circle write down those situations you can influence.

Step 3. Draw one more circle around both of the smaller circles and label this “Things that I cannot control.” Fill this circle in with all the things that you cannot control

Step 4. Now make a commitment to yourself that you will ONLY spend as much time as possible in your inner circle.

Conclusion

Stress is always going to be part of one's life but how we deal with it will determine if we are able to see stress as being positive or if we let stress become a negative. There is always ways for anyone to learn new ways in dealing with stress but they take work, especially when it comes down to being a good friend to ourselves. Once we are able to look what stressors we have and acknowledge them we can work on being resilient, which in turn will help us move through those situations that were previously a stressor to becoming more resilient.

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