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## The Art of Resilience

***Sometimes carrying on, just carrying on, is the superhuman achievement,” says Albert Camus. Ekaterina Voznesenskaia looks into the art of resilience.***

### How do we deal with life-changing events?

Sooner or later, we are faced with difficult moments and have to handle stressful situations daily. One day we feel on the top of the world with the whole glory and success. But the following day we might find ourselves sliding down the mountain with no help and support. Something has changed, something that we cannot take control of. We are trying to navigate our life through unexpected changes. We are trying to keep work-life balance, remaining strong and resilient. Constantly we are experiencing inevitable ups and downs in life, going through minor adversities or big life crises. We are constantly struggling to keep going. Struggling to build stress resilience.

### How do we define stress resilience?

According to George Vaillant, “stress resilience is a positive response to stress known as mature defence.” It means “bouncing back” from difficult situations and recovering from bad experiences, even when it seems that the cards are stacked against us. George Vaillant has revealed in his research that what distinguishes his graduates who live successful and happy lives from the others, is their ability to use transformational positive strategies versus defensive or negative response to stress.

The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another ,” said William James.

According to the American Psychological Association, resilience is proved as ordinary, not something extraordinary. It is common for people to demonstrate resilience. Interestingly, we are much more resilient than we can imagine. By nature, we are equipped to deal with most of the challenges that life throws at us. Our greatest benefit is that we are able to transform negative events into a positive outcome and turn adversity into a challenge.

It is scientifically proven that we are not born resilient, but born with the ability to become resilient if we live in a positive environment. We can adapt, overcome and thrive despite adversity if we have at least one positive relationship that brings us love and support. “Resilience depends on supportive, responsive relationships and mastering a set of capabilities that can help us respond and adapt to adversity in healthy ways,” says Shonkoff, director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard. “It’s those capacities and relationships that can turn toxic stress into tolerable stress”, he adds.

Yes, it is extremely difficult to change ourselves. But how we perceive stress matters a lot. Dr. Kelly McGonigal of Stanford University has found out in her studies that when we see a situation as a threat, our body goes into a fight-or-flight response, and we learn to avoid stressful circumstances. But when we see a situation as a challenge and an opportunity to grow and develop, it generates an approach motivation with a focus on a positive or desirable outcome. Some people are constantly fighting with stress trying to avoid it, while others are taking advantage of it, becoming more motivated, focused and balanced. This positive attitude has a long-lasting positive effect on our mind and body.

### **How can we develop stress resilience?**

Accept stress. Accept stress as something inevitable, something that you cannot control or change. Accept stress with no resistance. Deepak Chopra in his book 'The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success' describes three components to the Law of Least Effort, one of which is acceptance. Every day you make a commitment: "Today I will accept people, situations, circumstances and events as they occur." Chopra states that when you are struggling against the moment, you're struggling against the entire universe. We can wish things to be different in the future, but at this moment we have to accept things as they are.

In this very moment change your attitude to stress. Don't fear stress. At some stage of my life I had a terrible fear of stress. I tried to avoid stressful situations as much as possible and perceived stress as something destructive and damaging. The more I tried to avoid stress, the more overwhelming it was getting day by day. It so happened to me that on a Sunday evening I was obsessed by the clouds of thoughts. Thoughts about the next week. Thoughts about the future. Thoughts about constant everyday stress. I didn't want the next day to start, as I was afraid.

The fear of a new day, the fear of failure, the fear of future and the fear of challenges blocked me tremendously. Every day I told myself: "My life is incredibly stressful, I can't bear it, I want to avoid it, I must avoid it, it ruins me." I couldn't move any further. And for some time it was constant. It could have developed into toxic stress, if one day I hadn't realised something.

I realised that I exaggerated things. Yes, every day something unexpected might happen. Every day we need to cope with challenging situations. Every day we are struggling to find the solution to some problem and in some moments we think it is the end of the world. But actually, there is a solution. There's a solution to everything. I found the solution to all the issues I had at work and got constant support from my colleagues. I have realised that my attitude to the situation is what really matters and sometimes we think that all is going wrong, but some time later we see that this all happened for the better.

"Remember that sometimes not getting what you want is a wonderful stroke of luck" – Dalai Lama

When something is going wrong, ask yourself: **“What is the worst thing that could happen?”**

Seneca, a Roman Stoic philosopher, practiced the concept of negative visualisation - imagining the worst thing that could happen if certain privileges or pleasures are taken from us. Seneca not only imagined negative situations, but also put it into practice. For example, for a while he lived without servants and the food and drink he was used to as a wealthy man. He stepped out of his comfort zone and did something that before seemed absolutely impossible.

In most cases the difficulties are not as gigantic as we tend to imagine. I can truly say that when I ask myself 'what is the worst thing that could happen?', I cannot say what could be the worst. As even if I fail, it will be a lesson. Even if I lose, it might not be for me. Even if it terribly hurts, it will heal over time. Such positive mindset helps me a lot. Helps me not to exaggerate things and be more objective in everyday situations. Helps me to worry less about the future and simply live now. Helps me become more balanced and resilient.

*By Elaterina Voznesenskaia*

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