

META-RESILIENCE AND EXPERIENCE OF ADVERSITY



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Transformational Burnout is the guided experience of embracing Burnout to release Resilience. The transformation that takes place is from an old perception of the self which is struggling with coping in the present, to a new realised self which has ample resources to relish the ups and downs of life. This process of change leads to transformational learning which allows one to access enhanced and transcendent leadership capabilities in a personal, group and organisational context.

Meta-Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity by developing a self oriented spiritual understanding and being aware of, and prepared for, shocking events. It is about making choices and accepting one's position in life while at the same time making sure to diminish the effect of negativity or toxic relationships, be they with the self or with others. It is about expanding your consciousness following adversity.

The Meta-Resilience Model involves an increase in four aspects of your behaviour in work and life. These factors are Personal Persistence, Personal Efficiency, Experience of Adversity and Openness to Change. The model also calls for a decrease in the effect of four others behavioural aspects of work and life. These reduction factors are Obstacles to Adaptation, Instability of Environment, Personal Vulnerability and Low Self Esteem. Within the Meta Resilience Model the third factor that we are trying to increase the effect of is using Experience of Adversity to increase Resilience. Adversity is defined as adverse fortune or fate, usually marked by calamity or distress. For example, a true friend will show their true colours in times of adversity rather than in the good times, when it is easy to be a friend when things are going well.

Adversity is a symptom rather than a cause and there is a great opportunity to see it as a lesson with something very significant to teach us. In that sense, it is guidance and it is a chance to test your attitude to what life presents in front of you. There are many related states to adversity which depend on how one faces the adversity. On the shadow side, this means experiencing such phenomenon as conflict, death, evil, failure, grief, limitation, loneliness, oppression, struggle, suffering, war aggression and worry

However, there are light sides to all shadow, revealing such opportunities as chaos which contains a magical element of creativity, conflict as it relates to allowing truth to emerge, rebirth following the death of what was not meant to be, failure of relationships or systems that are toxic, the acceptance of impermanence as a way of life, risk taking in pursuit of a dream or vision of what ought to be and the use of anger as a rightful call to action.

Mother Theresa once said that "A bend in the road is not the end of the road unless you fail to make the turn" and sometimes, you have to bear the courage to turn back upon yourself and start again from a new set of experiences.

In corporate life, this is often discouraged and it may be difficult to have to say to peers and stakeholders that you were wrong, but it is now the right thing to go back. It is often a matter of confidence, however, if you can use the adversity that this brings, the learning can be very powerful and life changing.

Mother Theresa also said "I know that God will not give me anything to handle – I just wish that he did not trust me so much!" From such an iconic figure, this can bring enormous hope that for all that she has done to change the world, she too asked for the cup to be passed a little less often, but deep in her heart, she knew that she was given as much grace to handle the adversity as she had been given enough strength to face it.

When adversity is faced, a normal response to the environment, often called a Syntonic Response includes such themes as acceptance, action, awareness, control, endeavour, collaboration, and confidence. Emotionally positive responses to adversity include finding your courage, releasing your creativity, being more daring, improving your decisiveness, developing your determination, being more flexible, being in a state of flow, allowing forgiveness for self and others, attracting healing into your life and work and all with a sense of humour and insight.

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Facing adversity in a positive manner increases the possibility of inspiration, self directed learning, improvement in a sense of liberation, feeling more at liberty, being able to find opportunity even in difficult circumstances and developing patience.

It can help you in harnessing power, releasing pent up energy, feeling renewed, finding solutions that formerly eluded you, transformation of self and those around you, use of innate skills, discovery of talents and strengths deep within, the development of trust for yourself and those in your work, family and community, and ultimately, an openness to new understanding of you, your life and your role in the larger scheme of things which leads to a more powerful vision leading to the acceptance of the wisdom that you always had, but which had been buried under years of conditioning.

On the other hand, the Dystonic reactions to adversity, that which denotes an abnormal response of an organism includes such themes as anger, avoidance of what the adversity is trying to tell you, denial that you are in a toxic system, criticism of yourself and others, judgement prior to knowledge, delusion of your own role in the toxicity, dependence on outside factors such as drugs, relationships or risky behaviours.

It can lead to the road to depression, the finding of fault with everything and everyone, greed for more power when this power is not good for you or those upon whom it is wielded, guilt following every action, haste in implementation of solutions, hatred of self and others, jealousy, laziness, regret and revenge.

Frederick Nietzsche once wrote that “at the very bottom of my soul, I feel grateful to all my misery and bouts of sickness and everything about me that is imperfect. Because this sort of thing leaves me with a hundred backdoors through which I can escape from enduring habits”. So what backdoors do you have and how many times have you been offered a back door to break old and unhelpful habits only to lose the courage at the last minute and not open the back door.

There are many benefits to adversity. It can lead to spiritual growth, refinement of your own purpose in life and progress to the next stage of your learning journey. It is a learning opportunity. There can be a great benefit in bringing in success over adversity in one area of your life into the workplace and pose the very powerful questions such as “how did I cope” and “what did I learn about myself”.

Very often, we try to respond in the workplace in one manner when we would respond in a totally different manner in our community or family. By being able to bring such insight from life into the workplace, adversity can be used as a way to repeat successful behaviours in new environments.

Of course, adversity also teaches us how others will react and knowing that, allows you to choose the people with whom you choose to share risky journeys. Knowing what you know about how you and others react to difficult situations helps you to figure out how that experience has changed you and made you grow. It helps you to navigate what to do the same and what to do differently and importantly, previous adversity is just as important to your learning journey as the adversity that you face anew each day.

There are many proverbs which go back thousands of years which can help to put beautiful words on adversity. There is an old Jewish proverb which says that one should ask not for a lighter load, but for broader shoulders. There is an African proverb which says that smooth seas do not make good sailors. The Russians have one which says that if the thunder is now loud, the peasant forgets to cross himself.

Adversity introduces a man to himself and the difficulties of life are intended to make us better rather than bitter. Dealing with adversity in such a way that you grow leads to being stronger and better, impacting on your confidence to face new adversities in the future. What defines your response to adversity is being able to face the reality of the situation, digging deep to access the courage that you have inside you and being persistent in your behaviours which can lead to getting through the adversity safely and with new learning.

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When you face adversity with such courage, you develop a winning attitude and by using your emotional intelligence more than your intellectual intelligence, you are using adversity to learn how to perform at a higher level and in a higher state of flow. Luckily, there is always someone that you can find who has been through this before and if they have come through with learning, seek them out and ask their counsel. Ask them what wisdom emerged from their experience.

By remaining calm in a crisis and by seeking colleagues and collaborators, adversity helps to shape a shared vision of the future. Importantly, adversity can be taken in bite sized chunks, there is no rush as it will always be with us, but developing a winning attitude under defence allows us to be better at offence when the time is right to attack.

Many great writers have spoken about adversity with beauty and majesty. Oscar Wilde wrote that "to have become a deeper man in the privilege of those who have suffered". William Hazlett wrote "Prosperity is a great teacher, but adversity is the greater teacher". Chinese sage Confucius once wrote "The gen cannot be polished without friction nor man without his trials". The famous scientist Albert Einstein added "There are two ways to live your life. One is as if though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle". I think there is enough evidence to suggest that he chose the latter and through his thinking, his writing and his being, he changed our perception of our world for evermore.

Just as John Updike said "We do survive every moment after all, except the last one". Adversity can inspire faith, deliver a sense of purpose and help to shape a grand plan. In the depression in the USA in the last century, Franklin D Roosevelt developed a grand plan to keep people working through the hunger. Not all of them survived, but the ones that did helped to build a new country post depression. That experience of adversity is being called for again through the repeated crises which face our world.

Adversity has a wonderful way of helping us to create a cause that is bigger than any one individual problem. That could have something to describe how the USA now has an African American president, something that was unthinkable a few years ago. Adversity needs to be listened to and learned from. A system of adversity enables string leaders to emerge. In fact, in times of adversity, string leaders are the only ones who can lead us through.

I have often thought that we create our own adversity to teach ourselves a lesson and in this way, adversity is called from our deepest spiritual core to change something that is not working or that is not in the way that the universe wants it to be.

The reality of adversity is that it will be a constant or occasional companion for us all. It will visit us at some stage in every stage of our lives. We cannot avoid it. The only question is how you will react to it. Will your adversities be stumbling blocks or stepping stones? There are many that believe that we came to mortal life to encounter resistance. That it was part of the plan for our progress as a race. That without temptation, sickness, pain and sorrow, goodness would have no reference and virtue, appreciation, well being and joy would have no meaning or psychological construct.

Buddha said that loss and betrayal bring us awakening. Seneca, the Roman Philosopher told his students that fire is the test of gold and adversity is the test of strong men. The Roman poet Ovid wrote that the road to triumph is built by adversity while Horace, another ancient Roman philosophised that adversity reveals genius while prosperity conceals it. Could that be true in the world of today?

Nietzsche added that which does not kill us makes us stronger while the architect of the second world war Winston Churchill, himself a life-long sufferer from depression wrote that criticism may not be agreeable but it is necessary. It fulfils the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.

There is one organisation that has made a model of adversity and uses assessments to test for response to adversity. For them, they measure for Control, Ownership, Reach and Endurance. In their work, they measure how well people respond to adversity by using their own assessments tools. In a recent study they conducted with their own clients, they discovered for those that reported a lot of stress or maximum stress in their job, after adversity training, a 14% decrease was observed.

In the same study, and after their adversity training, there was an 11% increase in Engagement and a 43% increase in those who agreed that they possessed the skills, knowledge and abilities to thrive in an environment of constant change. The study showed a 42% increase in those who stated that they

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could now manage stress in ways that enhanced their job performance, a 45% increase in those that felt they could mostly or completely influence the factors that affected their stress and a 57% decrease in those who perceived that their greatest challenge was “highly” stressful.

It is crucial to ask adversity some questions. Ask it “why are you visiting me at this time”? Ask it “What gifts does it bring”? Ask it “What spiritual skills are you giving me and what spiritual level are you leading me to”?

The scientist who has written most about grief is Elisabeth Kubler Ross. She wrote “The most beautiful people I know are those that have known defeat, suffering, struggle, loss and have found their way out of the depths. These people have an appreciation, sensitivity and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen”.

There are several ways to experience adversity so that it becomes a teacher to you rather than a visiting disaster. Meditation and living in the moment is very important. Ninety nine percent of the time, the fear that you feel or the pain that you feel is being created by your mind. Unless you are medically in pain all of the time, the amount of time people feel in actual pain is quite low.

Breathing is important, and very many of us do not realise how important taking breathing courses can enhance the way that we live life. Creating a sanctuary for yourself, whether that is in your office, your bedroom, your club or even in your quiet time can help to experience adversity in a new way. By seeking that spiritual connection with yourself, you will never be disappointed, for there is always an answer deep within if you simply ask.

By engaging with your emotions, both positive and negative, you begin to navigate the paradox between love and fear, high and low and when you add in the excellent practice of stopping something, you create the space for wisdom to enter into that space that you have created.

Of course, asking for help and looking for support is crucial and there is no weakness in wanting to connect to another human being and connecting in with what you really want in our life. In this way, you are calling on the healing to begin. If you rediscover or recreate your own new set of rituals that connect you with yourself and your sense of humour, you will be going a long way to using adversity as a teacher rather than as an enemy.

Some of our greatest human beings have faced adversity and left us with imparted wisdom. Einstein wrote that it was possible to find simplicity out of clutter, find harmony in discord and in the middle of difficulty, find opportunity. Hemmingway wrote that the world breaks everyone and afterwards, many are string in those broken places.

Eva Pierrakos, the founder of Pathways, wrote that crisis is an attempt of the natural cosmic lawfulness of the universe to effect change. It tears and breaks up and while it is momentarily painful, transformation is unthinkable without it. “

The researcher behind the concept of flow Mihaly Csikszentmihaly wrote that many lives are disturbed by tragic accidents and even the most fortunate are subjected to stresses of various kinds. Yet such blows do not necessarily diminish happiness. It is how people respond to stress that determines whether they will profit from misfortune or be miserable.

In the workplace, I often use a Jamaican proverb “The higher the monkey climbs the tree, the more his backside is exposed”.

While it is very funny, it is also very true but it is possible to use that bare backside to use adversity for the purpose for which nature intended it – for us to learn about ourselves.