

ASSIGNMENTS AND READING MATERIALS FOR MODULE ONE

“Transforming Stress Into Resilience”

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ASSIGNMENT ONE

Identify two stressful situations that you want to work on during this course. I suggest you choose one personal situation and one professional situation; however, you may choose any types of situations you would like. Second, identify the important values that guide you in each situation; and third, identify your desired outcome. Write your responses in the space below.

<u>First Stressful Situation</u>	<u>Desired Outcome (e.g., puzzle box top)</u>
<u>Important Values That Guide You</u>	

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<u>Important Values That Guide You</u>	

Below are some examples:

Stressful Situation

I don't really understand my supervisor's expectations of me or the job that I am doing.

Desired Outcome (e.g., jigsaw puzzle box top)

I see myself meeting with the supervisor and clarifying my job responsibilities.

Stressful Situation

I don't have enough time to spend with my kids because of all the pressures at work and at home.

Desired Outcome

I see all members of my family present, together, and sharing with each other.

Stressful Situation

Several of my colleagues seem negative and bitter about the current level of stress and transition in our office. I can feel this negative energy rubbing off on me and affecting my attitude and morale.

Desired Outcome

I see myself involved in supportive, positive, constructive interaction with colleagues that energize me.

Stressful Situation

I don't have time to exercise and I feel overweight and tired.

Desired Outcome

I see myself taking a relaxing walk looking healthy and energized.

What Does It Mean to be Resilient?

Resilience is:

The ability to bounce back

The ability to fully recover from change and stressful situations

Being resilient is similar to a tree whose branches remain flexible and bend with the wind rather than rigid and crack under pressure... it's the same for you and I. When we're resilient, we have the mental and physical strength necessary to remain flexible... we're able to bend and grow with change and stressful life situations.

Resilient individuals are described as having three closely related personality characteristics. We call them the three C's: challenge, commitment and control. Resilient individuals...

Perceive a **Challenge**

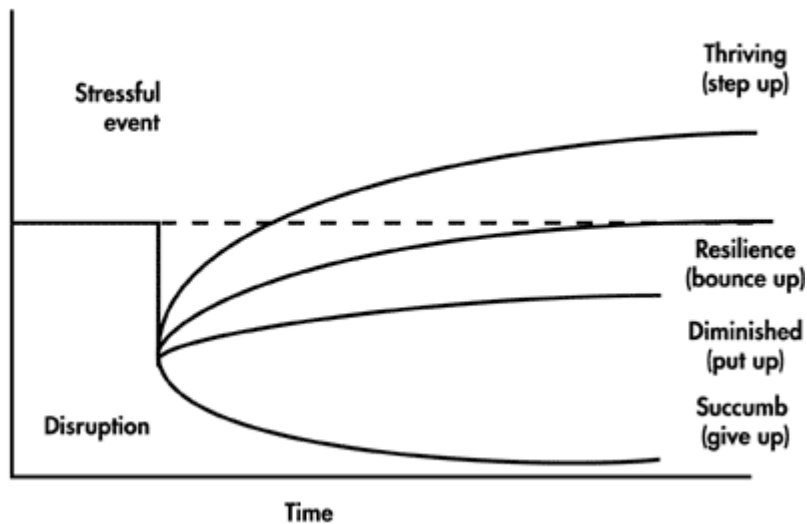
Make a **Commitment**

Take **Control**

For resilient individuals, change is a natural part of life; change is normal! Resilient individuals perceive change and stressful situations as a **challenge** rather than a threat to their security or survival; they are opportunity-driven rather than danger-driven. Resilient individuals also make a **commitment**. They have a strong value system and are genuinely committed to the people and activities in which they are involved. They believe in who they are and what they are doing and deeply engage themselves in meaningful projects at work and at home, rather than become alienated out of fear, boredom, or uncertainty. Finally, resilient individuals have a sense of **control**. They believe they have the power to influence things, and make things happen. They confront problems with confidence in their ability to implement effective solutions, rather than feel powerless, lack self-confidence and initiative, and manipulate others. In short, their locus of control is internal. They have an internal sense of personal

mastery. Their power comes from within, rather than giving their power away to others and feeling like a victim. So, to summarize, resilient individuals perceive change and stressful situations as a challenge, they make a commitment, and they take control.

The Resilience Model



The resilience model (shown above) describes 4 ways people typically respond in stressful situations:

1. *Give up*
2. *Put up*
3. *Bounce up*
4. *Step up*

When we **give up**, we give in to the stressful situation and our level of well-being is significantly weakened - we feel defeated and like things are outside of our control. When we **put up** with the stressful situation, we're better off than when we gave up, but we're still unhappy and our level of well-being suffers, often personally and professionally. When we **bounce up**, we fully recover from the stressful situation, and bounce back to being ourselves, which we call resilience. When we **step up**, we do whatever it takes to meet the challenge and grow to an even higher level of functioning and well-being; we call this **thriving**.

Coping Strategies We Use

Stressful life experiences result from an imbalance between the demands from the environment and our ability to cope with these demands. Excess demands create a disruption that requires us to somehow cope and reestablish order in our life.

Each of us has strategies for coping with the stressful events we encounter each day. We have developed our strategies over the course of our lifetime. Our strategies are formed from our behaviors and attitudes that alleviated stress in the past. When confronted with new stressful situations, we tend to use these same ways of coping. Sometimes these coping strategies are effective and at other times, alternative ways of coping would be more appropriate.

Problem-Focused Coping: When we use problem-focused coping strategies, we are attempting to solve the stressful situation. Let's briefly review the five types of problem-focused coping strategies you learned. These include active coping, planning, positive reframing, acceptance, and using social support.

1. **Active coping** involves such things as taking action to get rid of the problem; increasing your effort to cope with the problem; prioritizing your daily activities; and avoiding becoming distracted by other things.
2. **Planning** first involves thinking about how best to handle the problem, and next, making a plan of action.
3. **Positive reframing** involves thinking about the stressful situation differently, and trying to interpret that situation in a positive manner. Positive reframing will lead to active coping strategies.
4. **Acceptance** involves accepting the reality of a stressful situation and learning to live effectively with that reality.
5. Finally, you have two types of **social support**, *instrumental* and *emotional*. Instrumental support involves getting advice and help from other people about what to do. Emotional support involves getting comfort and understanding from others.

In general, when you use problem-focused coping your resilience and productivity increase, and you're less likely to get stressed out or sick. In our resilience model, problem-focused coping is linked to *bounce up* and *step up*.

Emotion-Focused Coping: You also learned five emotion-focused strategies that are very helpful in the short-term when you feel overwhelmed or like you don't have any control over the stressful situation. These include denial, behavioral disengagement, self-distraction, self-blame, and venting.

1. **Denial** is the refusal to believe that the stressful situation exists or trying to act as though the stressor is not real. It's as if we think, maybe if I ignore it for long enough, it will go away.
2. **Behavioral disengagement** involves reducing your efforts to deal with the stressful situation, or even giving up on reaching your goals. You think that no matter how you cope, it won't help, so you just reduce your effort or give up.
3. **Self-distraction** occurs when you use some alternative activity to take your mind off the problem, like escaping through watching television, sleeping, eating, or drinking.
4. **Self-blame** involves blaming and criticizing yourself for what happened. And of course, blaming yourself doesn't help; you just end up feeling bad.
5. Finally, when you **vent your emotions**, you focus on the upsetting experience and complain about it.

Emotion-focused coping is often helpful in the short-term when you feel emotionally overwhelmed or the situation is out of your control. However, if consistently used in the long-term, emotion-focused coping strategies get in the way of adjustment and are linked to lower levels of resilience and higher levels of stress and illness. In our resilience model, emotion-focused coping is linked to *give up* and *put up*.

ASSIGNMENT TWO

Select one of the stressful situations you listed in Assignment One. Then describe the problem and emotion-focused coping strategies you use when dealing with this situation. Finally, link your coping strategies to the four responses on the resilience model (e.g., give up, put up, bounce up, and step up).

Stressful Situation

Desired Outcome

<p>Identify the coping strategies you've used to cope with the stressful situation (i.e., to help reduce the source of the stress and/or help manage your emotional distress).</p> <p>Examples of problem-focused strategies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• taking action• planning• positive reframing• acceptance• social support <p>Examples of emotion-focused strategies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• denial• behavioral disengagement• self-distraction• self-blame• venting	<p>Problem-focused strategies:</p> <p>Emotion-focused strategies:</p>
<p>Connect the coping strategies you listed above with the outcomes of <i>give up</i>, <i>put up</i>, <i>bounce up</i>, and <i>step up</i> on the resiliency model.</p>	<p>List the coping strategies that were linked to:</p> <p>GIVE UP:</p> <p>PUT UP:</p> <p>BOUNCE UP:</p> <p>STEP UP:</p>
<p>Reflect on what you can do differently to cope more effectively with the stressful situation.</p>	<p>Reflection:</p>

It's important to remember that, initially, when confronted with stressful situations, all of us have a tendency to use emotion-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping strategies are most effective if used with the INTENTION to shift to problem-focused coping strategies. For example, suppose I am in a stressful situation and I come to you and vent my emotions. If all I ever do when I'm around you is complain and vent all my negative emotions, pretty soon you would probably say, "See you later Mary, I've got to go". On the other hand, if the purpose of my venting is to calm myself down, and I have the intention of letting you provide emotional and instrumental support and help me with other problem-focused coping strategies, then it is helpful. Similarly, if I use emotion-focused coping strategies initially in response to feeling overwhelmed, but then ask you to help me create a plan regarding what strategies are needed, then it is helpful. You might also help me reframe the stressful situation and think about it in realistic, yet positive ways.

As soon as I begin to think of the stressful situation as an opportunity rather than a threat, I am well on my way to using a greater percentage of problem-focused coping strategies than emotion-focused coping strategies. This of course, is associated with higher levels of resilience and productivity, and lower levels of stress and illness.

What It Takes to Create a Strong Foundation of Resilience... Even Transform a Stressful Situation into Resilience and Personal Growth

Remember the famous physics professor at The University of Texas, Ilya Prigogine, who won a Nobel Prize for his perturbation theory? He discovered that a natural system is disrupted if it is far from equilibrium. When this happens, the natural system begins to perturbate, or vibrate... to shake. Dr. Prigogine found that two things happen when a natural system is far away from equilibrium.

First, it's very **Vulnerable**; fragile. Second, it has **Tremendous Potential** to pop up to a higher, more complex system.

Human beings are no different. When we get pushed off of our secure foundation because of some stressful situation, we have to realize that it's a wonderful opportunity for us. Two things are working in our favor: First, we become vulnerable; we're fragile. Second, it's during this time of vulnerability that we also have tremendous potential to pop up to a higher level of growth and maturity.

And that's what we want to take advantage of! We want to realize that the stress and disruption in our lives is normal; it's natural. When life is easy, we don't have those opportunities, do we? Our challenge, when faced with a stressful situation, is to say to ourselves, yes, I'm very vulnerable, and I also have a tremendous opportunity to pop up to a higher level... to transform a stressful situation into personal growth.

Just think of it as lifting weights. If you've ever lifted weights, you purposely overload your muscles, don't you? Your muscles become vulnerable, maybe even shaky, but you overload them because you want the opportunity to grow physically. Psychological growth is no different. Of course, we don't purposely stress ourselves out, but when life throws us a curve ball, we can begin to look at it like lifting weights. Our system is simply overloaded, **we're vulnerable... and we have a tremendous opportunity to grow!**

You want to take three actions when you're stressed and vulnerable (when you're lifting weights so to speak), and this is at the heart of our resilience curriculum that you'll learn in the remaining sessions. You want to take responsibility, focus on empowering interpretations (which means to think about the situation in a way that brings you power), and create meaningful connections. That's your challenge!

When you're stressed, you're vulnerable, yet you have a tremendous opportunity to create a stronger and stronger foundation of resilience and possibly even grow and thrive. Now, if you don't take responsibility, you're struggling. You're using a lot of emotion-focused coping; it takes forever to resolve the problem and you're not growing. What you want to learn is simply to resolve the situation a little easier... with less effort... with less emotion-focused coping and more problem-focused coping.

Thanks for taking the time to read this. My hope is that you continue your journey towards resilience with Session Two.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

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