

## PURPOSE FUELS RESILIENCE

Resilience is derived from the Latin term *resilire*, meaning

“to bounce or spring back.”

A resilient material resumes its former shape after being pressed, bent or stretched out of shape, much like a bungee cord or rubber band.

### **EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE IS THE STRENGTH TO REBOUND FROM LOSS OR FAILURE.**

Some individuals possess the strength and durability to absorb the stress, shocks and pressures of daily life, to endure in hard times, to be stretched momentarily out of shape by loss and adversity, but then to regain one’s emotional equilibrium. Others don’t. What sets these individuals apart from those, who sadly, fail to “bounce back?”

### **RESEARCH INDICATES THAT THE QUALITY OF OUR LARGER, LIFE-STORY AND ITS SCRIPT IS THE CRITICAL FACTOR IN RESILIENCE, AND NOT THE NATURE OR SEVERITY OF THE ADVERSITY OR NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE.**

A clear and compelling purpose—a larger transcendent story—provides the emotional scripting to properly interpret and respond to adverse and even tragic circumstances. Hungarian psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s study of paraplegic accident victims revealed that adults who learned how to master new, negative experiences felt they possessed a clear purpose they had previously lacked. They turned a profoundly negative experience “from a source of entropy to an occasion for inner order.” Healthy and constructive life-stories possess at least two critical features.

### **FIRST, A GOOD STORY IS RICH WITH EMOTIONAL RESOURCES.**

It provides us with insight and perspective by telling us why we are in the world, and what we are supposed to do. It strengthens and fortifies us by giving us a significant role to play, and a script to prompt our response to daily circumstance, especially negative circumstances.

### **SECOND, A GOOD STORY FEATURES A “REDEMPTIVE SEQUENCE” THEME.**

The redemptive sequence theme presumes that life is full of negative events and adversity, but these events are embedded with transformative potential, which is realized as one follows the script. The script calls for the individual to internalize the redemptive sequence theme by

- (1) embracing the fact that life is difficult,
- (2) having hope that the seeds of positive outcomes, including personal growth and the transformation of one's character are embedded in adversity, and
- (3) recognizing that resilience—bouncing back from setbacks—is central to the redemptive sequence script.

It is a requirement if positive outcomes are to be realized, the necessary means by which adversity is transformed into something constructive and beneficial to oneself and others.

Resilient people are able to cope with negative emotions, but without the dulling effect of “coping by denial.” Prompted by a constructive redemptive sequence script, they are infused with the will to endure adversity, and supplied the emotional resources to bounce back. Less resilient people typically lack a redemptive sequence story and the emotional scripting it provides. When faced with failure or adversity, they become easily upset and emotionally overwhelmed. They focus their limited and diminishing emotional energy on devising and implementing coping strategies, which shield a fragile and vulnerable self from painful realities. They become self-absorbed and withdraw into a protective shell to shield them from adversity. They live a small and defensive life, with little or no capacity for taking on life in all its fullness, opportunity and challenge.

### **RESILIENT PEOPLE PRACTICE WHAT SALVATORE MADDI, UC IRVINE PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY AND DIRECTOR OF THE HARDINESS INSTITUTE OF NEWPORT BEACH, CALLS “TRANSFORMATIONAL COPING.”**

Transformational coping is focused on cultivating a learning response versus a controlling response to stress, adversity and failure. Resilient people—Maddi calls them “stress hardy”—are not primarily concerned with controlling life so as to avoid negative outcomes. People who need to control things tend to see failure as disaster. Maddi counsels that if we seek to control life and avoid stress, we will reduce our life to the size of postage stamp.

### **IN CONTRAST, EMOTIONALLY RESILIENT PEOPLE VIEW ADVERSITY IN A BROADER CONTEXT AS AN OCCASION FOR LEARNING.**

Setbacks are life lessons designed to teach us how to do better next time. So, emotionally hardy people don't put a lot of effort into avoiding stressful circumstances. Rather, they see adversity and even failure as normative, as a prompt to deep learning. Consequently, they stay positive and productive in harsh and negative circumstances.

### **ARE YOU PART OF A REDEMPTIVE LIFE STORY, WHICH ADDRESSES WHY YOU ARE IN THE WORLD AND WHAT YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO DO?**

Resources. The Art of Virtue-Based Transformational Leadership provides a discussion on the importance of transcendent purpose, faith and hope to one's leadership.

The book is available on this website. Leadership in a Changing World: Virtue and Effective Leadership in the 21st Century, by this author, provides a more thorough exploration of the relevance of purpose, faith and hope to leadership effectiveness. The book, published by Palgrave-McMillan, will come out December 2014 and you will be able to purchase it on Amazon.com in both hardback and e-book formats. A link will also be provided on this website. Dan Taylor's book Tell Me a Story provides a powerful discussion on the role that story plays in our personal lives and leadership. This book is also available on Amazon.com.

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