

## **Taming the Roller Coaster—Resilience in Action**

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### **Introduction**

For more than thirty years, my work has involved teaching and coaching others. From public school subjects to the corporate world, my focus has been helping others learn how to tap into their potential. One commonality that has surfaced again and again is that human experience continually moves from periods of high energy, confidence, determination, motivation and feelings of omnipotence to periods of self-doubt, anxiety, fear, feelings of failure or an emptiness or searching for that “something” that seems to be missing from their life.

Interviews with people of various ages and from different cultural and socio-economic, religious, education, and work backgrounds revealed that, without exception, had experienced periods of high and none were immune from the occasional “drop”. What, then, caused some to sustain the high periods longer than the low periods or, conversely, why did some stay in low periods for long periods of time without the seeming ability to rise against their obstacles and problems in their lives? My conclusion is that their resilience was directly tied to their attitude.

Riding the “Roller Coaster” of life and our ability to employ resilience during the “ups and downs” can make the difference between our success and failure in our personal life and on the job. Individuals and organizations have been faced with positive and negative experiences (the ups and downs) and have had to draw upon resilience to meet situational demands. The ability to call upon your resilience or your lack of resilience impacts every aspect of personal and organizational life.

Our reactions, coping or non-coping strategies, in other words our resilience, become automatic. We are often through the process, at our destination, before we realize we have taken the trip. We may respond proactively, with assertiveness, purpose and direction in any given situation. That same situation encountered at a different time may find us totally unprepared to handle to the crisis of the situation.

What is *resilience*? Webster’ Dictionary defines *resilience* (noun) as an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. *Resilient* (adjective) is defined as capable of withstanding

shock without permanent deformation or rupture. Resilience in life is often harder to define, but we know when people have it. Is it a trait, characteristic or behavior? Is the ability to be resilient inborn or acquired? If we have it, can we lose it? If we don't have it, can we get it?

Why is it important to understand our PERSONAL RESILIENCE? We need only to reflect on the rapid changes in our environment & our personal reactions to these changes to see how we have already engaged in the process of resilience. It has been said that the only constant in change IS CHANGE. Areas where we are finding rapid speed changes and the need to be resilient in the face of changes include:

- Jobs, careers and education
- Business and Global economy
- Workforce diversity
- Technology and communications, i.e. cell phones, e-mail, pagers
- Family structures i.e. single parents, number of divorces and children of divorced parents, blended families, traditional and alternative marriages

According to Department of Labor statistics, 85% of US workers were in agriculture related jobs. Now only 3% are. In the 1950's, 73% of US workers were in production or manufacturing jobs. Now there are less than 15%. In the year 2000, 2/3 of all US workers were in service sector making knowledge our most valued product. It is estimated that today employees will change job twenty or more times and will change career fields at least seven times during their work life.

**Those who have mastered the art of resilience embrace change and move forward in a positive direction in jobs, careers, relationships and life.**

Why is it important to understand CORPORATE RESILIENCE? The process of organizational change and how employees react to and implement changes are keys to an organization's success or failure. Successful organizations realize that corporate resilience is directly related to the resilience of its employees. Employees may respond to change and transition in a variety of ways. Understanding employee responses to change and providing resilience training can minimize the negative impact on efficiency and productivity. Organizations who have mastered the art of resilience, embrace change, gain the commitment of stakeholders, customers and employees and move forward in a positive direction in their industry.

The following five key elements can impact your resilience.

- AWARENESS (Knowing)
- PERSPECTIVE (Understanding)
- SENSE OF SELF (I can)
- RESOLUTION TO ACTION (Doing)
- PAYOFF (Resilience)

<b>AWARENESS + PERSPECTIVE + SENSE OF SELF + ACTION = RESILIENCE</b>
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The five key elements of maintaining or increasing your resilience are:

The **1<sup>st</sup> Secret** in taming the roller coaster ride is Awareness. Awareness is having a clear and insightful understanding of who you are in relationship to your strongest beliefs and values and the world around you. It is **knowing**.

Being *aware* is paying attention to what is going on around you. It's the opposite of ignoring or not knowing. A lack of awareness is a lot like apathy, not caring to give attention to the "real" you and your relationships with people and events in your life. When you are aware, you can clearly identify your deepest beliefs, values and attitudes. To become more aware you must start by making daily habits of:

- Reflection – Thinking about what is okay and what is out of balance.
- Focus – Recalling the specific details of events that were critical and what you learned from those events.
- Decision-making – Is a change needed or what has to be done to move forward?

The **2<sup>nd</sup> Secret** in taming the roller coaster ride is PERSPECTIVE. Perspective is the ability to interpret how past experiences have created lessons learned and to be more resilient in the face of similar or new situations. It is **understanding**.

Lessons learned include understanding what you could and could not control and who your Energy Givers, and Energy Robbers were in past events and relationships. Once you have Perspective, your ability to be resilient in the face of similar or new experiences reduces the time that the experience "cripples" you until you feel congruence with the **awareness** of who you are.

The **3<sup>rd</sup> Secret** of taming the roller coaster is BELIEVING in myself. **Sense of Self** is the belief in yourself and the confidence that allows you to move forward in the direction of a positive future. It is the **I CAN!**

It is recognizing when and how to turn negative or limiting self-talk into positive self-talk and visualization. A sense of self comes from developing the confidence that you are in control of who you are, where you are going and believing that there is an abundance of opportunities available to you. It is also the belief that you are deserving of abundance and positive experiences in your current life and imagined future.

The following steps will help you strengthen your mental resilience:

- Become **AWARE** of the any self-defeating thoughts and negative programming.
  - Reflect,
  - Focus and
  - Decide what you want to change.
- Look at events in your life and the lessons learned.
  - Reflect,
  - Focus and
  - Decide how events, crippling or positive are filtered through your PERSPECTIVE.
  - Develop the Posture of Excellence tool as your best defense against a Position of defeat.

The **4<sup>th</sup> Secret** in taming the roller coaster ride is Resolution to Action. Resolution to Action is the process of understanding areas in need of changing, mapping the steps to change and embracing change. It is *doing*.

**Mapping the Change** is transitioning away from thinking that you have no control over actions that will result in what you want. It is moving from “I won’t” to “I do”. In other words, instead of limiting your future by bracing for the impact of staying where you are or the impact of circumstances if they stay the same, you set out on a plan of “doing”. Doing whatever it takes to get to where you want to be is no longer a goal but a deliberate set of actions.

The following action steps will empower your goals:

- Action Step 1: Focus in specifically on what you really want.
- Action Step 2: Write down your goals.
- Action Step 3: Repeat mental rehearsals.

The **5<sup>th</sup> Secret** in taming the roller coaster is The Payoff. The payoff is reaping the rewards from riding the ride through Awareness, Perspective, Sense of Self and Resolution to Action. It is fuel for the future and it **IS** resilience.

Personal PAYOFF is the process of seeing, feeling and tasting the benefits of employing resilience. It is the process of accepting responsibility and being accountable for your attitudes, actions and non-actions in moving toward your personal and work goals. When you accept responsibility and are accountable, you have moved from **LETTING** things happen to you to **MAKING** things happen for you.

Why is it important to understand the **CORPORATE PAYOFF** for developing resilience? The process of organizational change and how employees react to and implement changes are keys to an organization’s success or failure. Successful organizations realize that corporate resilience is directly related to the resilience of its employees. Employees may respond to change and transition in a variety of ways.

As you explore the ideas and strategies of resilience presented, allow yourself to be the *teacher* and the *student*.

The **TEACHER**, continually acknowledging your sense of self, considering how other people and events have impacted your roller coaster ride and how the *student* in you could be most receptive to new ideas and actions that are in harmony with your true self.

The **STUDENT**, open and ready to explore past experiences and future possibilities. Students seek knowledge, knowledge about self, their surroundings and their world. Some are internally motivated to learn. They hunger for newness and find ways to continue to add to their existing knowledge. Some are encouraged by others, and still others are forced to learn.

Many learning patterns follow the ups and downs of the roller coaster. Some of you need only to think of our traditional education to identify with the times when we were forced to learn in order to pass a test, pass a course or just survive until we could get to the next year in hopes that we would have a better teacher, more interesting subjects or even a better social life. Others may

remember being motivated by a teacher, a subject, another student or a parent. Motivation may have come from a fear of failure or from success and recognition in sports, the arts or academics. This motivation caused us to easily move into an active student role, we became proactive and even passionate in seeking knowledge or continuing our success. A topic or an idea struck a chord with us. Something inside of us stirred us to learn.

In conclusion, during your RIDE of resilience

- Understand who you are in relationship to your strongest beliefs. **(AWARENESS)**
- Interpret lessons learned to prepare for your future events. **(PERSPECTIVE)**
- Examine your resilience and visualize positive events in your future. **(SENSE OF SELF)**
- Map changes that will get the results that you want. **(RESOLUTION TO ACTION)**
- Appreciate the rewards derived from personal accountability. **(PAYOFF)**

If you find twists, turns, loops or curves on your ride through life, decide if you are on track or whether you need to take some action to smooth out your ride. Enjoy the RIDE!

## **Bibliography**

Northup, J. E. *Life's a Bitch and Then You Change Your Attitude, 5 Secrets to Taming Life's Roller Coaster and Building Resilience*. 2005