



The Resilience Factor

In their book *'The Resilience Factor'* (Broadway Books 2002), Reivich and Shatte describe the characteristics, assumptions and thinking patterns of resilient people and show how you can develop these characteristics and become more resilient too.

Reivich and Shatte describe resilience as:

'The basic strength underpinning all the positive characteristics in a person's emotional and psychological makeup. A lack of resilience is the major cause of negative functioning. Without resilience there is no courage, no rationality, no insight. It is the bedrock on which all else is built.'

The following is a brief summary of the main points of the book.

The Characteristics of Resilient People

Emotional regulation

- ability to stay calm under pressure
- control of emotions
- appropriate expression of emotions
- to improve – learn to understand your thinking, and learn to calm and focus your mind.

Impulse control

- linked closely to emotional regulation
- impulsive interpretation of events can lead to the use of false beliefs and loss of perspective
- to improve - learn to understand your thinking and avoid thinking traps; also learn to challenge beliefs.

Optimism

- involves having a belief that things change for the better – seeing a bright future but also being realistic
- linked to self-efficacy – having faith in your ability to solve problems
- to improve – ensure that you have good self-efficacy.

Causal analysis

- able to identify the causes of problems
- using a thinking style that is flexible and open to possibilities as well as realistic
- avoiding blaming, as well as ruminating about things beyond your control
- to improve – challenge your beliefs.

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Empathy

- how well you relate to other people's cues about their psychological and emotional states (this is useful in knowing how to motivate other people)
- to improve – learn to notice how you think and detect “icebergs” (the beliefs you use) to understand what motivates you, then you can apply these skills with others.

Self-efficacy

- our sense that we are effective in the world, and able to solve problems that may arise, and faith that we will succeed
- linked to optimism (pessimism damages self-efficacy)
- to improve – avoid thinking traps (put things in perspective), challenge beliefs – these help to improve problem solving and confidence – and thus self-efficacy.

Reaching out

- trying new things, getting involved with people or new things
- to improve – challenge beliefs, put things in perspective.

The Vital Skills of Resilience

1. Learning to notice and understand how your thinking affects your state of mind – and your resilience

A. Identify critical situations that lead to negative reactions

- notice when you get upset, angry etc
- notice what is sparking this off – what is the situation? e.g.:
 - managing a hectic schedule
 - dealing with embarrassment
 - frustration
 - conflicts with colleagues
 - receiving negative feedback.

B. Identify the beliefs you hold that lead to negative feelings

- when you get upset about things, notice what you are saying to yourself
- work out what you believe about the situation e.g.
 - people have no right to talk to me like that
 - people shouldn't treat me that way
 - I should have done better at that
 - I should know how to do that
 - they should have let me know
 - it happened because
 - what will happen next will be
- check the validity of these beliefs, as they may well not be valid

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- notice patterns or habits in your thinking that lead to negative feelings
- most of us have a dominant style, and this may need to change for our own well-being.

- C. Recognising that feelings are the consequences of how we think (and our beliefs) about what happens to us e.g.**
- believing that your rights have been violated tends to lead to anger
 - feeling that you have lost something valuable tends to lead to sadness or depression
 - perceiving a future threat tends to lead to fear or anxiety

2. Avoiding Thinking Traps: we make a variety of thinking errors, including:

- jumping to conclusions
- having tunnel vision (getting stuck in a biased or narrow way of looking at things or not seeing the wider picture)
- exaggerating or minimising things (changing them from what they really are)
- taking things personally when they are not really personal at all
- externalising things, not seeing how they are involved in something, or responsible for something
- over generalising
- thinking others know something when in fact they don't (as if they are mind-readers) – and we need to tell them eg how we feel, what's going to happen, why something is important etc
- trying to work out why we feel uncomfortable, and then reaching the wrong conclusion – which then upsets us – when in fact if we had worked things out accurately (eg not personalising the situation) then we would not have felt upset.

3. Detecting Icebergs

Surface beliefs often don't explain how we feel. We need to detect our underlying beliefs in these situations. Your beliefs are your values – those ideas you feel are so important that they drive your behaviour. These tend to fall especially into 3 groups:

- A. Achievement**
- "I should succeed at everything I put my mind to"
 - "failure is a sign of weakness"
- B. Acceptance e.g.**
- "what matters most in my life is being loved"
 - "I deserve to be praised for what I do"

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C. Control eg

- “getting emotional is a sign of weakness”
- “asking for help shows that you’re not in charge”

These underlying beliefs reflect the way you think things should be.

To be truly resilient you need to understand the beliefs or values that you hold, so that you can see what motivates you – as well as what creates problems for you. Sometimes these beliefs will work in your favour, but at other times they will cause you problems.

Typical Problems resulting from unhelpful beliefs:

- out-of-proportion reactions
- reactions that don’t appear on the surface to be appropriate to the situation (because the real cause is hidden below the surface)
- contradictions between your beliefs, which make it hard for you to make decisions
- rigid thinking – using your beliefs – which lead to habits and repeated problems.

Difficulties in getting out of unhelpful habits around beliefs:

- a tendency to twist reality to match our beliefs – we see things through our own biased view of the world
- a tendency to focus on the things that confirm our beliefs, rather than the things which contradict our beliefs, so they don’t readily get challenged or changed
- a tendency to be unaware that we are doing these things.

4. Starting to Change

- first, you have to believe that you can change, and you have to want to change
- then you have to uncover the beliefs that drive you ie the “icebergs” (asking why you became upset by things, or reacted strongly, until you get behind your reaction)
- then you need to:
 - evaluate the validity of the beliefs
 - challenge these beliefs
 - put things in perspective (detecting when you have a distorted perspective)
 - be aware of the implications of your beliefs
 - be flexible (try new ways of looking at things)
 - be realistically optimistic
 - change to more accurate and realistic beliefs when necessary (work with reality rather than the way we want things to be, or the way the fiction in our heads creates our reality).

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Associated Skills

- **make sure that you know how to stay calm and focused**
- **learn how to notice what's driving your reactions as they occur, so that you can make changes before getting upset or over-reacting.**

It also helps if you:

- **believe that you are able to be in control of**
 - **events in your lives and**
 - **your reactions to these**
- **feel committed to – or engaged in – what you are doing**
- **see change as an opportunity for growth rather than a stressor.**

Taken from: The Resilience Factor. Reivich and Schatte. Broadway Books (2002)