



Resilience in Perspective

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Resilience is a popular term today. This morning a web search produced 32,800,000 entries! This term has gotten out of control in a good way. How can we make practical sense of all of this? In the 25 years I have been doing work grounded in the evidence of resilience research while affiliated with the University of Minnesota, I have found certain considerations lend focus.

First, the definition of resilience has been evolving since at least 1950. I prefer to say ***“Resilience is our natural, innate capacity for navigating life successfully. The opportunity to learn and understand how we operate from the inside out makes a critical difference whether one realizes resilience or not.”***

It is important to understand resilience as *human capacity* is different than *behavioral manifestations* of resilience. Thus we do not develop resilience in ourselves or others. We can discover resilience, tap resilience, point to resilience, foster resilience, and realize resilience. A great deal of emphasis in the early days of resilience research understandably focused on measuring signs of resilience. In truth all that can be measured is the result of personal resilience...individual’s behaviors and outcomes. Thus there is a common lay notion that resilience means bouncing back, overcoming adversity, rising above difficulties. These are logical conclusions, but they are not the essence of resilience.

The hopeful, good news is that something within us can propel us forward. We don’t question the natural physical ability of our bodies to heal wounds. We also are amazed and encouraged by stories of people who survive terrible tragedies and move on in life in such good ways. However, the more formless the manifestations of resilience are, the more likely we are to think, “Well, she is a special person, I could never respond that way!” At that point, our own thinking simply covers up our resilience, and makes this very natural, ordinary resilience illusive to us. Natural resilience is part of our innate mental health and has a formless spiritual (not religious) dimension to it. We are, among other things, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual beings. Our inner life is often the last frontier we make sense of.

Second, it is helpful to understand two aspects of resilience. Internal or ***existential resilience*** emanates from our own thinking and being, and a calm spirit aids immensely. External or ***phenomenological resilience*** is fostered by environmental supports such as caring relationships, high expectations from others, and opportunities for participation in activities and needed human services. Human beings do best when both the internal, spiritual part of our being and the physical environment we live in are rich in protective factors and mechanisms.

This is not an either or equation. My own mental house and the world around me need to both be aimed at bringing out the best in people. This is a tall order but luckily there are significant global efforts on both fronts.

Third, we live in exciting times. ***Expertise and resources articulating the Three Principles are at an all-time high and will grow exponentially.*** I believe both my first Three Principles teacher Roger Mills and Sydney Banks would be very gratified to see this progress. I also trust that each person who makes their best effort to disseminate the principles to others will add a special touch and power to the spread of this understanding. I value each attempt, publication, and presentation. From my academic position I have learned that it takes many, many experts working in varied and diverse ways to establish new perspectives. I also know that thinking and approaches evolve and change on the way to lasting

contributions. Furthermore, the early efforts, even when outdated, often spark others to have new insights so everything written and said matters for the long haul. It all needs to be preserved and valued.

The excitement extends way beyond the Three Principles community and I am thrilled about that. New scientific endeavors, far too numerous to name here, in neurosciences, psychology, philosophy, spirituality, education, nursing, mindfulness and more, provide sound evidence of the positive impact of a calm mind. In fact the evidence is so compelling an internationally famous clinic is currently embarking on a major resilience training effort designed to aid patients in achieving this natural state of mind. Importantly, they are engaged in researching the mechanistic impacts on physical health. At this point the leader of that effort indicates that with as little as a 4-5 week application of the approach, the brain can be “rightwired” for a much needed state of health.

In a very practical way for those of us who understand the Three Principles and treasure resilience, what we have always done—*enhancing the health of the helper and bringing the understanding to others*—is especially important now. We are a vital part of something much larger that is significant, multidimensional, growing and changing the world person by person.

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