



TAKE A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

Promise me you'll always remember: You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.

Christopher Robin to Pooh (by A. A. Milne)

Whenever something happens in your life that may result in loss or change and pain, in whatever guise, something very special can occur at the same time. You are given an opportunity to reassess your position in life and to learn something new and potentially empowering.

Resilience very often is referred to as the ability to bounce back from adversity. The question to ask is:

Do I want to bounce back to where I am right now?

It may be that, through the apparent process of upset and upheaval, you can move your life into a far better position than it is at the moment. The situation that may be causing your current anxiety may well be a springboard for you to make some positive changes that you would never have thought of before.

Reassessing the relationship you have with yourself is very important because this will be the time that you need to tap into all your inner strength and work on any weakness. There will, of course, be people around you who can support you; however, you are ultimately your own salvation and developing your coping ability is essential to survival.

Feeling positive about who and what you are will provide you with a solid foundation and developing a healthy amount of self-respect and self-worth is a good place to start.

BE YOUR PERSONAL BEST

It is important first of all to take personal responsibility for being the best that you can be. So often it is easy to compare yourself to others and, if you do this, you run the danger of engendering two

emotions: one of vanity or one of bitterness, because there will always be people you come across who you perceive as better or worse off than yourself. It is also pointless to benchmark yourself against others. Using yourself as your own benchmark is far more constructive.

My sister Jacky Pearson is a wonderfully talented watercolour artist who lives in New Zealand. When I first started writing, I lacked confidence in my ability to be as good as other writers, and she said that she had felt the same about her art. She decided one day, however, that she would no longer allow herself to do this, and her focus and ambition would be about being a better artist than she had been the year before, and use this as her goal and herself as her own benchmark. This was a great piece of advice, and certainly helps take away the weight of pressure that we can so unnecessarily put upon ourselves.

Just Be You!

Persons of high self-esteem are not driven to make themselves superior to others; they do not seek to prove their value by measuring themselves against a comparative standard. Their joy is being who they are, not in being better than someone else.

Nathaniel Branden

Imagine having no one to compare yourself with except yourself. What a sense of relief this would bring. You wouldn't have to give yourself a hard time about not performing as well as your colleagues at work. You wouldn't have to worry about not looking like the most attractive person with the smartest mind or having the most important job role and the biggest pay packet. You wouldn't

have to worry about your body not being the fittest or most beautiful and most sexy.

All you would need to ask yourself is:

- Did I do this better than I did it last time?
- Have I moved forward in my own definition of success?
- Am I feeling content?
- Am I doing my best for my health?
- Do I have an attractive mind and healthy interactions with other people?

In Neuro-Linguistic Programming, broad distinctions are made between predominantly internally-referenced people who are generally better at using their own referencing to measure their success and those who are more externally-referenced, who look for reassurance and confirmation of their abilities from others. Externally-referenced people are more likely to make comparisons with other people as a kind of self-affirmation, but no one lives in a vacuum and everyone has some kind of referencing system to people outside of themselves.

We all have an actual or imagined audience to our lives that gives our actions meaning. One of the first steps in improving self-esteem is to learn where we currently position ourselves on the line of continuum between being internally-referenced and externally-referenced. Nobody is entirely one type or the other and different patterns will play out with different people at different times. In the workplace, for example, the quality and nature of the relationships we have with colleagues will be coloured by the degree to which we are externally-referenced and the number and strength of comparisons we make in relation to job roles, personality types and status.

Our behaviour will be determined by these perceptions and, for example, a conversation with a team member might be very different from a conversation with a line manager. The outcome of the interaction cannot be viewed in isolation from our perceptions of who we are, the boundaries of our role, who our colleague is, the boundaries of their role and the value of our role compared to our colleague's role.

In addition, the perceptions we have and comparisons we make will be based on what we see and hear. However, we see and hear only a small range of other people's behaviour and we need to take this into account when we examine our perceptions.

To pull all of this together, we are making assessments based on a small chunk of information that is internally processed through a system coloured by our own perceptions of self, role, status and personality type! It is no wonder that many people find success a difficult concept to grasp and find it easier to use other people's measures of success than find their own!

The most powerful place on the continuum is in the middle: having a faith in your own perception and judgement but still being open and receptive to others' feedback.

So, in addition to recognizing your referencing systems, and to fully understand personal success, you will need to take a good, deep look into the essence of your being and see what it is that makes you who you are.

ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- What qualities make me feel good about myself?
- What can I offer to the world around me?

- What is my personal success gauge?
- What is my own definition of happiness?

You can then accept that your definition of success might look completely different from someone else's. What you think of you is the most important opinion.

The more clarity you have around your definition, the more you will have demonstrated personal honesty and the creative imagination to think outside of other people's referencing systems. This will help you to take responsibility for your own perceptions and definition of reality. This then will become the place that you will want to bounce back from any adversity that you may have to deal with.

WHAT VALUE DO YOU GIVE YOURSELF?

Something else to consider is how much you value yourself. This will provide you with something to think about.

- A bar of iron costs £5
- Made into horseshoes it can be worth about £20
- Made into needles it can increase its value to £3500
- Made into balance springs for watches, its value can leap to £250,000.

Remember, your own value is determined also by what you are able to make of yourself.

We are all people in progress which is very exciting because we have the ability to make improvements every day of our lives and keep adding value to our pot of self-worth.

Appreciating and valuing yourself is the most important component of self-love. However that sounds, it is hugely important, because if you don't love yourself, how would you even begin to expect anyone else to?

Many years ago I met a young woman called Megan, who made a huge impression upon me, whilst I was working on a community project for homeless people in North London. I was so impressed by her vitality and passion for life. She was a beautiful and vibrant person who always wore beautiful bright scarves and had a great sense of humour. She also had a very deep scar that ran from her forehead across her eye to her lip and she seemed totally unselfconscious about it even though people used to stare at her. As I got to know her, I realized that she had worked very hard to cultivate her attitude and indeed her sense of self-worth.

Megan was born in Trinidad and came to London when she was five, with her mother and brother, to escape an abusive father. Initially they lived with the grandparents, and then moved to a council flat in Camden. Her mother soon became involved in yet another dysfunctional relationship, and Megan and her younger brother were regularly physically and mentally abused. Eventually they were taken into care after they were both subjected to a severe beating that left Megan's face badly scarred and partially sighted in her right eye.

She was frequently bullied by people who were prejudiced about her background and her apparent disfigurement. She said that she grew up with very little self-esteem and believed she was

ugly and worthless. When she was fourteen she was fostered by a wonderful Irish family who helped to restore Megan's self-esteem and she became passionate about helping others with disability and trained as a school assistant to work with children with special needs.

Megan was encouraged by her foster mother Mary to see her experiences in life as something that would help her to empathize with other people who may have suffered too. If this vision remained strong, and she followed her dreams, it would inspire and encourage others to do the same.

I remember Megan telling me that when she looked in the mirror that she didn't see her scar or her challenged past. What she saw was a bright, colourful woman who was beautiful in her own right and who lived a meaningful life which meant that she added value herself which helped her to feel really good about herself.

FEAR AND DESIRE

It is important, at this point, to understand that human beings are essentially driven by fear and desire and, very often, fear can override our ability to want to make changes. Fearful people get stuck in what they perceive as their safe zone and any upheaval appears insurmountable. The fear of the unknown can be quite scary and the danger sometimes is that we can allow our minds to imagine all sorts of negative outcomes. This is where you need to work at turning these situations around and focusing on what you want the outcome to be and take control of where you would like to get to.

LEARN TO TRUST

Trusting yourself and others is key and to really trust is something that requires a certain amount of confidence and also the ability to occasionally move out of your comfort zone. Being able to trust someone is a real gift; however, it is a gift that brings with it vulnerability.

Positive relationships are built on the cornerstone of trust. Sometimes it can be difficult to let go of the paranoia and fear that tends to attach itself to trust, especially if you have been hurt or let down. It may not be easy, but if you simply behave in the way that you would expect others to behave towards you, then this will help you to build this trust in yourself and others.

FEEDBACK

To understand yourself better, you will also need to be receptive to feedback – from yourself and from others – because this will help you to get a wider perspective. Sometimes people will see potential in you of which you may have no awareness whatsoever. Receiving feedback can also be challenging even if it is something I like to term as the ‘food of progress’. However, like some foods, while it may be good for us, it can also be a little unpleasant to digest. However, the more you can let your guard down and open up, and the more you will see feedback as free information that can add huge value.

INVEST IN YOU

The very best investment that you can make primarily to yourself and to those around you is to invest time and energy into

yourself. Sometimes people fall into the trap of being the helper to every person in their vicinity and, literally, running out of energy and losing sight of what they need themselves to be strong and healthy. This is counterproductive because when you reach burnout you are no good to anyone around you, least of all to yourself.

Taking time out each day for yourself is essential for you to take stock of who and what and how you are.

Ask yourself from time to time these three questions:

1. Who am I?
2. What am I?
3. How am I?

*He who knows others is learned;
He who knows himself is wise.*

Lao-tzu

BUILDING SELF-CONFIDENCE

Working on your own self-confidence is a very important part of building resilience. Below are some tips that may help you to do that.

There are many ways to develop self-confidence and what works for some may not work for another. However, here are few suggestions:

- 1 **Believe in yourself.** The real key to self-confidence is to believe in yourself and to trust your own views and opinions. This, at times, can be difficult, especially if you have a tendency to listen to others and benchmark yourself against what they think of you. This is, however, very dangerous and the ability to be able to establish your own inner benchmark to success is essential, as we have already covered.
- 2 **Like yourself.** If there is something about yourself that you do not like then do something about it. Every human being has the potential ability to take control and make positive changes. Other people can try and stop you, but only if you let them. When you look in the mirror, be proud of the person that you see, knowing that you do the best you can every day of your life and, even if you make a mistake, see it as valuable lesson learnt. Even if you make the same mistake a few times you are not always going to get everything right every time.
- 3 **Listen to yourself.** Tell yourself that you are confident and believe in yourself. Focus on your strengths and the positive aspects of your character and set about developing the areas that you have for potential. Be your own best friend and, above all, be really kind to yourself and make sure that you do things that nourish not deplete you.
- 4 **Develop good practicing.** The way a person carries themselves tells a story. People with slumped shoulders and lethargic movements display a lack of self-confidence. By practising good posture, you'll automatically feel more confident. Stand up straight, keep your head up, and make eye contact. You'll make a positive impression on others and instantly feel more alert and empowered.

- 5 **Develop an attitude of gratitude.** Be grateful for what you have. Set aside time each day to list mentally everything you have to be grateful for. Recall your past successes, unique skills, loving relationships, and positive momentum. You'll be amazed how much you have going for you, and motivated to take that next step towards success.
- 6 **Compliment other people.** When we think negatively about ourselves, we often project that feeling on to others in the form of insults and gossip. To break this cycle of negativity, get in the habit of praising other people. Refuse to engage in backstabbing office gossip and make an effort to compliment those around you. In the process, you'll become well-liked and, by looking for the best in others, you indirectly bring out the best in yourself.
- 7 **Speak up.** During group discussions and meetings at work, many people never speak up because they're afraid that people will judge them for saying something stupid. This fear isn't really justified. Generally, people are much more accepting than we imagine. In fact, most people are dealing with the exact same fears.
- 8 **Exercise.** Along the same lines as personal appearance, physical fitness has a huge effect on self-confidence. If you're out of shape, you'll feel insecure, unattractive, and less energetic. By working out, you improve your physical appearance, energize yourself, and accomplish something positive. Having the discipline to work out not only makes you feel better, it creates positive momentum that you can build on for the rest of the day.
- 9 **Look outwards.** Sometimes, when we are feeling low, we can become introspective and kick things around in our mind

in a way that drains our energy. This is the time when it is good to look up and outwards and start to focus on the things around us. Smile and acknowledge others, show an interest in what they are doing and what is going on. This can help you to get off your own case for a while and regain a balanced perspective.

So, in terms of ensuring that you have built the best possible platform to bounce back to, it is really important, first of all, to know and understand who you really are. You will then need to examine whether you are totally happy with who and what and how you are and, if not, you have the opportunity to make some positive changes.

You will be able to work on your self-esteem and develop your self-confidence and ensure that your personal value and sense of self-worth is the best it could possibly be. Remember YOU are your most valuable asset!

Really knowing and understanding yourself is a very important part of developing resilience. Self-awareness is a recognition of who you are and an acknowledgement of your strengths and weaknesses, your likes and dislikes. Developing self-awareness can help you to recognize when you are stressed or under pressure. It is also often a prerequisite for effective communication and interpersonal relations, as well as being critical for developing empathy for others. We will take a good look at emotions in the third chapter of this book; however, self-awareness is a vital ingredient for developing your emotional intelligence.

Being self-aware is the first step in the creation process. As you grow in self-awareness, you will understand better why you feel the way you do and why you behave the way you do in certain

situations. That understanding then gives you the opportunity and freedom to change those things you would like to change about yourself and create the life that you really want, and the place you would most want to bounce back to. Without fully knowing who you are, self-acceptance and change are virtually impossible.

The journey of self-discovery can, at times, be a painful process because, when we take a good look in the metaphorical mirror, we may not always like what we see. We may well learn things about ourselves that make us afraid. However, this is where the true voyage of discovery takes place – on the crest of a wave – this is where you can begin to cast off the shackles that may hold you down and stop you from making positive progress.

Positive Steps

- 1 Examine the value you give yourself
- 2 Understand your strengths and weaknesses
- 3 Develop techniques to improve your self-confidence
- 4 Listen to yourself and others, and seek feedback
- 5 Be open-minded to making positive changes about yourself

Take a journey of self-discovery – Personal exercise

- Providing evidence to back this up, write down the three things that you believe are your greatest strengths.
- Do the same about the three things that you believe are your biggest weaknesses.
- Ask three people, a friend, a family member and a work colleague, to tell you what they think your three strengths and weaknesses are and ask for evidence.
- Write down five words you would like to hear if you were being described by someone else, and the reasons why.
- Make an action plan of what you are going to do each day to aspire to be the five things that you would most like to be.

It's never too late to be who you might have been

George Eliot

