



## **eNewsletter**

May 2009

Welcome to the May eNewsletter from Unconscious Potential.

Hoping this newsletter finds you all well.

Given the current environment in which we are living, I have focused this newsletter on emotional resilience – an understanding of as well as a number of strategies to support our ability to better cope with what life is presenting to us.

As always, enjoy the read and seek to implement one small change that can make a difference.

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### **Emotional Resilience**

In the current climate of constant change and increasing uncertainty emotional resilience becomes a pivotal self leadership competency. Stress is a fact of modern life - seemingly everywhere and all the time. There are so many sources of stress: caring for children, disabled persons and elderly parents, holding down a job, and making time for a social life are all everyday sources of stress. Added to these everyday stresses are extraordinary events such as deaths, serious illnesses, natural disasters and social upheavals that often occur randomly and without warning. It is easy to become frustrated by the great number of pressures that consume you on any given day. Over time, the cumulative effects of multiple stressors, small and large, can combine to wear you out before you've had a chance to get started.

#### **What Is Emotional Resilience?**

To be resilient means to be able to 'spring back' into shape after being deformed. Emotional resilience refers to one's ability to adapt to stressful situations or crises. Stressed people experience a flood of powerful negative emotions which may include anger, anxiety, and depression. Some people remain trapped in these negative emotions long after the stressful events that have caused them have passed. Emotionally resilient people, on the other hand, are quickly able to bounce back to their normal emotional state.

#### **What Influences Emotional Resilience?**

Resilience is not a quality that you either do or do not possess; there are varying degrees of how well a person is able to handle stress. It is indicated that emotional and physical resilience is, to a degree, something you're born with. Some people, by nature, are less upset by changes and surprises - this can be observed in infancy and tends to be stable throughout one's lifetime. Emotional resilience is also related to some factors that aren't under your control, such as age, gender, and exposure to trauma. However, resilience can be developed with a little effort. If you know what to do, you can become more resilient, even if you are naturally more sensitive to life's difficulties.

#### **The Resilient Attitude**

What is it about emotionally resilient people that makes them more effective at managing stress than non-resilient people? The key difference between the groups appears to be that emotionally resilient people have a specific set of attitudes concerning themselves and their role within the world that motivates and enables them to cope more efficiently and effectively than their non-resilient peers. Some of the main characteristics are:

- Have realistic and attainable expectations and goals.
- Show good judgment and problem-solving skills.
- Be persistent and determined.
- Be responsible and thoughtful rather than impulsive.
- Be effective communicators with good people skills.
- Learn from past experience so as to not repeat mistakes.
- Be empathetic toward other people (caring how others around them are feeling).
- Have a social conscience, (caring about the welfare of others).



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- Feel good about themselves as a person.
- Feel like they are in control of their lives.
- Be optimistic rather than pessimistic.

These special beliefs characteristic of resilient people help them to keep proper perspective, and to persist with coping efforts long after less resilient types become demoralised and give up. In order to become a more resilient person, it is necessary to work on cultivating these beliefs and attitudes for your own life.

### Strategies for Improving Your Resilience

As mentioned, emotional resilience can be developed. And because stress and change are a part of life, there are always opportunities to practice resilience -- the payoffs are significant. All it takes is an interest and commitment to the process, and a little information on how to develop and strengthen traits of resilience

**Develop The Right Attitude:** Resilient people tend to view life's difficulties as challenges and respond accordingly with action, rather than with fear, self-pity, blame or a "victim mentality." While life can be very challenging, an important step in becoming more resilient is to develop positive self-talk and to remind yourself that you are strong and can grow stronger and more wise as you handle life's challenges.

Suggested Action: Formulate appropriate affirmations to remind you of your greatness. When forming an affirmation add "because" making it specific and giving it meaning. For example; "Today is a great day because the sun is shining and I am spending it with my family"

**Become Aware:** Part of resilience is emotional awareness; it's important to understand what you're feeling and why. Sometimes people feel overwhelmed with their emotions, and this frightens and immobilises them. Knowing why you feel upset can provide valuable information about what needs to change in your life.

Suggested Action: When feeling overwhelmed or strong emotions, stop; breathe and ask yourself why you are feeling this way. What value do you hold that has been compromised? What alternative action could be more useful?

**Develop An Internal Locus of Control:** Resilient people believe that they're in control of their lives, and it's true: while we can't control our circumstances, we can control how we respond to those circumstances, and that makes a big difference in our attitudes and in the course our lives take. Fortunately, you can develop an internal locus of control.

Suggested Action: When you feel trapped, make a list of all possible courses of action. Just brainstorm and write things down without evaluating them first. You may even want to do this with someone you trust. When you have a list, evaluate each one and decide on the best course of action for you, and keep the others in the back of your mind as alternative options. You may end up with the same answer you had before the brainstorming session, but this exercise can open your eyes to the amount of choices you have in a given situation. Seeing new possibilities will become more of a habit.

**Cultivate Optimism:** Being an optimist is more than looking on the bright side (though that helps). It's a way of viewing the world where you maximise your strengths and accomplishments, and minimise your weaknesses and setbacks. Developing a more optimistic world view can help you become more resilient.

Suggested Action: When your things go well, acknowledge and give gratitude. When things don't go so well reframe your thoughts of failure or other negative emotion to one of "what can I learn from this?"

**Rally Social Support:** While we ultimately face our own challenges, a supportive friend or group of friends can help lighten the load. Those with strong networks of social support tend to stay healthier and happier



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throughout life, and tend to cope well with stress. Conversely, those with little support may find themselves more vulnerable, and those with conflicted and unsupportive relationships tend to fare even worse.

**Suggested Action:** Develop a network of supportive relationships. If they exist already, nourish them. If not, find a way of developing your network. For example join a gym, get involved in a hobby, volunteer, get a pet, have a party. Last but not least, Smile! Smiling gives off 'approachable vibes'

**Maintain Your Sense of Humor:** If you're able to laugh at life's frustrations, you can have increased immunity, if you will, to stress and adversity. Those with a sense of humor about life tend to experience life as less stressful, are able to bond with others during difficult times, and experience the numerous benefits of laughter.

**Suggested Action:** Watch a comedy video once a week

**Exercise:** Yes, you read right. Exercise has been correlated with stronger levels of resilience. This may be due to the effects of endorphins on one's mood, or the physical health benefits to those who exercise, or both. Regardless, adding a regular exercise habit to your lifestyle can benefit you in more ways than one.

**Suggested Action:** Take a 15 – 30 minute walk during your lunch break

**Get In Touch With Your Spiritual Side:** Studies have shown that those who are more spiritual tend to be more resilient as well. If you are open to it, reconnecting or strengthening your connection to your spiritual side can provide you with strength.

**Suggested Action:** Meditate for 10 minutes daily

**Don't Give Up:** While many people know of coping strategies that can help with stress, as with diets and exercise programs, the most successful individuals are those who maintain the effort for the long term. Don't give up on your situation; don't stop working toward getting through it. Trust the process.

Be patient with yourself, and just do your best.

References: Elizabeth Scott, M.S., About.com; [www.Mentalhelp.net](http://www.Mentalhelp.net)

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## To Ponder.....

*"We can change our whole life and the attitude of people around us simply by changing ourselves."*  
(Rudolf Dreidurs)

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