

Inspirations

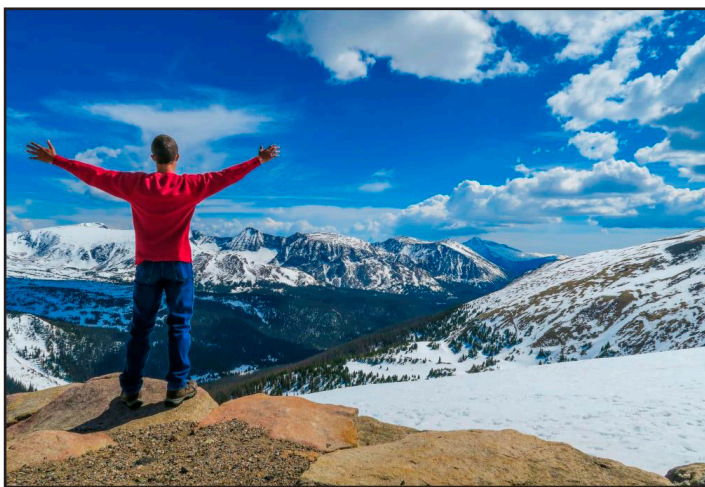
Resiliency Reset 2021

by Brian Luke Seaward, Ph.D.

How does one bounce back from a pandemic? Truth be told, Americans were not faring well before the pandemic. While news headlines focused on serious political and racial issues, mental health and wellness experts were expressing grave concerns regarding issues of depression brought on by alienation and isolation, digital toxicity, insomnia, work-life imbalance, addictions and debilitating chronic diseases tied to inflammation. A year of lock-downs, social distancing and social isolation have only magnified these problems.

While the full effect and impact of the Covid pandemic will take years, if not decades, to comprehend, the implications on mental, physical, and even spiritual health are already present: Exhaustion, burnout, fatigue, anger, anxiety and more exhaustion. Over the past several months, mental health experts have sent repeated warnings of a tsunami of mental health issues approaching, with the first waves already appearing on the shores of humanity. Despite various headlines and warnings, all is not lost. Yet a course correction is not only possible, it is highly recommended.

The word, reset, implies a new beginning. And while many people, under a canopy of stress, wish to return to a normal existence of familiarity, in truth, that would be taking a giant step backward. Instead, the way forward is to create a new normal; new healthier routines, new healthier behaviors and a new appreciation for a simpler, less complicated lifestyle. This is certainly possible, and given what we have been through, highly recommended. Resiliency has become a popular buzzword over the past few years and for good reason. News reports from various sources, including the American Psychological Association in their regular "Stress in America Report," cite stress as major issue compromising the lives of countless Americans. Human beings by our very nature are resilient. It's time to reclaim this most precious of human traits and seek a new sense of personal balance.



The basic definition of the word resiliency means to "bounce back;" to be flexible. The word may be easy to define, even conceptualize, yet it is much harder to describe what makes a person resilient. Experts have tried for generations with no consensus on what constitutes the epitome of a resilient nature. There are no set characteristics or attributes for being resilient, perhaps because humans are so complex. Moreover, stressful scenarios are equally plentiful. Be that as it may, there are some core aspects of resiliency that everyone agrees upon. To be resilient means to be tenacious, and persistent, with the stamina to endure many hardships; what some people call a strong backbone. Yet those who study the resilient nature also

see these characteristics; A strong sense of faith, imagination, and inspiration; in essence, a wishbone. And its fair to say that one aspect everyone agrees upon for a resilient nature is a good sense of humor, the funny bone. There you have it; the three bones of resiliency: Backbone, wishbone and funny bone.

Recently, resiliency research revealed that perhaps above all else, a resilient person needs a clear head as well to replenish their personal energy levels. The word resiliency may convey a sense of strength, but in the 21st century, resiliency also implies mastering the art of stillness. We all have the ability to be resilient. Yet it is a muscle that must be exercised daily. Given the incredible changes the world has gone through during this latest pandemic, summoning the power of our resilient nature is a clarion call to action for our health and wellbeing.

Ten Suggestions to help reset your life back into balance

Invoking this sense of resiliency, this reset is more than a course correction. It's a new beginning. The post pandemic reset allows us to take stock of the past, learn any and all lessons we can and then redirect our lives to a better future, one day at a time. Over the years, providing self-help tips for better living has almost become trite conversation. Yet despite the abundance of self-help advice, there is a good reason

continued on page 17

Resiliency Reset 2021 cont...

for their popularity; they work. These days there is no shortage of tips and advice to improve your life. Yet, in this age of constant distractions it helps to be reminded of things which can easily be forgotten in the course of a disrupted daily routine. For this reason, these suggestions are gentle reminders to reincorporate some time-tested resiliency skills to help you more successfully navigate your life through these challenging times and reset your life for a new and healthy beginning.



1. Engage in Healthy Grieving

Many things were lost during the Covid-19 pandemic, from loved ones and jobs, housing, consistent income to sobriety, quality family time, vacation travel and the ability to eat at our favorite restaurants. At some level everyone lost some personal freedoms. Every loss, no matter how big or small, requires a time for grieving. In this period, we acknowledge our loss and the pain and trauma that this loss has created. By ignoring the pain, and trivializing the loss, we push the pain deeper, making it harder to resolve later. Unhealthy grieving manifests in many ways including anger, complaining, whining, and displaying a repeated sense of victimization. The process of healthy grieving invites us to acknowledge the loss and respond to the emotional pain associated with it. Resiliency conveys strength and endurance, but it also requires self-compassion. Taking time to heal emotional wounds is essential, and the first step in pushing the reset button to move forward. One suggestion for healthy grieving is a short but meaningful grieving ceremony. Just as we attend funerals and wakes for our departed loved ones, creating a ceremony to acknowledge our loss helps move the pain. Writing a poem, planting a tree or bulbs or creating a photo collage are just a few ways to help move through the grieving process. For healing to occur one must move through the loss.

2. Establish and Practice Healthy Boundaries

Simply stated, healthy boundaries provide structure and stability to our lives. Like the wall of a cell membrane that determines what goes in and out, and what stays in, healthy boundaries help maintain a sense of integrity to our lives. More than just guidelines of when to eat, sleep and exercise, healthy boundaries provide the foundation for appropriate behaviors in relationships, finances, social habits, watching the news; practically everything. Moreover, healthy boundaries give a sense of empowerment when it feels like the world is out of control. Creating healthy boundaries requires a clear perspective on where you wish to be. Practicing healthy boundaries is the means to get there. Yes, it requires will power, until these habits become second nature, and they will become second nature with repeated practice. Practicing healthy boundaries is a skill, just like shooting hoops, typing on a keyboard, and hitting a golf ball. The goal is excellence not perfection. If you miss a day or something gets through that shouldn't, simply start over again.

3. Spend Time in Nature Daily

Eons before anyone ever heard of the term "Forest Bathing," people were well aware of the healing, soothing power of nature. From viewing stunning sunsets or falling stars to listening to birds chirping to encountering an animal on a morning walk, the ways that nature is healing are countless. As the expression goes, it's hard to be in a bad mood walking through a forest or sitting on the beach. The grandiosity of nature simply has a way of reducing problems down to a manageable size. We are a part of nature. To separate ourselves from the natural world is to invite illness and disease into our lives. Moreover, several decades ago scientists discovered that human beings have an internal clock called circadian rhythms that regulate everything from sleep cycles to eating patterns and much more. Perhaps as no surprise, many things can throw these cycles out of rhythm, which then cause havoc on our physical and mental health. Stress tops the list but being cooped up inside without a healthy exposure to fresh air, sunlight and basic earth rhythms compromises these energy rhythms as well. What's the solution? Getting outside daily. Go for a neighborhood walk. Fill the bird feeder in the backyard. Take a peek at the night sky (and there are great apps for star gazing). If there are no parks or forests near by, make a visit to your nearest greenhouse.

4. Tickle Your Funny Bone Daily

Humor, above all else, is considered by many resiliency experts to be THE cornerstone of a resilient nature. The ability to laugh at yourself is essential to bouncing back from a metaphorical pandemic face-plant. And

continued on page 18

Resiliency Reset 2021 cont...

there is always something to laugh about. One of the best ideas shared regarding humor therapy is to try to find one funny thing a day. By keeping an eye out for ludicrous, ironic, or pure silly moments (and there are many), you reprogram your brain to attract more funny things to your attention span. A second idea is to start gathering funny jokes, memes, photos, etc. and create a tickler notebook. Add to this tickler notebook, your favorite comedies, books, podcasts, and nightclubs.

Bottom line: Don't take yourself too seriously: Learn to be your own best audience.

5. Re-Establish and Nurture Solid Friendships

Two of the biggest issues we are facing in the digital age are isolation and alienation. Psychologists have known for decades the importance of establishing and maintaining strong friendships. In wellness circles, it's called "social support," and it is vital to our health and wellbeing. Video chats and zoom phone calls may be a good start but scheduling in person visits with close friends over a cup of tea or coffee are now thought to be as essential as breathing. As the constraints of social distancing ease up and disappear, start making a list of a handful of friends to reconnect with in person. Set dates. Make it happen. Friendships, like plants, need nurturing. You don't need thousands of friends, just one or two people that accept you for who you are.

6. Minimize Social Media (and doom scrolling)

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but social media voyeurism has become a toxin to the spirit. The data results are in: social media has an addictive quality to it. Moreover, doom scrolling tends to wire the brain for stress. No one needs more stress in their lives. While social media has its merits, it has become itching powder for the ego. Be mindful of how much time you spend in social voyeurism, with an equal amount of attention to what you post, and why you post it. Sharing valuable articles and funny cartoons and memes is encouraged, however, various types of self-promotion become an addictive fix for the ego. Become mindful how you feel after scrolling through social media and limit the time spent each time you enter into one of these portals. Avoid social media before bedtime.

7. Adopt a Sound Meditation Practice

Welcome to the 21st century world of distractions.

Headline news, smart phone texts and social media are just a handful of the many distractions we face today, but the biggest distraction is your ego. Adopting and cultivating a good meditation practice is like house training your pet dog. It needs to be done or you will have poop all over the place. Simply stated, a sound meditation practice domesticates the ego. Start small and build up. Begin with 3-5 minutes of sitting quietly in a private space and focus on your breathing. Build



up from there to 15-30 minutes. Experts suggest scheduling your meditation time at the start of the day. A regular meditation practice is not only good for clearing your head of ego-based distractions, but also proven to enhance the immune system, lower resting blood pressure and help ensure a good night's sleep.

8. Getting a Good Night's Sleep is a Necessity; Improve Your Sleep Hygiene

Before the Covid-19 Pandemic,

continued on page 19

quality sleep was a real issue for over half of all Americans who claimed not to sleep well on a regular basis. Sleep issues continue to be a growing concern and if for no other reason, getting a good night sleep is paramount to having a good immune system. Sleep hygiene is the term given to good sleep habits. These include not using your screen device right before you go to bed, not using your smart phone as an alarm clock, not eating right before bedtime, and not



leaving your WiFi router on while you sleep. Additional habits include keeping your bedroom dark and noise free. Having a great mattress and high thread count linen helps too. 7-8 hours is recommended not only for physical rest, but to cleanse the brain of amyloid waste products that are associated with memory loss and declining brain function.

9. Exercise Your Creative Muscle

One of the issues not addressed during the pandemic

was the issue of boredom. While many people felt overwhelmed with responsibilities, there was an equal sense of boredom that spiraled into hours of binge-watching, and countless hours on social media. One attribute that makes humans different than other species inhabiting planet earth is our ability to create. Think of the Eiffel Tower, the Iphone or your favorite Broadway musical, or documentary film. Creativity is a muscle that everyone has, and its a muscle begging to be exercised. Creativity is counted by many experts as one of the cornerstones to a resilient nature. You know all those photos stored on your phone? Consider making a Shutterfly book. Do you love Italian food? How about growing some basal in your garden and making your own pesto sauce? You don't have a garden? How about creating a flower and herb garden in the backyard? Here is an idea: Consider creating a new music play list to use while cleaning the house, or play while taking a bubble bath? Exercising the creative muscle is as essential as brushing your teeth.

10. Visit/join a Support Group

The sign of a strong resilient person is that they are not afraid to ask for help. Sometimes the help is nothing more than gathering with a group of people going through the same problems, issues, and trauma. Since the advent of Alcoholics Anonymous, support groups have taken root as one of the premier coping strategies for chronic stress. Today you can find support groups for cancer patients, caretakers of cancer patients, parents with children who have Asperger's, people with Lyme disease; the list is nearly endless. Name the issue and there is a support group of people there to listen to you and help identify creative solutions. In an age where so many people are alone, having a reassuring group of people who understand what you are going through is one of the greatest gifts you will ever receive.

As we emerge from the Covid-19 Pandemic, we find ourselves at a crossroads: Either we can turn around and return to a lifestyle that nurtures stress, impatience, anxiety, frustration and countless distractions that pull us off the path of our highest potential, or we can take a step into the unknown with a toolbox of personal coping skills to help navigate our lives through the winds of change, life a more balanced life and do it gracefully. The choice is ours.

Brian Luke Seaward, Ph.D. is the author of the acclaimed best-selling book, *Stand Like Mountain, Flow Like Water* and *Stressed Is Dessert Spelled Backward*. He is the executive Director of the Paramount Wellness Institute in Boulder, Colorado. He can be reached via his website, www.brianlukeseaward.net.

Photos by Brian Luke Seaward