

On Mental Toughness – Harvard Business Review 10 Reads

How the Best of the Best Get Better and Better – Graham Jones

Make a choice to devote yourself passionately to self-improvement. (2)

Train with people who will push you. (5)

Have an insatiable appetite for feedback; Have a strong need for instant, in the moment feedback. (6)

Make sure any feedback you get is constructive. (7)

Crucibles of Leadership – Warrant Bennis and Robert Thomas

Participative Management. The experiences that shape leaders are “crucibles.” For leaders interviewed, the crucible experience was a trial and a test, a point of deep self-reflection that forced them to question who they were and what mattered to them. It required them to examine their values, question their assumptions, hone their judgment. And, invariably, they emerged from the crucible stronger and more sure of themselves and their purpose – change in some fundamental way. (11)

Four skills enable leaders to learn from adversity: 1. Engage others in shared meaning; 2. A distinctive, compelling voice; 3. Integrity; 4. Adaptive capacity (ability to grasp context and hardiness. Grasping context requires weighing many factors. Hardiness provides the perseverance and toughness needed to remain hopeful despite disaster. (13)

Not all crucible experiences are traumatic. (21)

Great expectations are evident of great respect. (22)

Building Resilience – Martin Seligman

People who don't give up have a habit of interpreting setbacks as temporary, local, and changeable. (27)

PERMA: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. (29)

Personal transformation comes from a renewed appreciation of being alive, enhanced personal strength, acting on new possibilities, improved relationships, or spiritual deepening.

Five elements known to contribute to post-trauma growth: 1. Understanding the response to trauma; 2. Reducing anxiety through techniques for controlling intrusive thoughts and images; 3. Engaging in constructive self-disclosure; 4. Creating a narrative in which the trauma is seen as a fork in the road that enhances the appreciation of paradox; 5. Articulating life principles. (32)

Albert Ellis's ABCD Model: C (emotional consequences) stem not directly from A (adversity) but from B (one's beliefs about adversity) whereby learning D (how to quickly and effectively dispel unrealistic beliefs about adversity. (32)

Thinking traps, such as overgeneralizing or judging a person's worth or ability on the basis of a single action. Minimize catastrophic thinking by considering worst-case, best-case, and most likely outcomes (33)

Effective praise: Specific. Authentic. (34)

Four ways to respond: 1. Active Constructive; 2. Passive Constructive. 3. Passive Destructive; 4. Active Destructive. (35)

Cognitive Fitness – Roderick Gilkey and Clint Kilts

The basic cells that allow information to transfer to support the brain's computing power, do not have to die off as we get older. In fact, a number of regions of the brain are important to functions such as motor behavior and memory can actually expand their complement of neurons as we age. Called neurogenesis. (38)

The brain's anatomy, neural networks, and cognitive abilities can all be strengthened and improved through your experiences and interactions with your environment. The health of your brain isn't just the product of negative and positive childhood experiences and genetic inheritance; it reflects your adult choices and experiences as well. (38)

You can make physical changes in your brain by learning new skills. You can even make changes in your brain functions by exercising conscious will. (38)

Cognitive fitness: A state of optimized ability to reason, remember, learn, plan, and adapt that is enhanced by certain attitudes, lifestyle choices, and exercises. The more cognitively fit you are, the better you will be able to make decisions, solve problems, and deal with stress and change. Cognitive fitness will allow you to be more open to new ideas and alternative perspectives. It will give you the capacity to change your behaviors and forecast their outcomes in order to realize your goals. (39)

Step One: Understand how experience makes the brain grow.

Experiences gained through observation activate these performance-enhancing neurons, which accelerate learning and the capacity to learn. Traditionally, scientists have assumed people gain new skills through practice – that is, through direct experience – but the existence of mirror neurons means you can also gain skills through observation and indirect experience.

Your social cognitions are similarly aided by specialized neurons that reflect facial expressions, gestures, and other signals. (40)

You can conceivably gain the brain benefits of other people's long-term direct experience through, for example, short-term exposure to simulation. Simulated experiences can establish neural readiness for real experiences. Direct experience remains the keystone of a person's brain development – but we increasingly understand how to pave the way for such experience. (41)

Step Two: Work hard at play.

Consciously drawing on one of the great legacies of childhood – the ability to play, which lies at the heart of our capacity to imagine and invent. The origin of “play” is telling: It is derived from the Old English word “plegian”, which means to exercise. It is closely tied to pleasure and strongly associated with the brain’s reward system. (42)

In adult life, play engages the prefrontal cortex, nourishing our highest-level cognitive functions. It improves your ability to reason and understand the world. Play is a tool we must consciously use, as the demands on us increasingly call for a greater level of emotional control. (43)

A big challenge in finding the right environment for your brain to thrive is striking a balance between risk and security. Risk alerts the brain and activates capacities for both reason and imagination. But too great a personal stake in the game creates stress, which activates the amygdala and other limbic brain areas that constitute the brain’s homeland security system. When the limbic system kicks in, your brain reverts to instinctive, preprogrammed survival behaviors rather than engaging in higher order learned one. In extreme situations, stress can trigger anxiety disorders and chaotic behaviors. And the more driven you are, the greater the risk this will happen. Ambitious people don’t like failing or looking stupid. Smart people have trouble learning because it involves so much floundering and failure. Play is hard work. (44)

Step Three: Search for patterns.

Pattern recognition is the brain’s ability to scan the environment; discern order and create meaning from huge amounts of data; and thereby quickly assess a situation so that appropriate action can be taken right away and with a high degree of accuracy. (45) The power of pattern recognition is a critical competence. (46)

Step Four: Seek novelty and innovation.

In the brain, the right hemisphere deteriorates faster with age than the left. (47)

People who are receptive to novelty and innovation also tend to be good in crisis, because they are open to seeing opportunity. Buddhist monks refer to the beginner’s mind. (51)

The making of a corporate athlete – Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz

The body, the emotions, the mind, and the spirit: the performance pyramid. (53)

The real enemy of high performance is not stress, which paradoxical as it may seem, is the stimulus for growth. Rather, the problem is the absence of disciplined, intermittent recovery. (55)

Rituals that promote oscillation – the rhythmic expenditure and recovery of energy. (58)

The body and mind need recovery every 90 to 120 minutes. (60)

Focus simply means energy concentrated in the service of a particular goal. Anything that interferes with focus dissipates energy. (64)

Importance of both oscillation and rituals: move from peaks of concentration into valleys of relaxation. Visualization is another ritual that produces positive energy and has palpable performance results. (66)

Spiritual capacity: The energy that is unleashed by tapping into one's deepest values and defining a strong sense of purpose. "Values-based adaptation." (68)

Stress can be a good thing if you know how to use it – Alia Crum and Thomas Crum

Stress has many wonderful attributes. It reminds us that we care; it connects us directly with the most challenging and important aspects of our lives. Individuals who adopt a "stress is enhancing" mindset in their lives show greater work performance and fewer negative health symptoms than those who adopt a "stress-is-debilitating" lens. (72)

Step One: See It.

"See" your stress. Simply naming or labeling the stress you are facing. Acknowledging stress lets you pause your visceral reaction, allowing you to choose a more enhancing response. Individuals who view stress as debilitating tend to either over or under react to stress whereas those with a "stress is enhancing" mindset have a more moderate cortisol response to stress and are more willing to seek out be open to feedback during stress. (72)

Step Two: Own It.

"Owning" your stress is to recognize that we tend to stress more, and more intensely, about things that matter to us. The issue, then, is not in the response to stress itself but in how we channel or employ this response. (74)

How to bounce back from adversity – Joshua Margolis and Paul Stoltz

Control: Look for what you can improve now.

Impact: Identify what positive effects your personal actions might have.

Breadth: Crisis is specific and can be contained.

Duration: How long will repercussions last?

The first two lenses characterize an individual's personal reaction to adversity, and the second two capture his/her impressions of the adversity's magnitude. Consider all four. (79)

The ability to bounce back from adversity hinges on uncovering and untangling one's implicit beliefs about it – and shifting how one responds. (81)

Three types of questions can help: 1. Specifying questions [identify ways to intervene]; 2. Visualizing questions [towards more positive outcome]; 3. Collaborating questions [reach out to others]. (82)

Reactions to stressful situations depend on the degree of control we believe we can exercise. The goal is to ask questions, generate possibilities, do an inventory of what might be done. (83)

To build up resilience, managers need to stop worrying about the reach of the causes and focus instead on how to limit the damage. Highlight opportunities in the midst the chaos. Shift from reflexive, cause-oriented thinking to active, response-oriented thinking. (85)

The act of writing about difficult episodes can enhance an individual's emotional and physical well-being. Writing offers people command over an adverse situation in a way that merely thinking about it does not. (87)

Rebounding from career setbacks – Mitchell Marks, Philip Mirvis, and Ron Ashkenas

Figure out why you lost – Identify new paths – Seize the right opportunity.

Realizing what you're made of – Glenn Mangurian

Resilience. People confuse it with toughness. Toughness is an aspect of resilience, certainly, as it enables people to separate emotion from the negative consequences of difficult choices. Resilience, by contrast, is not about deflecting challenges but about absorbing them and rebounding stronger than before. (98)

Choose to go forward. Seek perspective. Re-create your identity. Raise the bar. (103)

Extreme negotiations – Jeff Weiss, Aram Donigian, and Jonathan Hughes

Strategy one: Get the big picture. Avoid: assuming you have all the facts, assuming the other side is biased – but you're not, assuming the other side's motivations and intentions are obvious. Instead: be curious, be humble, be open-minded (111)

Strategy two: Uncover and collaborate. Avoid: making open-ended offers, making unilateral offers, simply agreeing to (or refusing) to the other side's demands. Instead: ask, "why is it important to you?", propose solutions for critique. (113)

Strategy three: Elicit genuine buy-in. Use facts and the principles of fairness. Avoid: threats, arbitrariness, close-mindedness. Instead: appeal to fairness, appeal to logic and legitimacy, consider constituent perspectives. (116)

Strategy four: Build trust first. Avoid: trying to "buy" a good relationship, offering concessions to repair breaches of trust. Instead: explore how a breakdown in trust may have occurred and how to remedy it, make concessions only if they are a legitimate way to compensate, treat counterparts with respect – and act in ways that will command theirs. (118)

Strategy five: Focus on process. Avoid: acting without gauging how your actions will be perceived, ignoring the consequences of a given action. Instead: talk not just about the issues but about the negotiation process, slow down the pace, issue warnings without making threats. (122)