



March 14, 2018 *In The Know* Summary*

POSITIVELY RESILIENT

Five and a Half Secrets to Beat Stress, Overcome Obstacles, and Defeat Anxiety
by **Doug Hensch**

About the Book – Background

This month, author Doug Hensch facilitated a discussion about his book [Positively Resilient](#). This book explores the notion of resilience and provides practical tips for enhancing your own resilience. Per Hensch, resilient people grow as a result of effectively managing adversity. The growth is profound, and they can also be more empathic as a result. Overall, overcoming adversity can be linked to increased psychological flexibility, more loving and caring behaviors, and more optimistic thinking.

Activity: Think about the most resilient person you know. What makes that person resilient? Themes from the report-out:

- Positivity and optimism.
- Spirituality. Has means of support greater than him/herself.
- **“Narratives of choice”** The stories you tell yourself about your life are powerful. You can have a terrible childhood, but if you cast it in a different light, you change your outlook.

Five and a Half Secrets ‘FOCUS’

- Flexibility
- Optimism
- Curiosity (Mindfulness)
- Uplifting
- Support

And the Half Secret: **Quitting**

Resilience – The Foundational Skill

- **Definition of Resilience:** “The ability to bounce back from setbacks, learn from failure, be motivated by setbacks, and believe in your own abilities to deal with the stress and difficulties in life.” (This definition is adapted from [The Resilience Factor](#) by Karen Reivich.)
- “Resilience is the ability to pull the weeds out, so the roses can grow.” Martin Seligman, founder of positive psychology.
- In training sessions, Hensch often asks, “What word do you think of when you hear resilience?” A common response is “bounce back.” Hensch believes it’s a deeper concept.
- One participant commented on the notion of being “motivated by a challenge.” After a setback, there is a period where you are exhausted, then you feel the motivation rise up again. Learn to watch for that. Important to embrace the negative to get to the other side. You have to face things as they are, in order to see what is possible.
- Phrases that zap your resilience: “You have to,” “You need to.” (No one wants to hear it.)
- It’s a myth that resilient people are almost always upbeat. Hensch says resilient people experience anxiety, grief.

Highlights from the Discussion

- **“Locus of control.”** I feel I can control everything, and I will always prevail. But sometimes there are things outside of our control that will not let that happen. Then what? Will I be resilient?

- One participant commented on her main **strength of “flexibility”** and its relation to resilience. At times could “flexibility” be limiting and hinder your ability to form meaningful attachments? Could it turn into a martyr syndrome? (i.e., “I can do anything!” when sometimes the better answer is “No.”)
- People who are **pessimistic are more accurate in their self-assessments** than people who consider themselves to be optimistic. Hensch said, as you look at the continuum of Pessimism to Optimism, ideally you’d want to fall right of center.
- There is a **downside to optimism**. When you are relentlessly optimistic, you could be blind to something. Hensch gave a real workplace example of an incredibly optimistic VP who did not see writing on the wall as company was in crisis.
- **“Stockdale Paradox”** This is the concept of being “Realistically Optimistic.” Commander Stockdale was a Prisoner of War (POW) in Vietnam for seven years. He observed that it was the optimists who died, and the pessimists who survived. The optimists had told themselves, “We’ll be home by Christmas,” and then “We’ll be home by spring.” As those dates came and went, the group became more and more hopeless. The people who survived had a realistic view of the current situation and hope for the future.
- **“Learned Optimism”** If you’re not waking up thinking “Tomorrow could be better,” there is no reason to get out of bed. (Martin Seligman)
- **Language is powerful**. Instead of speaking in terms of “Pessimists” and “Optimists,” say “pessimistic thinking” and “optimistic thinking.”
- Notion of **“Social Contagions.”** For example, you work with someone who you don’t enjoy. They are gone for a week, and suddenly work is great.
- **Carol Dweck** is a researcher who writes about the **“Growth Mindset”** and **“Fixed Mindset.”** (Dweck’s [website](#).) Reminder: You are not one or the other. Instead, your thinking can be skewed toward one or the other, in any given moment or life circumstance.

Resilience for Parenting (general discussion)

- As parents, how do you help show your children that some level of vulnerability is okay? How to help others understand that failure is okay? One participant said she was a helicopter parent. What could she do to let her children fail, and learn from it?
- Childhood conditioning impacts where you are on the spectrum of optimism/pessimism. One participant talked about how as a child, she was taught to look out for danger. This way of thinking influences one to skew toward pessimism.
- Hensch says we have an **“epidemic of comfort”** in our society. Scary for next generation.
- How do you help a child **increase self-esteem**? (You cannot do it by saying, “You’re great.”) Two strategies:
 1. Tell your children about the mistakes you make. “I was so embarrassed. I did this stupid thing at work today.” This makes you human, and allows children to see that it is okay to make mistakes. Demonstrate your mistakes. Drop the ball as you are playing sports with your kids. Show them that you are not perfect. One participant talked about how she can share her own parenting mistakes with her now grown daughter.
 2. Put yourself in a position where you are offering service and making a difference. You feel you are doing some kind of community service for the purpose of helping others. **Self-efficacy** leads to natural self-esteem, or the belief that I can master the environment. (Martin Seligman)

Related Resources

- [Laura Mendelow’s blog](#) on being Realistically Optimistic
- [Made to Stick](#) by Chip Heath and Dan Heath

- [Learned Optimism](#) by Martin Seligman
- [The Resilience Factor](#) by Karen Reivich

*The Chesapeake Bay Organizational Development Network (CBODN) Book Club is a monthly session, open to all learners. Each month, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, or coaching. There's no obligation to pre-read the book. The session summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For a listing of Book Club summaries, [click here](#).