



Clarity and Action

By Lehan Stemmet, Ph.D.

People often confuse resilience with the ability to hide emotions and to appear cool, calm and collected when you are actually not. That, I'd say, is more likely emotional regulation than it is about resilience. Resilience is the ability to return to a normal level of functioning after you've been through something tough... or simply to relax quickly after a hard day at work, challenging meeting, etc. It is similar to fitness in a sport sense. The quicker you can return to normal blood pressure and heart rate, breathing, etc, the fitter you are. So, emotional control and not showing emotions is not the same as resilience.

However, resilient people are particularly good at acknowledging what they feel and they are very clear about what emotions they are experiencing, and why. In other words, resilient people have often developed the ability to find out what they feel, why they feel it, and they are also good at articulating it to other people or to themselves on a piece of paper if need be. This is one of the reasons why they appear to be resilient. This makes sense when comparing it with two people who both get into a car with no petrol in the tank. The first one to acknowledge the real reason why the car is not starting, and who is clear about it, will likely also be the first one who takes action to find petrol and get going again.

One of the challenges I often see when I talk with people about resilience is that they eventually after some practice get the clarity part right but forget that is only one side of the equation to resulting resilience. If you know what you feel, and why, you still need to figure out what to do about it. "It" being the emotions, yes, but also the reason for having those emotions in the first place. Any medical professional will tell you that dealing with the symptoms and treating only symptoms only alleviates how we feel when we feel ill, but it doesn't take care of the reason why we have the symptoms.

Emotions are similar. They are symptoms and until we figure out why we feel what we feel, we won't know what to do about it. Emotions are natural. There is nothing wrong with feeling. It is one of the reasons why we are human and one of the reasons why people with some forms of psychosis often appear to have what psychologists and psychiatrists call flat affect, or reduced emotional expressiveness. But... if we want to be resilient we need to be clear about the emotions we are experiencing and why.

The next step in being resilient is to identify what we need to do about whatever we feel and whatever triggered it. What resources do we need, who can help us with those resources and who is ultimately responsible for our lives and future happiness and life satisfaction. Who is responsible for our resilience? This can be challenging simply because people often revert to blaming something or someone who caused the way they feel or whatever happened in their lives. That is different to taking responsibility for your own resilience and satisfaction with life. You can continue to blame things or people for what happened, although that never seems to be a very effective strategy. It doesn't matter how much you blame other things or people for whatever happened or is happening in your life... the truth remains that there is only one person who is responsible for your resilience and future satisfaction with life, happiness, and the contribution you make to society. You!

This is challenging and a typical hurdle for people to overcome during their resilience journey. Not the emotions, not the sadness, nothing else... other than taking responsibility for our resilience regardless of who or what is to blame for what happened or got us into whatever situation we find ourselves in.

The third and fourth steps in the resilience journey is to take the action you need to take and to continue practicing. It requires commitment. Some days you may not be up to the task, but commit to giving it another go again and again. It is important to be proactive and constructive. Focus on hope and a goal bigger than merely being resilient. Resilience in my view and experience is more of a set of behaviours than a set of thoughts and personality. Positive thoughts and a strong personality could help, but you need to behave proactively, consistently and deliberately. It requires action, hence the title of this short piece: Clarity and Action. An action plan without any action has only potential, but no outcomes. Being resilient is about achieving positive and constructive outcomes for ourselves and also for others.

It requires intentional action beyond the clarity we have about why we feel the way we feel. The tables below are simple tools you can use to identify some of the reasons why you may be feeling what you feel or typically respond the way that you respond to certain situations, etc. It also helps you to identify what the next steps are and what resources you require; who can help with it and who is responsible to ensure that it happens.

Give some examples of things that happened in your life and how you felt about it.

Events	Emotions

Write down problems or issues in your life and next to it who you blame for it.

Problem	Blamed on...

Now write down the same problems or issues in your life and next to it who is responsible for dealing with it or sorting it out. In other words; who could help you to resolve this problem

Problems	Problem Solver

While completing the tables above it is good keep in mind that you are ultimately the 'project manager'. You have overall responsibility to source the resources and assistance you require. Other people could help you based on their skills, knowledge, experience and resources, but you need to own your resilience project. Don't underestimate the value in helping someone else on their resilience journey. It can be hugely satisfying and reciprocal care helps you to grow.

Next you need to write down what you will do, how and by when in order to put the plan in motion. You can even go into detail about how you will deal with scenarios when you feel demotivated to continue on the journey, when you lose track and sight of the bigger purpose. Put measures in place to mitigate those times and to have a support network in place who will hold you accountable and who will keep you reminded about your resilience journey and the plan you have put in place. It could take a while, so be patient with yourself and don't expect to just see changes overnight. Habitual thoughts, emotional and behavioural responses sometimes need time to change, incremental changes. If it means you need to seek professional help, do it!