

The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strengths and Overcoming Life's Hurdles 2002

Karen Reivich, Ph. D., Univ of Penn, Penn Resiliency Center
Andrew Shatte', Ph. D., Univ of Arizona, Phoenix Life Academy
(215 pages condensed to 44)
Notes and Summation: Ken Hughes (*italics mine*)

Introduction

Your thinking style is what causes you to respond emotionally (*or not*) to events, so it's your thinking style that determines your level of resilience, your ability to:

- Overcome
- Steer through
- Bounce back

Are you quick to anger, often feel guilty, stifle your feelings and worry silently? Perhaps you often feel defeated. This book will teach you to identify your own thinking style. Twenty years of research shows conclusively that how we analyze the events that befall us has a profound effect on resilience.

Thinking style is like a lens through which we view the world and everyone has such a lens (*a personal paradigm through which we see people, a subjective map of how the world tends to work*) and it colors the way we interpret the events in our lives.

What is resilience?

Resilient people seek out new and challenging experiences because they've learned that it's only **through struggle** (*discomfort, pain*), through pushing themselves to their limits, that they will expand their horizons. They are not danger seekers, yet they don't wither when confronted with risky or dangerous situations. Resilient people understand that failures are not an end point. They do not feel guilt or shame when they don't succeed. Instead, they are able to **find meaning from failure**, and they use this knowledge to climb higher than they otherwise would. They have found a system - and it is a system - for galvanizing themselves and tackling problems **thoughtfully, thoroughly, and energetically**. Resilient people, like all of us, feel anxious and have doubts, but they have learned how to stop their anxiety and doubts from overwhelming them (*being a slave to the current emotional state*).

We watch them handle adversity and threats with integrity and grace.

Is this you? It can be.

Resilience is **not an immutable genetic trait** that some have and some don't. Anyone can become more resilient if they want to. It is under your control. You have to learn to listen to your thoughts, your inner voice, and let that **true voice** guide you through the havoc that life sometimes brings. Resilience is of vital importance when making quick and tough decisions in moments of chaos and grants you the ability to do so with grace, humor, and optimism.

Resilience turns victims into survivors and allows survivors to thrive.

Resilience is not an either/or trait. It's a **continuum**, and no matter where you fall on that continuum today, you can increase your ability to rise to the next challenge with doggedness and spirit.

Non-resilient thinking styles are often begun in childhood and also learned throughout our lives. They operate reflexively, in knee-jerk fashion, when things don't go our way. These non-resilient thinking styles leads us to cling to **inaccurate belief systems about the world** and to **inappropriate problem-solving strategies** that burn through emotional energy (*which is finite each day*) and valuable resilience resources (*psychic energy that won't be used on the things that really matter, that move us towards resolution and growth*).

Most self-help books are geared toward fixing what is broken, and while it's important to minimize the damage that depression, addiction, or PTSD cause, **if you are stuck in a damage-control approach to life, you will never flourish**. You can learn foundational skills that you can use to overcome areas of weakness, and just as important, enhance areas of strength.

In the real world **it takes real work** to change your life for the better (*to become the ever-evolving next you*). Increasing resilience will require work on your part and it will require you to be honest about how you see yourself and others. It will take energy and commitment. As soon as you learn to fight off your negative thinking styles, such as **harsh, unfounded self-criticisms**, you can stop yourself from spiraling into a major funk (*mental rumination cycles*), and that feels good - immediately, not next week. You will like yourself better fairly quickly. You will learn to **stop ducking responsibility** and blaming what is "out there" for your problems, and put yourself in the driver's seat to actually solve those problems once and for all.

You need to **learn to "hear"** the nonresilient thoughts that run through your mind automatically when you are faced with adversity and stress and how this negative thinking generates counterproductive feelings and behaviors. You need to learn how to recognize **unproductive "rules for living"** that are unwittingly sapping your motivation and hindering your success - such as, "I must succeed in all things, at all times, or else I am a failure". *And as you start to recognize the voice of lies inside your head, you can call them out for what they are and **decide to increase your experience of positive emotions**.*

Part I - The Commitment to Change

Chapter 1 - Resilience Matters

The skills of resilience are a means to achieve diverse ends - overcome childhood obstacles, steer through new adversities, bounce back from major setbacks, and reach out to broaden your world. **Resilience provides the base** from which people can solve their own problems, take appropriate risks, and accurately forecast the implications of an adversity. The skills learned via this book will also provide an **opportunity for people to look inward**, to get to know themselves - really know themselves - and connect more deeply with others.

The research has determined that the number-one roadblock to resilience is not genetics, not childhood experiences, not a lack of opportunity or wealth. The principle obstacle to tapping into our inner strength lies with **our cognitive style** (referred to as thinking style), ways of looking at the world and interpreting events that every one of us develops from childhood and throughout our lifespans.

Humans are not passive recipients of sensory data. We actively process information, simplifying it and organizing it in idiosyncratic (*personally unique*) ways. When adversity strikes, we use mental shortcuts to figure out its causes and implications so that we can quickly make sense of the abundance of information that barrages us. At times these shortcuts help us manage the information overload; at other times they lead us astray.

> As we navigate our way through the world, we assume that we are responding to a direct readout of that world, one that is comprehensive and accurate. But we are not. Our thinking styles bias and color our viewpoint, leading us to develop patterns of behaviors that are often incorrect and self-defeating.

When you learn to stop, take a breath, and think about why you are thinking the way you are, you can then decide if those thoughts are accurate, or not. Lies, or the truth. And you can start to see life as it truly is and not simply and habitually through a lens of distortion.

Research has revealed that humans have **four fundamental uses for resilience**.

1. Some of us apply our reserves of resilience to **overcome** the obstacles of childhood - a broken home, poverty, emotional neglect or physical abuse. We need resilience to put behind us the damage that may have occurred in our youth to take responsibility for creating the adulthood we want.
2. All of us need resilience to **steer through** the everyday adversities that befall us - arguments with friends and family, disagreements at work, or unexpected expenses. Life is rich in stress and hassles, but resilience will not let the daily tribulations of life interfere with your productivity and well-being.
3. Most of us at some point come up against a major setback, a life-altering event that threatens to blow us off course - job loss, divorce, death of a parent or child - monumental crises that tax our reserves. We will either become helpless and resigned, or we will **bounce back** and find a way to move forward.

4. We should also explore a fourth use of resilience that transcends our desire to protect and defend ourselves. If your goal is to find renewed meaning and purpose in life and to be open to new experiences and challenges, you can use resilience to **reach out** so that you can achieve all you are capable of.

Overcoming

Research has isolated many of the childhood circumstances that present the greatest threat to resilience: low birth-weight, low socioeconomic status, low maternal education, unstable family structure, and maltreatment put any child at risk for underachievement. Clearly the world in which we are raised matters, and as children, there's little we can do to alter that world. But not everyone in difficult circumstances succumbs to the risk. **Some children do fine, others even flourish, despite their impoverished backgrounds.**

While IQ is important in overcoming, EQ is as much or more so. **EQ, or emotional intelligence**, is the ability to monitor one's own and other's emotions, to regulate them, and to use emotion-based thinking to guide actions. Traditionally conceptualized intelligence matters, but it exerts its effects in different ways. Success in life is largely determined by the ability to understand another person's perspective and develop and use good problem-solving skills. Children with higher IQs tend to be more successful as adults because they developed more **sophisticated social and cognitive skills** - emotional intelligence - and a key component of EQ is resilience.

Resiliency training can teach people how to analyze and change the nonresilient beliefs they have developed about themselves during the early years when they had no control. Anyone can be taught a process that you can use to stay motivated, productive, engaged, and happy even when facing stress at work or at home. Breaking free from a difficult childhood takes hard work and grit. It requires the ability to stay focused and to make **accurate distinctions between where you have control and where you do not.**

Steering Through

Resilient people use their inner resources to deal with the **normal grind of life** - running late for work, squabbling with coworkers, managing a child's hectic schedule, staying on top of a never ending to-do list - without becoming overwhelmed or negative. Research shows that the essential ingredient in steering through chronic stress is self-efficacy - **the belief that you can master yourself and your environment and effectively solve problems as they arise.**

People high in self-efficacy stay committed to solving problems and don't give up when first solutions are ineffective. And by solving problems, their confidence is enhanced. People who don't believe they can solve life's problems are passive and shy away from new experiences because they assume they are unequipped to meet the challenges of anything new. When they do have to face problems themselves, their lack of confidence causes them to give up at the first sign of difficulty. **Both believing that you can solve problems and can't solve problems become self-fulfilling prophecies, and each new success or failure simply reinforces the prophecy.**

Self-esteem is a byproduct of doing well in life - meeting challenges head on, working problems until they are solved, struggling and not giving up (grit). This is healthy self-esteem. That being said, we can't do everything we want to in life, sometimes our real talents lie elsewhere, and trying to fake it just won't work.

One of the goals as you work through the seven skills of resiliency is to become more aware of your “**unconscious competencies**”, skills you already have so that you can use them more effectively and more deliberately and then add additional tools to your “resilience” tool kit.

Bouncing Back

Some adversities are particularly traumatic and seem to require higher levels of resiliency than what we are accustomed to as we steer through our normal days.

Renowned trauma expert Dr. Judith Herman (*Trauma and Recovery*) describes how resilience actually increases a person's resistance to stress and lowers their chances of developing PTSD and they display **three primary characteristics that work in concert to protect them from PTSD and hasten their recovery.**

- They exhibit a task-oriented coping style - they take incremental, purposeful actions to deal with the adversity.
- They have deeply held belief in their ability to control the outcomes of their lives.
- People who know how to bounce back more quickly know how to use their connections to others as a way to cope with their experience.

Highly resilient people are able to connect to others through purposeful action, whereas less resilient people find themselves easily paralyzed and isolated by the terror.

Become convinced that the importance of resilience does not stop with recovering from setbacks. Resilience is a mind-set that enables you to seek out the novel and to view your life as a work in progress. It creates and maintains the positive attitude of the explorer. Those that have learned these skills report that they are no longer fazed by problems, their “skin feels thicker”, that they feel strong and confident and willing to take risks. As one woman said, “**My life just seems bigger now.**”

Reaching Out

Some people **live narrow lives**, a routine that works for them and they stick to it. They feel comfortable, even happy, when the routine runs smoothly. Life is predictable and known. They don't complain often and don't feel like they are missing out.

And then there are other people who **live largely**. They approach life as if it were an all-you-can-eat style buffet. Plate in hand, they go back for more, trying a little of this and a little of that. They find joy in reaching out to others and seeking new experiences.

Resiliency is just as important for those that want to move beyond a deficiency mind-set of life, that seek a life rich in purpose and meaning, deep in connections and committed to the pursuit of learning and new experiences.

There certainly exists basic temperamental differences among people that might be nudged a little, but dramatic change may be unlikely - it makes no sense to try and make an introvert gregarious. **But if you have a desire for deeper intimacy or a passion for new experiences, you can develop the skills to do so.**

People who reach out do **three separate things quite well:**

- They are good at assessing risks - they are realistically optimistic.
- They know themselves well - they know themselves and can read other people
- They find meaning and purpose in their lives - and express gratitude for what they have

Finding meaning in life requires a focus on the here and now, a mindfulness that many of us lack, coupled with an ability to see the big picture.

Chapter Two - How Resilient Are You?

How Can We Impact Resilience?

Early childhood circumstances affect a person's resilience well into adulthood because they shape a child's belief systems and abilities and these can remain stable into adulthood.

Childhood environmental factors are history - they are beyond anyone's ability to change. But beliefs can be changed and abilities boosted. Although resilience is a nebulous concept, the work on the nature of resilience shows that it is comprised of seven abilities that can be measured, taught and improved):

- Emotion regulation
- Impulse control
- Empathy
- Optimism
- Causal analysis
- Self-efficacy
- Reaching out

Take the RQ Test

(adaptivlearning.com)

>

Emotion Regulation and Resilience

Emotion regulation is the ability to stay calm under pressure and resilient people use a wide range of skills that help them to **control their emotions, attention, and behavior**. People don't like to spend time with people who are angry, sullen, or anxious. Not only is it a drain, but emotions are contagious. People who lack self-regulation have less intimate relationships, find it hard to form and develop lasting friendships and to succeed at work.

The expression of emotions, negative and positive, is healthy and constructive; indeed, proper emotional expression is a part of being resilient. However, **being a slave to your emotions interferes with our resilience and drains it from others**. Some people spend many years of their lives being held captive in emotional rumination cycles.

How you acquire the skills of regulating emotions will be discussed in Chapter 9. The most effective of those strategies that will be discussed is working **to alter your beliefs about adversity** - the actual thoughts you have when problems arise and that are the source of your emotions.

Impulse Control and Resilience

See Dan Goldman ([*Emotional Intelligence*](#), 1970's), and his marshmallow test with 7 year olds, giving them the option to eat a marshmallow now, or waiting for a time and getting two marshmallows. Follow up ten years later, those that could delay their gratification - impulse control - were doing significantly better socially and academically.

Research bears out that emotion regulation and impulse control are **closely related**. People who are strong on the factor of impulse control also tend to be high on emotion regulation. It is believed that the connection in these areas exists because they tap into similar belief systems. **Accepting your first impulse belief** about a situation as true, and acting based on that belief, often produces negative consequences that can hamper resilience.

Optimism and Resilience

Resilient people are optimistic and believe things can change for the better. They have hope for the future and believe they control the direction of their lives. **Compared to pessimists**, optimists are physically healthier, less likely to suffer from depression, do better academically, are more productive at work, and win more in sports - facts borne out of hundreds of well-controlled studies.

Optimism implies that we have the ability to handle adversities and this of course is our **self-efficacy**, our faith in our ability to solve our own problems and master our world. **Optimism and self-efficacy are often linked**. Optimism motivates you to search for solutions and to keep working hard to improve your situation (grit). This is not Pollyanna, unrealistic optimism that may lead some to ignore real threats for which they need to prepare.

Causal Analysis and Resilience

Causal analysis is a term used to refer to people's ability to accurately identify the causes of their problems. In reference to this concept, everyone has an "explanatory style", the habitual way you explain the good and bad things that happen to you. This **explanatory style** can be coded on three dimensions:

- Personal - me-not me
- Permanent - always-not always
- Pervasive - everything-not everything

The most resilient people are those who have **cognitive flexibility** and can identify all the significant causes of the adversities they face, without being trapped in any specific explanatory style. They are realists and don't ignore the factors that are permanent and pervasive, but they also don't reflexively blame others or waste time on factors they can't control.

Empathy and Resilience

Empathy is how well you're able to read other people's cues to their psychological and emotional states. Some are adept at interpreting the "**nonverbals of others**" - facial expressions, tone of voice, body language - and determining that that person is possibly thinking or feeling. The **inability to read non-verbal cues can be costly** in business with networking and leading subordinates and also in personal relationships where people need to feel understood and valued. Increasing empathy skills helps us get at the "why" of other people's behaviors and desires.

Self-efficacy and Resilience

Self-efficacy is our sense that we are effective in the world, our beliefs that we can solve problems we experience and our faith in our ability to ultimately succeed. **Self-efficacy is the bedrock** of any resilient person and has many ways to improve upon as a skill.

Reaching Out and Resilience

Resilience also enables us to enhance the positive aspects of life. Resilience is the source of our ability to reach out, **explore and engage** those parts of us that might help us find **purpose** and meaning in life. Some people shy away from reaching out in fear of embarrassment - better to live a life of mediocrity than be exposed to ridicule and failure. And some overestimate the likelihood of future adversity. Also, people often overvalue sins of commission and underplay sins of omission - that is, **failure due to an action is falsely considered more detrimental to success than the failure to act**.

People can tend to overestimate the probability that failed attempts will lead to catastrophic outcomes.

Chapter 3 - Laying the Groundwork

During the fifteen years of research on this topic, we believed that our philosophy should be shaped by the data, and this propelled us toward the four pillars we hold. From these pillars, the mission was set to develop and validate real-world programs that boost resilience through more accurate thinking.

Pillar 1: Life Change is Possible

Historically, **people have believed that lasting change was not possible**, and even now, people cling to the notion that the first few years of life determine everything about a person and their future. We do not share in this belief.

In the early 1900s, Sigmund Freud claimed that our personalities are largely fixed by about age five and was pessimistic about our ability to change. He borrowed heavily from the rationalistic philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, who condemned our nature as “nasty and selfish and our lives as brutish and short.”

The last eight decades in psychology represent a battle over human nature. The crucial question is: What are the forces that shape our behavior, and can they be controlled? The answers that are offered define the very core of what it means to be human.

By the 1920's, dissenters embraced the empiricism of John Locke and Rousseau, that we are born *tabula rosa*, “clean slates”, not with innate selfishness and greed but as fresh pages awaiting the formative imprints of our experiences. They concluded that just as learning shapes who we are and what we do, so we can direct new learning to overcome the past. What is learned can be unlearned. We are free to change our lives at any moment.

We are not fatalistic victims of our ancestries or of their past lives, if we have the self-awareness, motive and drive, and if we are equipped with the appropriate skills. People can change positively and permanently and this principle is adopted as the first pillar in our platform.

Beyond the study of behavior (*as Behaviorism*), from the 1920s to 1940s, although it is easier to study behavior with the scientific method, **if the key to boosting resilience is thinking** - that space between “stimulus” and “response” - then that's what we need to study. (*There is a “thought” before the “response” and many possible reasons why a person thinks the way they think*).

Pillar 2: Thinking Is the Key to Boosting Resilience

In the 1940s, psychiatrist Aaron Beck realized that the current psychoanalytic model, attempting to peel back the layers of defenses to release, from unconscious, the fixated energy that supposedly caused depression and anxiety, he found that his patients **wanted to talk instead about what was going on in their lives now**, about what had driven them into therapy.

He noticed that these thoughts, these cognitions, shared about equal airtime with the patient's emotions. He was finding out then, as an enormous body of research has since confirmed, that **cognitions cause emotions and emotions matter in determining who remains resilient and who succumbs**. He developed a system of therapy - cognitive therapy - in which patients learn to change their thinking to overcome depression and anxiety. He then established the Center for Cognitive Therapy at the Univ of Penn, where the authors were trained.

Cognitive therapy takes the form of a dialogue between the therapist and client. Together they **tackle the client's inaccurate belief systems and thoughts** - cognitions. It is optimistic about people's ability to radically change their lives and equips them with skills to get them back to normal as soon as possible. It holds that real, lasting change can be effected in a matter of weeks or months. Cognitive therapy is a **highly effective treatment for anxiety and depression**.

The tools work if one can be focused on what really matters - **beliefs, thoughts, and emotions**. The skills of cognitive therapy form the basis of the seven skills of this book.

Pillar 3: Accurate Thinking is Key

Early theorists in cognition claimed that people generally interacted in the world just as a scientist would. In other words, people gather data in an unbiased way, aggregate the data in a logical manner, and then draw a conclusion that is accurate and empirically supported. Real-life human cognition is much less tidy.

Humans instead collect incomplete data, use shortcuts to process it that lead to biased appraisals, and make errors in interpretation that often support our favored hypothesis. Humans can tend to mentally manipulate what is happening around them to fit already-held beliefs (*almost every “journalist” today*).

Realistic optimism is the ability to maintain a positive outlook without denying reality, actively appreciating the positive aspects of a situation without ignoring the negative aspects. It is the belief that good things may happen and are worth pursuing but that effort, problem solving, and planning are necessary to bring them about. These are not the optimistic illusions of self-inflation that many tend to have.

Pillar 4: Refocus on the Human Strengths

“...We live but a fraction of our life. Why do we not let on the flood, raise the gates, and set all the wheels in motion? He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Henry David Thoreau, 1851.

Psychology was not always a discipline of illness and remediation. In addition to diagnosing and curing mental illness, psychology also had focal missions **to nurture above-average talent and to promote life satisfaction and fulfillment in all people**. Post-WWII, with the advent of the VA in 1946, and the establishment of the National Institute of Mental Health in 1947, grants from the government narrowly defined the funding areas of psychology and shifted its focus profoundly from the positive aspects of life to the negative.

Psychologists became dedicated chroniclers of mental illness, exploring the many varieties and developing convoluted categories and subcategories of disorders with increasing zeal. The American Psychiatric Association first published its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1952 and it contained 100 pages. The most recent publication in 1994 exceeds 900 pages - **perpetuation of the illness model**.

In 1998, Martin Seligman decided it was time to move “beyond the remedial”. He argued that the same methodologies of measurement and investigation could be used to bear on the human strengths and civic virtues. Dubbed **positive psychology**, this new social science aims to create an empirical body of knowledge of optimal human functioning. It has **two basic goals**:

- To increase the understanding of human strengths through the development of classification systems and methods to measure those strengths.

- To infuse this knowledge into effective programs and interventions designed to build participants strengths rather than remediate their weaknesses.

If how well we are functioning in the world can be thought of as a dial, the numbers in the negative and positive, cognitive therapy dials patients out of the negative and positive psychology skills dials patients into the positive. It takes “reaching out” resilience to dial us well into the positives using courage and determination to explore what makes us curious and to find purpose in life.

Resilience, then, is the basic strength, underpinning all the positive characteristics in a person’s emotional and psychological makeup and a lack thereof - the major cause of negative functioning. Without resilience there is no courage, no rationality, no insight.

Our Road to Resilience

The principle the authors adhered to during their collaboration was that if you develop a theory about the world, don’t test it in a lab, test it in the world. Their research convinced them that **thinking styles determine people’s resilience** and that resilience determines how well they do in life.

In the early 1990s, Martin Seligman developed a depression prevention program, known as the [Penn Resiliency Program](#) (PRP), for school children at high risk for depression. Multiple studies and follow-ups show that those children (and also college students) who received the resiliency training showed significantly fewer symptoms of depression and after two years, with no additional booster sessions, these children and young adults had **half the rate** of depression than those that did not participate.

In 2000, a program that **included the parents** of the children participating in PRP was piloted in New Jersey. Six months post-intervention, only 10% of the children who participated in the workshops with their parents reported symptoms of moderate to severe levels of depression as opposed to 33% of the children whose parents were not part of the workshop. [Adaptiv Learning](#) was created in 1994 to serve adults in the workplace facing critical adversities in the contemporary world.

Part Two - Mastering the Seven Skills

Chapter 4 - Learning Your ABCs

Know Thyself, Then Change

We have grouped the seven skills of resilience into two categories: know thyself skills and change skills.

Know thyself skills are designed to guide you toward a better understanding of how your mind works, they build self-awareness. These skills give you a map of **your beliefs, feelings and behaviors and how they are interconnected:**

- Learning Your ABCs
- Avoiding Thinking Traps
- Detecting Icebergs

As you master these skills you will have better insight into how you see yourself and the world and **why you react to the world the way you do.**

Insight alone is not enough and that's why after you have learned the know thyself skills, you will be taught the four change skills:

- How to identify the true causes of a problem and
- How to accurately assess whether you have control to fix or recover from it.
- How to keep the implications of a problem in perspective
- How to fight back against your nonresilient beliefs in real time

You Are What You Think

The foundation - our emotions and behaviors are triggered not by events themselves but by how we **interpret** those events.

ABC equips you with the skill to detect your thoughts when you are in the midst of an adversity and to understand the emotional impact of those thoughts/beliefs.

We all experience adversity, the "A" in the ABC model. Most of us believe that adversities lead directly to emotional and behavioral consequences, the "C" in the ABC model, what we feel and do in response to an event. On the surface, it seems logical and accurate that the world operates from A to C (*stimulus > response*). But as logical as this seems, it's simply not accurate. It is our thoughts or, as we will call them, beliefs, the "B" in the ABC model, about events that drive how we feel and what we do.

The world does not operate A > C, but A > B > C.

(Thoughts/beliefs are always heavily influenced by context, and we change when we can thoughtfully analyze and re-frame the context).

Adversity (A) - What Pushes Your Buttons?

Certain events rob us of our grace and these events are our button-push adversities. Adversities vary in degree and are very subjective.

A partial list:

- Maintaining family-work balance
- Juggling multiple tasks
- Recovering from relationship breakups
- Dealing with other people's anger, *disengagement, stupidity, laziness*
- Negotiating responsibilities with spouse and/or other family members
- Losing your job
- Hosting events
- Being diagnosed with a serious illness

> Adversities list and ranking (page 68)

Take a moment to **look for patterns** in your adversities that you ranked 4 or 5 out of 5:

- Do you have more adversities in one domain of your life, personal, professional?
- Are there certain themes such as conflict, time mgt., dealing with authority?
- Do you feel stuck in certain emotions, positive or negative?
- Looking at the list holistically, do they share other common features?

As you begin the process of pausing for self-engagement and reflection, you might be able to notice which adversities cause you the greatest problem. Pay attention to what they have in common, **which area of your life they might emanate more frequently and with greater intensity.**

B. Your In-the-Moment Ticker-Tape Beliefs

Once you have identified your As - adversities - you can start to concentrate on your Bs - your beliefs.

In research studies, when groups are given an adversarial situation to consider, and then to share how they would react and deal with it, there is always a fairly wide range of responses. If the world operated A-C (*stimulus > response*) we would see uniformity in how people respond to the adversity. This is not the case.

What you really want to try and bring forward and analyze is your in the moment beliefs (*thoughts*) just as if we could read them off of a ticker tape right as you were thinking them. **You want the raw, uncensored ticker-tape beliefs (*thoughts*)** that you say to yourself in the moment.

Ticker-tape beliefs are the thoughts that run through your mind - sometimes outside your awareness (*let's be honest, mostly outside of our awareness*) - that determines how you feel and what you decide to do in the midst of an adversity, challenge, or new experience. **These beliefs set you squarely on an emotional and behavioral trajectory** that will either facilitate your ability to handle the situation or cause you to stumble and falter. They directly affect the emotions you feel and the actions you take in response to adversity.

Those of us that don't spend much time listening to that stream of thoughts need to learn how to tune in more often. You must learn to listen to what you are saying to yourself.

stop - breathe - consider - respond

Why Beliefs and What-Next Beliefs

Consider two main ticker-tape belief templates that we may use often:

- Causal beliefs - the "why beliefs"
- Implication beliefs - the "what-next beliefs"

Why Did This Happen?

From an evolutionary perspective, the accurate identification of causes, the "whys", is essential to locating workable solutions - and acting on solutions provides an edge. We ask "why" almost spontaneously when problems arise, particularly when the outcome was unexpected. This helps us redress the situation and increases the likelihood of goal attainment - we learned to learn.

Causal attribution researchers have found that every answer to the question "why" can be described along three dimensions:

- Personal - me vs not me
- Permanent - always vs not always
- Pervasive - everything in life vs not everything

They also found that **people tend to answer the question "why" the same way, over and over again**. If you notice a pattern with your thinking, the better you are at identifying and labeling your why beliefs, the easier it will be for you to change them when they interfere with your ability to respond to adversity. Those that are high in resilience have a **flexible** "why" system of causation and take them time and energy to consider it carefully.

What's Going to Happen Next?

Some people's ticker-tape belief templates are **oriented toward the future** and express what they believe will happen next given the situation at hand. Evolutionarily, this would provide an advantage, since those that failed to look for threats were dramatically unprepared when a genuine threat emerged. But many of us experience what-next beliefs that are catastrophic and highly improbable. Far from threat preparation, the **anxiety that is produced** hampers problem-solving efforts - and undermines resilience.

What Is Your Pattern?

In addition to the above, some of us simply produce a string of narration about what is happening or are simply evaluations. And of course, some have a hodge-podge of all four styles. But for the most part, people have a **dominant style**.

If your ticker-tape beliefs (*thoughts*) are mostly a play-by-play account or simply evaluate how you feel about the situation (all emotion - no consideration), you need to train yourself to think about the causes and implications of adversity because **resilience requires balance** between thinking about the past and planning about the future (*not simply marinating in whatever emotional state you happen to arrive at*).

The challenge for you today is to start refining your understanding of how you think (*introspect for patterns*). The tinkering process will come later

C. Consequences Are Feelings and Behaviors

Beliefs and thoughts matter because they shape the quality and intensity of your feelings and influence your behaviors - your Cs, consequences - the way you feel and what you **DO IN THE MOMENT** of an adversity or challenge.

**Everything that you are, and where you are in life,
is a composite of your mood and behaviors.**

Resilient people are able to regulate their emotions and control their reactions so that they respond appropriately in any given situation. The goal is not to be in a good mood all the time or to never give up. Rather, the goal is to have your emotions and behaviors be productive, appropriate responses to the facts of the situation, not knee-jerk reactions to your ticker-tape beliefs.

Belief-Consequence Couplets

Everyone's internal dialogue has its own meter and language, yet despite these differences, beliefs can be categorized and these B-C connections always hold - **they are universal**. The lack of positive emotions is because they are less important to our resilience than negative ones. Adversity normally deals with negative emotions.

B-C Connections	
Belief	Consequence
Violation of your rights	Anger
Real-world loss or loss of self-worth	Sadness, depression
Violation of another's rights	Guilt
Future threat	Anxiety, fear
Negative comparison to others	Embarrassment

Violation of Your Rights Leads to Anger

Psychologist Dolf Zillman has studied the triggers of anger and found that, most often, insults to our self-esteem cause us to feel harmed or that our rights have been violated. Anger comes when we believe we have been unfairly or thwarted in pursuit of a goal - even if, irrationally, that it is an inanimate object doing the transgressing.

Usually, we see another person as the agent of harm and **we believe that that person's behavior was under control**. When this happens, two beliefs/thoughts are being expressed which drives the consequence/behavior:

- Another person is to blame for the harm that comes to us.
- That person could have done otherwise

These ticker tape beliefs that precede anger are why beliefs. **If you are a “why” person**, you tend to see external causes for the problems you encounter, particularly involving other people, and you will experience anger often.

(I will suggest here that more often than not, there is no intent to harm. That people are so deeply disengaged with what is going on around them, they are literally in a world of their own - phone-brain hijacked, earbuds engaged, etc. Should they be more engaged when out in space? Absolutely. But the intent to harm does not exist. Is it annoying to live in a world of cognitively disengaged people? Yep. Phones with Internet connections - what a blessing they are.)

From the evolutionary perspective, violation-of-rights beliefs might have signaled the presence of an enemy and quick perception and reaction to enemies would have been a survival enhancement. However, in modern cultures, people who anger easily and have poor impulse control wreak havoc in their own lives and in the lives of those around them.

To paraphrase Aristotle: **Becoming angry is easy. Becoming angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose and in the right way - that is not within everyone's power and it is not easy.**

Real-world Loss or Loss of Self-worth Leads to Sadness and Depression

Sadness and depression result when you believe that you have lost something real - like a relationship, job, or loved one - or intangible - like self-worth.

Evolutionary psychologists argue that the function of sadness is to facilitate our adjustment to abandonment, such as the death of a loved one. The introspection and withdrawal is supposed to provide us with the opportunity to **search for meaning in the loss and think about plans for the future**. Chronic sadness also saps our energy systems making us more vulnerable and weeping and passivity may have elicited caregiving behaviors from kin, which might have ultimately **strengthened family connections**. Thus, sadness, and even depression, might produce support and protection from one's group.

People who are more “why” oriented and who focus on internal causes of problems are more likely to feel sadness and depression when things go wrong - especially if they lack self-efficacy. **Nothing erodes resilience more quickly than depression.** Nothing.

The Violations of Another's Rights Leads to Guilt

From monitoring college students, happiness was the most common positive emotion; guilt was the most common negative emotion, in fact, it was fairly pervasive. The data suggest that, on average, adults feel moderate guilt for 38 minutes per day (*I will add that I believe the negative rumination cycles caused by guilt can often cause 3x that amount of total psychic time and drain -or more*).

Two main situations that elicit guilt:

- Breaches in self-regulation, including procrastinating, binge eating and drinking, failing to exercise, and overspending.
- Breaches in commitments, including sexual infidelities, not spending enough time with family, and ignoring the needs of friends.

(Guilt is absolutely worthless. We have to take the time to specifically define WHO WE ARE - and then spend every minute of every day BEING THAT PERSON.

Example: You are not on a diet - you are a person who eats REAL FOOD in portions that MAKE SENSE. That is who you are. Every day. Own that. Be that. And be courageous in telling the world that that is WHO YOU ARE!)

Not all guilt is bad. Guilt may have evolved because it helps us **change our course of actions and make amends and it signals a breakdown in impulse control**. Guilt can act as an internal brake of sorts, forcing us to notice what we are doing that makes us feel that way. It forces us to pause and provides us the opportunity to regain control of ourselves.

Guilt can also appear before we decide to act. Considering a transgression can be enough to trigger what psychologists refer to as **anticipatory guilt**, and this can be enough to correct our thoughts before we make a decision that provides actual guilt of action. Guilt is brought on by internal beliefs about cause and guilt and sadness overlap on the internal dimension. Guilt is both the belief that we have done a “bad” thing and also could have done otherwise.

Guilt also has a close cousin - shame. The ticker-tape beliefs that precede guilt were focused on having done a bad thing - incorrect behavior. Shame, in contrast, was related to beliefs focused on character rather than behavior and **people that experience shame believe that weakness in their character and flaws in the self are the cause of most of the transgressions they commit**.

Shame is toxic. Guilt functions to facilitate reparations and is adaptive in the realm of relationships. Shame-prone people tend to not be empathetic; they are more angry and hostile and ineffective at controlling their anger, and in a general way, more depressed. **It engenders a powerlessness** because people believe they have no tools to change themselves, and instead of attempting to correct self-control and behavior, and offer apologies, they tend to flee and make themselves disappear.

(We DO have the tools to change ourselves and it starts with admitting who really are RIGHT NOW - which is our chronic behavior cycles - and then deciding to be SOMEONE NEW and OWNING THAT - to transition, and transform, and focus on a GROWTH MINDSET.)

Future Threat Leads to Anxiety and Fear

How often do you feel anxious? Everyone experiences anxiety. It can be a mild wave to motivate us to begin/finish projects or it can be crippling and interfere with our ability to handle situations, to handle life.

Anxiety and fear affect almost every system of our bodies and our physiology changes.

Anxiety leads to disturbances in our cardiovascular systems - increased heart rate and blood pressure, shallow and rapid breathing. There can be shifts in the sensitivity of our gastrointestinal tracts with loss of appetite, abdominal pain or heartburn. Our startle response is heightened and we can become unstable and even pace unconsciously. We can also feel pressure to urinate more often. *(Chronic anxiety and anger and their chronic physiological responses can lead to chronic, holistic body inflammation - which we now strongly suspect is the basis of most chronic diseases - diabetes, heart disease and cancers. **We literally relent and live in our negative emotional states that create our diseases.**)*

Aaron Beck and other cognitive therapists argue that the central feature of anxiety is actually a person's thoughts (*conscious with unconscious drives*), specifically about threat and danger.

Anxiety-prone people tend toward what-next beliefs. *(Mostly based on the past, which degrades or skews the perception of the truth of the reality of the present. It is also an "owning" of that fear, the belief that that is just "who they are".)*

You can stop and learn to identify the what-next beliefs that bring on emotions like anxiety and fear - **capture those thoughts that trigger anxiety** - which are almost always about some imminent threat that may or may not be true in this particular moment. Beck assumes that the evolutionary advantage of anxiety and fear may have served to check on our overly careless behaviors. We need to use these advantages in such a way that we have a strong connection between the cognitive appraisal of threat and our bodily experience of anxiety, **to be able to cognitively appraise while experiencing the emotion of anxiety.**

If you **habitually catastrophize** - seeing imminent danger when there is none, or **react reflexively to every perceived "danger"**, regardless of its actual threat level - you not only waste time and energy worrying about bad things that will never happen, but you experience levels of anxiety that can disrupt resilience and wreak havoc on your performance and mental health. *(As well as feeding the negative input to your unconsciousness and long-term memory which will continue to fuel your anxiety cycles in perpetuity.)*

Comparing Yourself Negatively to Others Leads to Embarrassment

Embarrassment is an acute loss of self-esteem, caused not by any behavior, but, rather, by our knowledge that the behavior has been **observed and negatively evaluated** by others. Embarrassment requires an audience. But some researchers have also found that embarrassment sometimes occurs when we have acted in a way that is **inconsistent with our personal standards** - the social aspect is not a necessary condition. We do not all have the same personal standards, therefore, what embarrasses one person might not affect another at all.

What matters most in the context of resilience is **how you respond** in moments of social interaction. Ticker-tape beliefs in the moment of embarrassment almost always include references to others and center around the fear that they have lost standing in front of the people **whose opinions matter.**

How to Use B-C Connections

The knowledge of these B-C connections is the foundation of self-awareness. By listening to your ticker-tape, you can make sense of, even predict, what emotions and behaviors that will follow. There are two important uses of the B-C connections:

- You can use them to **disentangle** the mixture of emotions you experience when faced with a button-push adversity.
- You can use them to **identify** the beliefs/thoughts that are causing you to “get stuck” in a particular emotion, gain understanding as to why you are reacting as you did, and learn to keep your bearings in even the most stressful circumstances.

Disentangle Your Emotions

Our emotions are not always singular but seem, at times, to come in a dizzying jumble - particularly in the wake of a major stress. You must systematically identify the beliefs that brought on each emotion and clarify the many possible issues that were brought to the surface by a single adverse incident. This will help separate those that are **external to you**, that others might have caused, and those that are **internal to you** - that may not have been caused externally, but seem to at first - but were hidden as an automatic reaction.

This will hopefully curtail hours of worthless, circular ruminations and reveal the multiple causes of the negative emotional state(s) and **help you react appropriately with others - and yourself**. This is steering through - with self-awareness and problem-revelation and problem-solving.

Identify The Beliefs That Have Trapped You.

Sometimes people develop biases and gravitate to one or two types of beliefs. They apply these interpretations like cookie cutters, stamping every ambiguous situation into the same shape. Some people, perhaps because of their personal history and story, scan their world for what could hurt them next - and they feel anxious a lot of the time. They can also spend most of their lives seeing themselves as a **victim** - that his rights are being violated. This type of person spends a lot of time being anxious and angry. Then again, some people simply see threat and danger around every corner, and they are **constantly anxious** - which can negatively affect them and their relationships.

The **positive emotion of pride**, that neglects the efforts of others, can also have you trapped in bias - that everything that happens good is because of what you did. Being arrogant and boastful can create professional and personal problems.

You may have other biases that cause you to filter your world in an unrealistic fashion and if you do, you are undermining your resilience because of it - you are spending too much time and psychic energy on things **that aren't really true and/or valid**, that could be spent on production, growth, and joy.

Keep An Emotions Log

Keep a log for one week and write down anytime you have a strong emotion or experience a sudden shift in emotion. Jot down what you are feeling and how intense the emotion is. At the end of the week, group these emotional experiences into “families” of anger, sadness, guilt, anxiety, and embarrassment.

Notice whether your emotions span the spectrum or tend to clump into one family. **If they tend to clump together**, you may be biased in your thinking style. Check the five varieties of beliefs mentioned earlier. Once you have revealed any biases and also your personal button-push adversities and accompanying beliefs, you can focus change skills on the beliefs that are dominating your emotional life negatively.

How To Use ABC In Your Own Life

The goal of ABC is to **parse your experience into A, B, and C**. Until you separate your beliefs about events from the facts of the events, and then separate these facts from your reactions to the event, you cannot do the work of changing your counterproductive beliefs.

Step 1

Think of a recent adversity that you didn't handle well. The first step is to **describe the adversity, A**. Make sure you describe the adversity **objectively**; do not let your interpretations of the event bias your description of the facts. Focus on the who, what, when, and where of the situation. The goal is to separate the facts from your beliefs about those facts.

Step 2

Identify your Cs. What did you feel and how did you react as the event unfolded? Try to identify both your emotions and your behaviors, and note the intensity of the emotion(s). At this point in the exercise, the reason we jump from A to C and skip the B for now is that this is how we most often experience the **flow in the real world** - we react before we notice what we have said to ourselves (our Bs).

Step 3

After you have noted the A and C, the task is to figure out the beliefs that connected the A to the C.

Ask yourself: **What was I thinking that brought on these feelings and actions?**

The goal is to remember them and identify the beliefs as you actually thought them, not to convert them to a more palatable version. You want to identify your ticker-tape, **the very words you used in your mind**, because those specific words capture the meaning with which you imbue the event. This is how you clarify your beliefs about others, their intentions and the dynamics of relationships.

Now use your knowledge of the B-C connections discussed previously to make a mental check of your logic. If the beliefs you have generated do not fall into one of these five categories, you haven't identified your beliefs. These five B-C connections are universal - they always hold. Don't be discouraged. Take a breath, try it again. There is no timer on this exercise.

As you practice ABC over time, across a number of situations in your life, begin to look for patterns:

- Do your ticker-tapes have a certain theme?
- Do you tend to have more why beliefs than what-if beliefs, or vice versa?
- Do you notice a preponderance of a particular kind of belief?

Pattern detection enables you to anticipate, and later prevent, nonresilient reactions (*you are trying to find any current tendencies*). If you have a solitary B or C, **they should be coupled**. Take a moment to check for lingering emotions that you did not immediately notice or beliefs that may have been playing with the volume too low.

You will eventually start to have “aha!” experiences. **You will understand what you are feeling and why you are feeling that way** and then you are ready to closely study the beliefs that are driving your reactions, like thinking traps, that we will explore later.

ABC Exceptions

In some cases, events are so severe that your reactions are **truly driven directly by the event** itself, not by your beliefs about the event (terrorist attacks, the loss of a loved one, etc.). But your beliefs do play a role in healing and your resilience determines how quickly and how easily you will regain control of your emotions and behaviors following colossal experiences.

Also, you may experience an “**amygdala hijack**” from time to time in your life. The amygdala is part of the limbic system and its primary role is the service of emotions: generating emotions, storing emotional memories, and providing emotional meaning to our lives. Without it, your life would be without emotions and passions. The hippocampus, another part of the limbic system, encodes non-emotional information, what we would consider cognition, or thinking. In some situations, the amygdala can override the system (the neural pathway from the thalamus to the neocortex, where signals are processed and information is evaluated). Therefore, the signal from the amygdala can sometimes act as an alarm and the rest of the brain, and also the body, is mobilized before holistic processing can take place.

Obviously, in certain situations, the speed of threat detection is an advantage. The bad news is that important, detailed information can be lost if the neocortex is left out of the loop.

The amygdala can save us, but it can also cost us dearly in some situations.

These amygdala moments are the exception, **not the rule**. Most of the emotions we experience follow more extensive processing from the neocortex, including our interpretations of the stimulus before us. Also, the very fact that in some situations emotions cloud our thinking indicates a greater, not lesser, need for rationality. When your emotions are coming too fast and/or too strong, the most effective strategy is to calm your body - then your mind can take over. The skills of Calming and Focusing will be taught later.

The ABC is the first resilience skill and the foundation of all the others. You can use your understanding of ABC to make sense of your responses and also to increase your empathy for others. When you know a difficult situation or adversity is about to happen, **listen to your ticker-tape beliefs beforehand and notice how they are starting to affect you**, and will continue to affect you, if you stay in that mindset. (*visualization skills*) You can then choose a different response to the situation beforehand. (*As you start to identify your current “tendencies”, for whatever reason that they exist, you can make the choice to change your reactions and therefore - change WHO YOU ARE.*)

Chapter 5 - Avoiding Thinking Traps

Human beings are indeed very smart. We have large brains, and it is our intelligence that has given us the evolutionary edge over all other species - but our faculties are not infinite. In fact, they are measurably finite; our brains only have about 1500 cubic centimeters of procession capacity. Our **five senses**, however, are capable of taking in much more information that our brains are able to process, so we need to simplify the information streaming in through our senses before we can use it.

**We cut corners and take shortcuts to better handle the sensory load.
Doing this means that we are not getting a direct readout of the world,
so our thoughts and beliefs about the world are vulnerable to error.**

And as it turns out, we make fairly **predictable** mistakes processing our universe. Eight of these errors directly interfere with our resilience, with how we handle the setbacks and stresses in daily life.

The Eight Common Thinking Traps

[Aaron Beck](#), the “father” of cognitive therapy, uncovered seven thinking traps that made people particularly vulnerable to depression. This work on resilience has found they also apply more generally to resilience, as well as adding an eighth trap - externalizing.

As you internalize this information, try to recall the last time you fell into one or more of these traps. No worries - we all have from time to time. But as in the last chapter on ABCs, consider where and when you have a tendency to be most vulnerable to two or three traps. This type of revelation and self-discovery is part of the initial processes of any kind of change, to be able to objectively know how you are now, so you can take steps to become someone new.

#1 - Jumping to Conclusions

Jumping to conclusions is thinking that you **automatically** believe something, and believe it with **certainty**, without any relevant data to support your conclusion(s). **This is the umbrella error**, really, since all of the thinking traps involve making an assumption of one kind or another.

Jumping to conclusions makes it almost impossible to respond effectively to an adversity, A, because the belief, B, is incorrect. This can lead to any of the five discussed B-C couplings and the associated negative emotional states - based on faulty data that may be completely false. Ticker-tape beliefs rarely come in neat one-sentence packages. Most often **they cascade from**

one to another, so one faulty B-C coupling can lead to multiple B-C couplings and therefore multiple negative emotions. This cascading often leads to future-threat beliefs which lead to anxiety. You are not in control. You are not in control of your thinking, and so you are not in control of your emotions.

Some **intuitions** need to be responded to quickly if there is a perceived threat, but most intuitions **do not require immediate action** and can benefit from gathering more information. (*I will posit that we don't pay enough attention to intuition, our "sixth sense", and that we miss a huge portion of what the universe has to offer because of it. But as above, it does not mean we have to act immediately on the intuition. In fact, I would suggest just the opposite and consider it over time and in depth.*) Consider treating intuitions as theories to be tested and it's valid to consider past experiences.

*(As we jump to conclusions, and let ourselves become emotionally negative, by default and design, **our minds will focus more narrowly**, when in fact, without data to support the conclusions, we really need to relax, take a breath and **let our minds expand** to find real data that makes sense given the adversity at hand.)*

#2 - Tunnel Vision

Most of us cannot process everything that happens around us. We are unable to attend to the entire sensory scene before us. Our minds tend to automatically take **shortcuts by sampling select scenes and details** from the environment, leading us to register and attend to only these samples. The thinking trap of tunnel vision, based on our beliefs, can **filter out relevant data** as it seeks data that supports our beliefs about ourselves and the world at hand.

Evolutionarily speaking, it would be an advantage for survival to notice and attend to unanticipated adversities. That being said, **most would tend towards the style of noticing and attending to mostly negative input**, while others can tend to attend to mostly positive input. Both styles lead to assumptions of the whole situation that may be flawed. And as above, an initial ticker-tape belief can cascade into many beliefs, all emanating from the initially flawed belief. Whether the emotions that follow are true to what is actually happening is now in doubt and these emotions, negative or positive, lead us down further cognitive paths with **assumptions that are not as valid as they could be.**

#3 - Magnifying and Minimizing

Unlike people with tunnel vision, magnifiers and minimizers have registered and can remember most of the events that have occurred, but they **tend to overvalue some and undervalue others.**

By overblowing the negative, the connections inherent to ABC pull towards negative mood and compromised resilience. Negativity is a mood kill, and negative moods tend to sap energy and effectiveness. Negative moods are unpleasant and slow or eliminate flexibility, creativity and problem solving. Negative people are often **self-absorbed** and lack the empathy required to maintain close relationships with others. **Negativity is an unconscious thinking bias** that will propel you to the negative like a moth to a flame.

Some people do the opposite - they magnify the good and minimize the bad and they may underestimate the opportunity and need for real life change. Eventually, your denial of reality will catch up with you, and when it does, you will be ill prepared to face it. Ignoring problems, that should be obvious outside of an unconscious positive thinking bias, gives them the time needed to grow from manageable setbacks into crisis. And crisis saps your total energy for resilience.

In either scenario above, your personal and professional relationships will suffer. Resilience rests on an accurate appraisal of one's life. **Extreme pessimists and extreme optimists will suffer equally.**

#4 - Personalizing

This is the reflex tendency to attribute problems to one's own doing. Seen through the lens of ABC and the B-C connections, this style, with its typical beliefs about self-worth, often leads to **sadness**. It leads to beliefs of violating the rights of others and to the emotion of **guilt**. Sadness and guilt often ride together.

Psychologist Julian Rotter differentiates people on whether they perceive the control of their lives as coming from within (**internal locus of control**) or from some outside force (external locus of control), such as others, luck, or circumstances. Those that possess an internal locus of control have **greater self-efficacy, resilience and increased motivation to seek and act on solution strategies**. Being passive and giving up simply leads to depression. Resilience comes when you believe you have the power to control the events and path of your life, the power to change what needs changing - AND that belief is **accurate**.

Personalizers ONLY see the internal causes of a problem and systematically ignore the external causes because you are oblivious to them inside this thinking style. Bouncing back from the inevitable failures that we will all experience from time to time requires a full and accurate analysis of what went wrong. **Resiliency requires accuracy.**

If you tend to personalize, track your beliefs closely to see whether you also tend to attribute problems to behaviors that you can control and change or to **deep-seated aspects** of your character that you "believe" are immutable. (*Genetic, unchangeable, which I believe is a very small part of who we are as humans. Very little of what we are, is immutable. It's mostly used as an excuse.*) This is a combination of personalizing and overgeneralizing, which will be discussed later.

#5 - Externalizing

This is the flipside of personalizing - simply blaming things external to you - and it has a cost as well.

This thinking style protects your self-esteem and keeps self-doubt at bay, but externalizers **fail to locate** those elements of an adversity that are genuinely of their doing and within their control. Seen through the lens of ABC, they find themselves **prone to anger**, since all adversity comes from outside of their personal behaviors and control.

#6 - Overgeneralizing

This is making always and everything explanations about the self, negatively or positively. From a negative standpoint, overgeneralizers tend to assassinate their own character and externalizers tend to assassinate the character of others. In both internal and external locus flavors of overgeneralizing, **the causes of problems are attributed to people's character rather than to their behavior**. This is not a winning motivational strategy. Overgeneralizing to global characteristics strips you and others of control, perceptually speaking. The key is to ask yourself are there other causations at work that you are, at the moment, not aware of?

#7 - Mind Reading

This is assuming something is true, when in fact, there is little or no data to support the assumption. Sometimes we read body language incorrectly, or attribute to it things that are not true or simply assume intentions of other people's actions. We assume from the information we are receiving **that we KNOW what they are thinking** - that in literal terms, we can read their minds - and we act accordingly. Inversely, some "mind readers" **expect others to know what they are thinking as well**. People are not mind readers, but we often expect them to be.

The common partner to mind reading is often **jumping to conclusions**. And of course, this ticker-tape can also cascade and lead us to many faulty B-C connections as before, and the negative emotions that flow seamlessly from them. The answer is to realize when you are attempting to "read someone's mind" and stop, take a breath, and then **engage in actual communication** with them to get truthful data.

#8 - Emotional Reasoning

This is drawing false conclusions about an adversity or simply the nature of the world based on an emotional state - either positive or negative.

Anxiety is often a direct consequence of beliefs about a future threat. Our **estimate of the level of threat** is determined by our perception of three aspects of the situation:

- How dangerous the threat is
- The probability that it will actually occur
- How close in time it is to us

(Anxiety can be attenuated, or at least solidified one way or the other, by stopping, taking a breath, and working logically through these three questions.)

Why Do We Fall Into Thinking Traps?

You hopefully are now well on your way to identifying the **two or three traps** to which you are most vulnerable. The next section will provide some tactics to avoid them. But before these tactics/skills are introduced, consider how and why we fall into these traps.

Research shows that humans are poor logicians. Why? Because the basic process of logic is very different from the kind of processing we have to do in the real world and that we have evolved to perform.

In formal logic, all information is there at our disposal. Our task is to determine what conclusion must follow from the information provided to us. These tasks are **deductive** - to deduce what

information must flow from what we already know. In the deductive process we move from the general to the specific.

In real life we are rarely provided with general information about the world. We usually have to piece together the general rules of how it operates by ourselves, using our intellect to detect patterns or rules based on our experiences. This is a process of **induction** - of building general rules from an accumulation of specific examples.

The problem is that we often apply inductive thinking to situations that require deductive reasoning. Inductive thinking can **build “mental pictures” of people and situations** that simply are not true and we make poor decisions based on these perceived “facts”.

Normally, inductive processes are useful - they are valuable rules of thumb, or heuristics.

(Mental shortcuts used during decision-making based on our history of solving, perceptually, “same type” problems.) But we can apply known heuristics to situations that seem to be similar, and yet they are not. Heuristics can speed up decision-making tremendously - that’s why we use them - **but they can also blind us** to the true realities of a specific situation. And mistaken beliefs about the world can blind us from true dangers.

This is what thinking traps are all about. Over time, using inductive reasoning, we develop general rules about the world and ourselves. We continually fall into these traps because by and large, induction is useful. We should be careful that we have considered adversities comprehensively. In this manner, we will also **not waste valuable resources** based on our mistaken judgments. Remember, our **psychic energy is limited, and therefore, so is our resilience**. Don’t waste either on assumptions that are not true.

Using the Skill of Avoiding Thinking Traps in Your Own Life

As with any new skill there is a learning curve. The recommendation is to try the skill in a post hoc manner half a dozen times and then start to apply it as soon after any adversity as possible. Most of the resilience skills begin by breaking the situation into A, B, and C.

Adversity - Make sure you are describing the adversity objectively and specifically and unfiltered by your beliefs. Just the facts.

Beliefs - You need your ticker-tape beliefs, uncensored, in the heat of the moment.

Consequences - Take the time to truly describe your emotions and the behavioral consequences. Use your knowledge of the B-C connections to help you ballpark your emotional consequences if needed.

You will often notice the **cascade of additional B-C couplets and emotions** that derive from the initial thinking trap. This is good. Then take note of which thinking traps you tend to fall into so that you can be aware of them in the moment - and not fall into them as often - and correct your thinking styles.

Simple Questions to Avoid Thinking Traps

- If you tend to **jump to conclusions**, you know that speed is your enemy. Your goal is to slow down. Are you certain of the data, or are you guessing?
- With **tunnel vision**, you need to focus more on the big picture, to slow down and assess the entire situation. How important is the one thing you are concentrating on within that entire situation?
- If you are **overgeneralizing**, ask yourself is there a more specific behavior that explains the situation? What does assassinating the character of self or others buy me? Is it logical to indict my or another's character and/or worth as a human based on this specific event?
- Do you **magnify the bad and minimize the good**? There are always positive parts to any negative situation, things you or others did well, even though there might be a negative tinge to the totality of the situation. If you tend to **dismiss the negative**, be sure you are not overlooking any problems, any negative elements that you are dismissing the importance of.
- If you are a **personalizer**, you need to look outward more, contemplate the bigger picture and any other reasons other than yourself that are contributing to the adversity and/or its lack of resolution.
- If you **habitually externalize**, you need to own that and attend to it. You need to start holding yourself more accountable for your role in creating the adversity and/or its lack of resolution.
- **Mind readers** need to speak up and ask questions instead of assuming. Ask yourself if you are sure you have made your beliefs and feelings known directly and clearly. Are you making people read your mind because you failed to communicate with them?
- People who use **emotional reasoning** (*welcome to 2023*) need to identify and practice separating their feelings from the specific facts at hand. Feelings are not facts.

For the next few weeks, set the goal of detecting patterns in your thinking and noticing what your thinking traps do to your mood and behavior. The better you are able to avoid these thinking traps, the easier it will be to hold yourself back from those inaccurate assumptions that are so costly to your resilience.

Stop > Breathe > Assess with patience > Uncover true data > Decide

Chapter 6 - Detecting Icebergs

Sometimes your ticker-tape beliefs don't explain the intensity of your reaction to a given situation. This is a sign that you are being affected by an underlying belief - **a deeply held belief about how the world ought to operate and you feel you ought to operate within that world.**

Examples include: "I should succeed at everything" or "crying is a sign of weakness". These deeper values motivate and drive us and determine how we respond to adversity. And since

these underlying beliefs - icebergs - are **usually outside our moment to moment, conscious awareness**, you need a special skill to detect them.

The skill of **Detecting Icebergs** will regulate your emotions, increase empathy for yourself and others and release you to reach out and explore novel parts of yourself and the world around you. Most of the clashes that occur in the workplace, and in personal life, are due to differences in iceberg beliefs. Revealing icebergs helps everyone understand each other's core values and motivations. *(When we understand where people are coming from and what they believe, we can begin to create common ground for productive and fulfilling relationships.)*

Surface Beliefs vs Underlying Beliefs

Ticker-tape beliefs float on the surface of your conscious awareness, and although you may not be aware of them at any given moment, **you can shift attention to them with relative ease** and identify what it is that you are saying to yourself. But they don't explain how you react to everything - just to the situation at hand, in the moment.

Underlying beliefs are general rules you have adopted and believe about how the world ought to be and how you should operate within that world - and they apply to many different adversities. And since they are general rules - ***the base template from which you build and have built, consciously and unconsciously, a large part of your personality and your life*** - once you have identified and then challenged and questioned them for validity, you will become more resilient in many areas of your life because these beliefs are what truly drive you and define who you are.

You can then decide if they are still working for you or if you would be happier and more productive with a different, perhaps more useful worldview. *(Your uniqueness, and your unique path of life, I believe require the ability to identify and question these types of beliefs as often as needed. Life is movement, transition and growth or decline, and it never ends. There is no neutral space to occupy. Challenging yourself and your worldview, for me, is a sign of **functional intelligence** that serves a purpose, for you, for those your life affects, and ultimately for the world you create and thrive in that is interwoven with the universe.)*

Iceberg Beliefs

Some underlying, core beliefs are **adaptive**; they help us behave in ways that facilitate happiness and success in society. However, some underlying beliefs inform and direct many of our surface beliefs **by biasing the interpretation of events**. These are called iceberg beliefs because they are fixed, frozen beliefs that you don't often consciously think about and since they lurk beneath the surface of awareness *(and therefore can not be attended to)*, they can sink your ship. **Iceberg beliefs** tend to be general propositions or rules for living that apply to more than one situation at hand. Most people have iceberg beliefs that fall into one of three general categories or themes: achievement, acceptance, and control.

Achievement

People who are achievement oriented tend to have an **underlying belief that success is the most important thing in life**. They set high standards for themselves (*and for others*) and are overly focused on their mistakes and imperfections. However, this can actualize as a fear of failure which can bias our responses and consequences negatively.

Iceberg beliefs around **perfectionism** are also common for achievement oriented people and they often suffer from tunnel vision - one of the thinking traps. They can tend to see anything and everything that isn't working, and none of what is working, and become paralyzed with indecision or simply give up. The iceberg belief of "anything less than perfect is a failure" is an unrealistic lens to view the entirety of existence. (*We also learn when we fail. Failure to try is worse than failing. Nothing is accomplished and nothing is learned. No one heads off into that good night undefeated. No one.*)

Acceptance

Those that value acceptance highly have a need to be liked, accepted, praised, and included by others. People who are governed by the **need for acceptance** are more likely to **notice, and then overreact to, interpersonal slights and conflicts**. They tend to jump to conclusions and mind read. In ambiguous situations they assume they have fallen from favor, which works to reinforce this iceberg belief. Their desperate need to be liked drives them to act in ways that cause people not to like them.

The need to be **praised** can lead us to boast about our accomplishments and narcissistically focus on ourselves vs others. This need tends to tax all of our relationships. These types of people are generally attention hogs and they become angry or sulk and/or withdraw then they don't get the praise and attention they believe they deserve.

Control

People who are control-oriented have underlying beliefs about the importance of being in charge and in control of events. They have a **heightened sensitivity** to experiences in which they are not in charge or are not able to change the course of outcomes. This experience can be overwhelming because **they ascribe lack of control to personal failure**.

(Consider planning in terms of flexible templates and work through alternate plans "B", "C", etc. This helps with overall planning coherence and increases real sense of control, then, when things don't go as planned, anger and anxiety can be minimized as you switch seamlessly to other plans you have already considered. Actual, real-time "control" is simply an illusion. Know it. Live it.)

Cost-Benefit Analysis of Iceberg Beliefs

After you have identified your iceberg beliefs, the fundamental questions you must ask yourself are:

- What is this belief costing me?
- How is it helping me?
- Does it need to be modified to reduce the costs and increase the benefits?

Sometimes our iceberg beliefs serve us quite well in some areas of life but hold us back and diminish other areas. **Modifications can also be warranted as we move through seasons of**

life, changes in relationships, changes in jobs - changes as we transition from who we are today into someone better. Beliefs, especially as we relate them to others, may need to be recast in levels of degree - our beliefs don't have to perfectly match up with other's beliefs in our personal or professional lives.

What is Your Theme?

How would you describe yourself, given the above? The three general themes just discussed are **not mutually exclusive or exhaustive** and problems can arise when two iceberg beliefs clash. Your challenge for you is to develop a fine-grained picture of yourself so that you can better understand what motivates you.

How Are Icebergs Formed?

Most of us learn behaviors from our parents and families, and as children, we develop iceberg beliefs that can tend to be similar to theirs. These are **learned behaviors and worldviews** - not inherited. Children absorb messages from those around them about how one should behave and how the world should be.

How Iceberg Beliefs Can Hurt You

Four problems can arise from iceberg beliefs, each can undermine your resilience:

- These beliefs can become activated at unexpected times, which lead to **out-of-proportion** emotions and responses.
- Their activation might lead to emotions and responses, while not extremely, are **mismatched** to the situation.
- Icebergs that become **contradictory** can make it hard to make decisions.
- Icebergs can become **too rigid**, which may cause you to fall into the same emotional patterns endlessly.

Problems 1 and 2: Iceberg Beliefs Can Lead to B-C Disconnects

B-C disconnects occur when your ticker-tape cannot explain the intensity of your emotions and behaviors - **the emotions seem out of proportion and/or incorrect and the behaviors seem inappropriate and you are puzzled by your reactions.** When this happens it is because an iceberg belief has been activated and violated

Problem 3 - Clashing Iceberg Beliefs Can Make It Hard to Make Decisions

When one core belief becomes at odds with another, decision-making processes slow down and we tend to become confused and even procrastinate about making decisions. These can tend to be big, life-transformation type decisions related to professional and personal life. In fact, clashes between these two realms and our core beliefs are frequent, and can be intense. In these cases, the decision we are trying to make, regardless of which choice is made, **contradicts one of our core values.**

Problem 4 - Iceberg Beliefs Can Cause Over-Experience of Emotions

Iceberg beliefs can cause you to overexperience certain emotions and underexperience others. Emotionally resilient experience the full range of human emotions - but they feel these emotions at the appropriate time and to the appropriate degree. Less resilient people tend to get stuck in one emotion, and that compromises their ability to respond productively to adversity. Once activated and violated, iceberg beliefs can become a radar that scans the environment for other examples of the violation. This doesn't happen at a conscious level. It is nonconscious, subtle, and stealthy.

Why Is It So Hard To Turn Off That Radar?

The iceberg-stimulated radar, once it is activated, is driven by two processes that make it very hard to deactivate.

Assimilation - this happens when once on full alert, with the emotional status solidified, even events the the person would normally see as positive get reinterpreted or distorted to make them fit **inside the current irrational emotional state that already exists**.

(The emotional state is hijacking, driving and biasing the "normal" ABC system.)

Confirmation bias - is the fact that all of us are much better at noticing and remembering evidence that confirms our beliefs than we are at noticing and remembering evidence that **disproves our beliefs**. This is the Velcro-Teflon effect: we are velcro for things that confirm our beliefs and teflon for those that do not - they just slide right on by. Confirmation bias is not happening at a conscious level. By definition, true confirmation bias is **not motivated or planned**, and if it is true confirmation bias, it is difficult to overcome.

(There are also those who see what they want to see and hear what they want to hear. A sure sign of a lazy, cowardly and/or sloppy mind and often by a mind driven by "emotional" thinking. It's actually the lack thereof.)

How to Detect Your Iceberg Beliefs

Until you identify the belief(s) that are driving your behavior, you are helpless to evaluate it and, if necessary, change it. To increase your resilience, you must gain more control over your emotions and behaviors. **Insight is our goal** in the know thyself skills, but now we want to apply that insight toward effective change.

As you plunge deeper and deeper, you will find the beliefs you uncover become bigger and broader, like an iceberg whose true size is invisible beneath the water's surface. At this point, beliefs begin to sound like basic values, or rules for living.

**This isn't a challenge of the accuracy or validity of your beliefs,
but rather an exploration with an interested third party guide to help you in
uncovering the meaning and importance of the beliefs to you - and this is crucial.**

Later, you will use the skills of Challenging Beliefs and Putting It In Perspective to test the accuracy and usefulness of your iceberg beliefs. **Fair warning:** Detecting Icebergs is one of the most challenging skills. It is often unnerving to explore deeply held beliefs. Unnerving, but necessary. Most people describe it as one of the most powerful skills they have learned. It helps

them clarify their values, explore their fundamental beliefs about themselves and others, and finally understand personal behaviors that have confused them for a long time.

Think of any adversity in recent memory. Work through the ABC process with it. After you've done that, **check the B-C connections**. There are three issues to focus on:

- Check whether your Cs are out of proportion to your Bs.
- Are there Cs that are mismatched with Bs? For example, do you feel sad when the ticker-tape suggests anger instead?
- Check whether you are struggling to make a seemingly simple decision.

Any of the above situations suggests that it is an appropriate time to use the Detecting Iceberg skills. Be advised, the ticker-tape will explain your emotions and responses quite often. **Don't look for icebergs that don't exist.**

To use the Detecting Iceberg skills, ask yourself these questions:

- What does that mean to me?
- What is the most upsetting part of that for me?
- What is the worst part of that for me?
- What does that say about me?
- What's so bad about that?

Notice that these are **“what” questions**. It is important to stay away from “why” questions and focus instead on “what” questions because “why” questions force us to defend our beliefs and behaviors and this is not the point. You will know when to quit asking questions, delving deeper, when you have the **aha! experience**:

- When your reactions no longer seem out of proportion
- When the quality of emotion makes sense
- Or when you understand why a decision was so difficult to make

This process can be **used in tandem with others** you have personal or professional relationships with. Try working through it one person at a time - but together. The process will not only help each person find their icebergs, but help both parties understand each other much better and help modify behaviors and increase empathy and intimacy.

Conclusion

Once you have identified what iceberg beliefs you may have, it's time to shift out of insight mode and start changing the beliefs that are getting in your way.

Chapter 7 - Challenging Beliefs

Life Change is Possible

You have just gone through a process of self-analysis and it may have shown snapshots of your style, your personality, even your character that were rather unflattering. Don't get discouraged. An important part of becoming resilient is owning up to your weaknesses and flaws. **The process of growth, of transition into somebody new, is about owning who you are at any one moment.** *(There can be no growth without this first step, this self-revelation and acceptance of who you are right now. You have, and will again in the future, accomplish that. You now know the skills and can use them any time.)*

The next step is to determine what aspects of those weaknesses can be impacted, and what can be improved. These skills of resilience give you a **freedom to choose that you didn't have before.** You can accept who you are at any moment - or you can change.

Now that you know what kind of thinking styles you have, you are ready to work through skills to **challenge your thinking:**

- To view the world more accurately
- To be a better problem solver
- To be less at the mercy of your emotions and behaviors
- To respond better when adversity strikes
- In short > To Be More Resilient!

As you progress through these skills, pay close attention to whether you have any ticker-tape beliefs about the futility or difficulty of change. Your **beliefs about the possibility of change** allow you to learn the skills - or prevent you from learning them - and become more and more resilient. *(This is a process, not an event. A life-long process of honestly uncovering who you really are - how you really think, process your universe, and respond to it - and ultimately, how those things affect the life you are living, and the lives of others.)*

The Change Skills

The self-analysis of the Know-Yourself Skills encourages you to do the groundwork that is necessary for the Change Skills. You can't change your beliefs until you can **uncover and own** what they are:

- Process #1 - Working through your ABC processes to tune in to your ticker-tape thinking styles.
- Process #2 - Going deeper than the ABC process when it is warranted to detect your iceberg beliefs.

The next step is to determine **how accurate - how realistic** - those beliefs are and to change to more accurate beliefs when necessary.

Problem Solving: Why We Ask "Why"

When confronted with a challenge or problem, people typically ask themselves "why" questions - questions concerned with causation. These questions are almost spontaneous - and serve an

evolutionary and personal growth purpose - and the answers we give ourselves are our why beliefs, our beliefs about causation.

We most often ask why and have why beliefs following failure, unexpected events, and interpersonal conflicts. We don't tend to ask why following successes or expected outcomes. Because of our tendency to work through and analyze adversity much more often and ask why, we have developed terrific problem-solving mechanisms, since we can't solve problems without revealing the source(s). The faster we identify the true causes of the problem, the faster we can generate a solution, and there is a level of urgency and/or threat that drives our motivation in many instances. And so we develop mental shortcuts that guide us to identify causes, sometimes almost instantaneously.

But as we saw with thinking traps, these mental shortcuts - **heuristics** - sometimes lead us to make mistakes. **And if we identify the wrong cause, we'll pursue the wrong question.**

(Stop - breathe - consider - are you asking the right question?)

(Heuristics, or the study thereof, is our process of lived experience - interrelated, interconnected - a continuing experience of what we have experienced and what we are experiencing at any given moment. We are ceaselessly assessing what and how we sense, feel, and think about certain phenomena, while checking in with others to learn if they are experiencing them in different, similar, or the same ways, and then returning to ourselves to process all of this information toward a more cohesive understanding. Heuristics are a huge part of how we process the universe around us and we develop paradigms and bias filters so the process can be completed as quickly as possible, to streamline our thoughts, and therefore our responses. When these are found to be faulty, they need to be modified for the better.)

See: [What is Heuristic Inquiry Anyway?](#)

The Seven Steps of Challenging Beliefs

Step 1 - ABC an Adversity

Choose an ongoing adversity, one that you have been wrestling with for some time, for which you have a makeshift solution in place at best or for which you are becoming helpless and hopeless.

- Start with the **A** and define your adversity/problem objectively and dispassionately - just the facts, the who, what, when, and where of the adversity.
- Next, recall the most recent time your adversity occurred and remember the ticker-tape that ran through your mind when you experienced it. Note each of these **Bs**, beliefs, verbatim - no filter.
- Finally, list the emotional and behavioral consequences, **Cs**, of the episode.

From Chapter 4, we talked about our ticker-tapes being composed of different kinds of beliefs. Now that we are challenging our beliefs, we need to **focus on the why beliefs**.

Step 2 - Pie Chart the Causes

Now a deeper understanding of your why beliefs and how they affect your problem solving. Isolate the why beliefs from above. These need to be causal beliefs or explanations for the problem. We want to test beliefs **that are specifically about cause** - not a description, not a narration, not a what-next. We want to drill down to the why beliefs.

Now, pie chart these beliefs and assign each a percentage of 100% based on how much you think each "why" caused the problem in its totality. We are normally fairly quick to assign levels of contribution to potential drivers of problems and do this non-consciously. This assists us in channeling resources to what we believe is the main problem and assigning the majority of our energies toward fixing it. (*Common heuristic/speed processing.*)

Now, we have to consider and assign a **level of possible affect in changeability** to each cause. We do this nonconsciously and consciously and ask ourselves how much we can really do to change or modify a causation and this helps determine the trajectory of the problem solving process.

Here is where your thinking style will reveal itself. You too have **developed a style of explaining events that affects the way you perceive problems** you face and that influences the solutions you choose to pursue.

(We see what we want to see and hear what we want to hear.)

Step 3 - Identify Your Explanatory Style

Our explanatory styles are learned responses to adversities, a pattern of ready-made explanations for the problems we experience - **our heuristics** - and they can limit our problem solving abilities.

Remember that explanatory style can be described in **three dimensions**:

- Me - not me.
- Always - not always.
- Everything - not everything.

Our thinking styles **can limit us** by drawing our awareness, and therefore our attention, to a subset of the real causes of the adversity, thereby making available only a subset of the possible solutions.

Me vs Not Me

Simply, do you usually see problems as being caused by you or by other people or circumstances? You may be thinking that your explanations don't follow a style, that they change depending on the situation, and, of course, you're right. There are times when you are crystal clear about the cause of the adversity. But you may be surprised at the degree to which your style can blind you to explanations that to an **objective (and emotionless)** person appears overwhelmingly true. Explanatory styles also **fill in the gaps** when the information is not available. That's one of the natures of a shortcut - we use them when the cause is ambiguous

Always vs Not Always

This dimension of explanatory style assesses the degree to which you believe the cause of a particular problem will likely be around for a long time or is relatively temporary.

Everything vs Not Everything

This dimension of explanatory style assesses the degree to which you believe the cause of a particular problem will affect many areas of your life or just a few.

Coding the Explanatory Style

> Using the three dimensions above (page 156)

What is Your Explanatory Style

> (page 157)

You need to rate several beliefs stemming from several situations. That's important because some people have **one style at work and one style when dealing with their personal lives**. Work through at least ten negative events you've experienced, some having to do with work and some with your personal life - and then **look for patterns/tendencies** in each.

What's the Right Explanatory Style?

Any style is limiting. Our goal should be to think **flexibly and accurately**. People can become helpless when they experience adversities that they believe are outside their control. Research tells us it's not the type of adversity that determines who becomes helpless and who becomes resilient, it is **how that person explained the adversity that mattered - their thinking style**. The difference between helplessness and resilience is your explanatory style. Pessimists tend to become helpless. Optimists most often remain resilient and depression free. Be aware that optimism is only advocated to the extent that reality permits, which is a big part of what resilience is about.

(What is real and what is not, what can I affect and what can I not affect, is this temporary or permanent and does this affect something specific or my entire life?)

Accuracy and flexibility are the keys to living in the kingdom of resilience.

Step 4 - Being Flexible

We are blind to most causes outside of a rigid explanatory style, and we come up with tired old solutions that try to reverse those same old causes, and we fail at solving the problem yet again.

If you are entrenched in a thinking-style box, it's going to take more than a command to think outside it to get you out. You've spent many years building that box, with help from your parents, teachers, even society. You've fallen into thinking traps and developed radar to scan the environment for violations of rights, for the possibility of personal loss, and for future threats. And you've cemented the box with the confirmation bias, screening out information that contradicts the box and systematically filtering in that information that concurs with the box.

None of this is good, but each and every one of us has built a thinking-style box. No one can expect you to be more creative, more flexible, simply by suggesting or telling you to do so.

**When it comes to your “why” beliefs,
the three dimensions of your explanatory style IS YOUR BOX.**

To be more accurate and flexible - and therefore increase our resilience - we have to use the three dimensions of explanatory style to code the why beliefs that first pop into our heads and generate alternative reasons **WHY** an adversity has occurred. Your explanatory style is a lens, a filter, that allows you to see what you see. You need to push back the lens, reassess the filters that you use, to **become aware of your universe, and also how you attend to it.**

Now take the time to go back to your adversity, your A, and try to think of additional causes of the problem. It is critical at this stage that you **not screen out a possible alternative** unless it is totally implausible. Open up your mind at this point - accuracy is the next step. Now, code these new alternatives through the three dimensions of explanatory style.

Step 5 - Being Accurate

Becoming an accurate thinker is like becoming a scientist, because your next step is to test both the why beliefs that popped into your head in the moment of adversity - via your current thinking style(s)- and any alternatives you've generated against solid, accurate evidence.

The biggest obstacle to becoming more accurate is your **confirmation bias**, which leads us to hold on to information that is consistent with our explanatory style while filtering out contrary evidence - details that don't fit neatly into our prepackaged perceptions and biases. For this reason, you have to **search deliberately for evidence both for and against each belief.** Through this process, you may uncover evidence of **iceberg beliefs** that need further detection and revelation.

Step 6 - New Pie Chart

As you uncover accurate evidence for and against each causal belief, you will notice that you begin to build an **intuitive sense** of how important each cause is. The more the evidence - the more the contribution to the adversity. You may even find that some of the beliefs you came up with have no support at all. The second pie chart you construct should represent a more comprehensive and accurate analysis, one that surpasses our explanatory-style driven why beliefs, and includes **only those beliefs**, either initial or alternative, that are supported by evidence.

(Emotions cloud accuracy. This is a cognitive process, not an emotional one.)

Research tells us that about **95%** of people add **new slices** to their second pie chart - causations supported by evidence beyond the initial explanatory style thinking. These are new, evidence-based causes that can bring about new solutions. *(Also, the addition of possible causations in the problem-solving matrix provides not only more possible courses of action but choices of resources, qualitatively and quantitatively, that should be expended for each*

causation, and also for this particular adversity as a holistic entity. You might also reveal how this adversity, and some of its causations, bleed over to cause other adversities. You are always looking for patterns. Oftentimes, these are iceberg beliefs that need to be addressed.)

Step 7 - New Solutions

Now you want to rate the changeability of each of the slices of your new pie - how subject each cause is to change. The concept of changeability is about you, about others and also about possible resources that could assist you now and in the future. We are trying to dramatically change the **solution landscape** (*both in breadth and depth*).

Conclusion

The Challenging Beliefs skills are especially useful for people who wrestle with sadness, anger, guilt, and embarrassment. Those that experience **anxiety**, who focus on the what-next beliefs, will appreciate the next skill - Putting It In Perspective.

Chapter 8 - Putting It In Perspective

“I’ve had many catastrophes in my life, some of which actually happened.”

Mark Twain

“the mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n”

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Many people when faced with an adversity, or adverse thought, say they “can’t get their brains to shut down”. As this thought cycle begins, their anxiety takes over and they **catastrophize** - they dwell on that current adversity and within a few minutes have imagined a chain of disastrous events stretching into the future. For some people, this cascading chain of catastrophic beliefs and the intense anxiety they produce initiates a **rumination cycle** that seems almost impossible to escape, even if they have the thought to do so.

If the above sounds like you, your first task before reading any further is to write down what it is that causes you the most worry. Via our previous work with B-C connections, we noted that anxiety evolved to prepare us for a potential threat. But there are times, ironically, that the higher levels of anxiety do anything but prepare us for threat. **You need to learn to reduce your anxiety to a manageable level that is more in proportion with the real degree of threat.**

From this new emotional position, you will be best able and more likely to prepare for the consequences of adversity.

Putting It Into Perspective is about **reframing and redefining the implications** of an adversity and how we feel about the adversity depends on the tone of our explanatory style.

Beliefs produce emotions about the cause of the problem - our beliefs about something that has happened in the past.

Perspective initiatives emotions as we ponder future outcomes - real or imagined, possible or not very likely.

Putting in Perspective can:

- Ease your anxiety and fear of embarrassment
- Teach you not to pounce on the first future threat belief as if it were true
- Can increase your sense of optimism
- Free you up to reach out and take advantage of opportunities to grow and flourish as a person
- On the flip side, help you identify genuine threats to your relationships, career and your health.

Remember, greater resilience derives from emotion regulation, impulse control, and realistic optimism.

How Does Catastrophic Thinking Start?

It starts with a single adversity, large or small, and cascades from there, like adding links to a chain of causation, and nauseum. There are three general noteworthy features of catastrophic thinking:

- All of the beliefs are projections into the future, building a story, a prophecy, link by link, step by step.
- The jump from one link to the next is relatively minor. Each step is so small, so reasonable, and so logical that it's easy to get seduced into the chain and stay there.
- The seductive nature of the chain is compounded because elements of the chain are true, not in the sense that they are highly probable but that they flow logically from one to the other. These "patches" of logic make it easier to glide over and accept other parts of the chain. This process eventually produces more and more anxiety, which makes the chain even more believable. These leaps in logic are the sources of error.

As before, start with your **ABC process**:

What is the initial adversity, A, that caused the rumination cycle?

Write down the entire list of ticker-tape beliefs, B, as they occurred, that grew from there.

Then list the emotional consequence(s) and the behavioral consequence(s) of the rumination cycle.

Page 172

Step 1 - Write down your ticker-tape chain or worst-case beliefs.

Step 2 - Estimate the Probabilities of Your Worst-Case Fears

Step 3 - Generate Best-Case Alternatives

Step 4 - Identify the Most Likely Outcomes

Step 5 - Problem Solve the Most Likely Outcomes

The Nature of Positive Illusions

Many people underestimate risk - they fail to see that there's a problem to solve, much less that they should set about solving it. Typically, **unrealistic optimists** believe that they lack the vulnerabilities that put others at risk, or they think they have strengths to protect themselves from the typical "victim", and in doing so they fail to see that, in many cases, they are at genuine risk.

Researchers have noticed a certain **egocentrism** of unrealistic optimists, but this brand of optimism is often surface-level only as the arrogance and self-importance is almost invariably driven by insecurity. This kind of person and thinking does serve to ease their anxiety and provide them with a sense of self-efficacy, but they have taken comfort in a false claim, a false sense of mastery, and a mistaken, inaccurate belief.

To attempt to correct this style, simply **flip the script** above and generate a list of possible negative implications of the adversity you are facing now.

Chapter 9 - The Fast Skills: Calming and Focusing and Real-Life Resilience

Three People Who Need the Fast Skills

Those that:

- Need to low down/relax
- Are prone to anger
- Are prone to internal chatter

Which Style Do You Resonate With?

These three problems - **losing your calm, losing your head, and losing your focus** - drain your reserves of resilience. They cause you to waste valuable time (life) in your work life, can deeply wound relationships and make you physically sick. *(All increase "distress", leading to chronic, negative stress that affects your cognitive and physical capabilities and also increases total body inflammation which over time leads to increased susceptibility to chronic diseases like cancers, heart disease and diabetes.)*

Stress

The more you practice Calming and Focusing the more you increase your Real-time Resilience. Everyone experiences stress to one degree or another. Good stress, **eustress** is beneficial. This is the stress of physical exercise and mental challenges, and it also motivates us to meet the myriad challenges of life. Also, the **anxiety** that it can produce, **in small doses**, is also a good thing, by helping motivate us and bringing important tasks into sharper focus. However, like most things, unless you are **aware** of the amount of any kind of stress you can handle, and **take steps** when too stressed to "de-stress", the chronic nature of high stress is definitely a negative.

Research into the common cold and stress showed that those people who scored highest in stress were almost twice as likely to catch a cold - stress compromises your immune system. Also, when chronically stressed, we are more likely to make **poor lifestyle choices**, day in and day out. Most poor lifestyle choices are made at the end of the day, when stress and fatigues are at their highest.

Stressors are those things or situations that elicit stress in people, and they can be external or internal - read that as other people and how you manage your own mind and emotions. Also, realize that all change - positive or negative - will raise the stress levels of all of us. So, if you're prone to fear or loathe change, you might rethink that way of processing your life.

The stress of **imminent danger** - or the perception of it nonconsciously - triggers a cascade release of hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. Evolutionarily speaking, this was a good adaptation, since it kept us more aware and physically capable of dealing with the threat. But like many automatic physiological reactions we experience, they are seldom driven by "true" threat, just **our cognitive and contextual interpretation of it**. However, the stress response remains unchanged, and once begun, can be difficult to steer, limit or abate.

Stress Overwhelms Some More Than Others.

Psychologist Suzanne Kobasa, through her research, has found that there are three critical factors that differentiate those who are resilient to stress from those that are more vulnerable:

- **Control** - resilient people believe they can directly influence the events that occur in their lives and **translate those beliefs to action**. They take charge over aspects of their lives that are controllable and thrive despite real-life problems and difficulties.
- **Commitment** - resilient people score higher on measures of **engagement** or commitment to what they are doing. Work is not just work - it's a primary source of meaning in their lives.
- **Challenge** - resilient people are more likely to see change as an opportunity for growth (leading to increased levels of self-actualization) rather than as a stressor.

For most of the daily hassles of life, whether we believe we have control (*via our thinking style*), and then how we go about handling the situation, matters a great deal in terms of the amount of stress we will actually experience. (***Thinking style yields the context, and with stress, as in most things - context is everything.***)

Skill 6 - Calming and Refocusing

Calming Techniques to Minimize Stress

As you can imagine, stress-reducing techniques hinge on increasing your ability to control how your body and mind responds to stress by teaching you how to bring yourself back into a state of relaxation.

Controlled Breathing

This is about breathing deeply and fully from your diaphragm vs breathing shallow from your chest. Stressors can cause the reaction of shallow, faster breathing rhythms, so to relax you must realize this is happening and reset your breathing to slower, **diaphragmatic breathing**.

Exercise: Sitting comfortably in a chair, empty your mind and concentrate only on your breathing. Take a slow, 4 second inhalation, followed by a slow, 4 second exhalation through your nose. Do this for 3 minutes. Practice daily and also when you feel overly stressed.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

This is the process of tension, then relaxing, individual muscle groups.

Exercise: Controlled breathing from above for 2 minutes. Continue the controlled breathing and focus on tensing your hands and lower arms. Initially, as you exhale, let the tension in your arms release quickly. After two or three cycles of this, keep your muscles completely relaxed for 30 seconds as you continue to breathe. Do this complete cycle twice, take a break, then move to your upper arms, repeating as many muscle groups as you like. Always concentrate on the muscles you are targeting and do your best to keep all other muscles relaxed. Practice PMR at least once per day.

You may notice over time that certain muscle groups are more tense than others from day to day. Concentrate on these areas daily.

You also need to practice these skills when there are **significant distractions in the environment**. With time, energy and focus, you should eventually be able to use these skills anytime, anywhere.

Positive Imagery

You can use this in all the same situations where you use controlled breathing and PMR.

Exercise: Close your eyes and imagine a calming, relaxing scene - a place where you feel completely at ease, comfortable, and happy. As you work with imagery, do this as vividly as possible and imagine all the inputs of your senses - what you see, hear, feel, taste or touch. The more detailed and vivid your visualization is, the more powerful it will be in helping you to relax. Remember to initiate this with controlled breathing. *(Try visualizing the context, the mantra if you will, of **calm amid chaos**. Consider it a character trait to own, exercise and strive for in all things.)*

This technique can be used preventively, by bringing to mind the event or other stressor that you must soon face and visualize yourself handling the situation with confidence and skill *(Competitive athletes have been using visualization for decades to help keep them calm and focused during competition. Since they have already played and replayed the competition and all the possibilities that could happen, whatever does happen is not a surprise. Also, visualizing anything exactly as you would like to do it makes it so much easier to do. It's like extra physical practice.)*

Intrusive Thoughts

Intrusive thoughts, and mind-wandering in general, happen to everyone during stressful events and even during activities they greatly enjoy. The ability to concentrate, for fairly long periods of time, is a skill that must be mastered to increase expertise in any realm of endeavor.

These kinds of intrusive thoughts undermine your resilience

- Those that center on negative experiences and cause your mood to turn sour
- Those that lead you to obsess and obsessing interferes with problem solving
- Those that simply waste time, distractive rumination cycles that go on for long periods of time. Regardless of the source or emotional flavor - ruminating reduces productivity.

Problem 1: Intrusive Thoughts are Often Negative and Catastrophizing

Try to clear your mind completely. If you can, even for a few seconds, then notice the first thing that pops into your mind. Many people can't clear their minds and their thoughts travel around aimlessly for a while but ultimately rest on something negative or problematic - **their thinking style fills the void. (Once again - context is everything.)**

Focusing on intrusive thoughts to control them can help us identify problems, but only if those problems are real. **Focusing on "what-if" thoughts** wastes mental energy and reduces our ability to work on real problems in a productive manner. Creating problems where they don't exist, and then being a slave to the rumination cycle it creates is a sign of **catastrophizing** - consider worst-case scenarios, most of which will never come to pass.

Problem 2: You Won't Solve Your Problems by Obsessing

Assuming for a moment that your intrusive thoughts are about actual problems in your life, you basically have a choice of two thinking styles: problem solving and obsessing.

Obsessing is **rumination**. Ruminators turn the same pieces of information over and over and over again, without generating planful actions or strategies for improving the situation. They tend to focus on their feelings, the causes of their feelings and the meanings and consequences of those feelings. They get stuck **simply monitoring their Bs and Cs** - their beliefs/thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

The intention is to "cope" and manage their mood, unfortunately, the process of rumination has the opposite effect: Persistently focusing on one's mood worsens it rather than alleviates it. The problems with rumination have been extensively studied in the area of **depression**. The "response-style" theory of depression proposes that your response style is important in determining how long your negative mood will last. Research suggests that distraction is a better strategy for clearing away self-destructive thoughts. **Calming and Focusing are distraction techniques**. However, many forms of "distraction" are a short-term solution. It may get you out of your depressed mood, but unless you do something about the problem, the mood is likely to return.

People who ruminate show **nonresilient thinking in four areas** that severely undermine their ability to solve problems:

- Ruminators rate the problems they faced as more severe and less solveable than those that used distraction. (***Incorrect original context of the situation.***)
- Ruminators were significantly **more self-critical** than those that used distraction and much more likely to see themselves as the cause of the problem. If you have a “me” and “always” explanatory style you will tend to be much less motivated to find solutions.
- Ruminators were also, because of the above, generally more **pessimistic** and less confident in their ability to solve the problem - even if they did try.
- Ruminators then, as can be expected, rate **very low in self-efficacy** and their negativism makes the unlikely to follow through on their idea

And of course, by not solving their underlying problems, ruminators reinforce their negative view of themselves and the situation, **creating a vicious cycle among rumination, depression and decreased problem solving.**

Problem 3: Intrusive Thoughts Waste Your Time

We have all been in the situation of attempting to finish an important task, only to be thrown off course repeatedly by distractive thoughts that lead to interruption after interruption. Even if you don't spin into a lengthy rumination, the time away from the task forces you to take the time to refocus and recapture trains of thought and momentum. (*This is also the **myth of multitasking which is in reality task-switching** - we can not cognitively attend to two dissimilar streams of thought at the same time.*) Constantly reengaging on tasks lowers productivity and wastes your time (*life*).

Skill 7 - Real-Time Resilience

This skill is as fast as Calming and Focusing but it works by changing your counterproductive beliefs the moment they occur. Because Real-time Resilience is **dependent on challenging your beliefs and putting things in perspective**, the more you practice those skills, the better you will become at this one. It is a powerful tool because you will use it **the moment that the adversity first strikes** - not down the road.

The goal here is **accuracy**. The goal is to change your non-resilient thoughts so that they are more accurate and powerful enough to send the counterproductive thoughts packing.

Three Tag Lines to Use

1. **Alternatives:** A More Accurate Way of Seeing This is....
The goal is to get outside your current thinking style and generate one other way of explaining the situation that is more accurate than your initial belief.
2. **Evidence:** That's Not True Because....
The goal here is not to look for confirmatory evidence and bias, but to be as specific and detailed as possible. The more concrete your evidence, the more effective your response.
3. **Implications:** A More Likely Outcome Is....And I Can Deal With It
All you need to do is identify one of the most likely outcomes and one step you can take to deal with it.

The goal is accuracy and honesty, not Pollyanna optimism. There may be a grain of truth in your ticker-tape beliefs so don't disregard the truth. If you don't acknowledge that truth in your response, it will lack credibility and the belief will return eventually. Be cautious in assigning blame - to yourself or others. Often assigning blame will not solve the problem as it exists in real-time, but can be used, if used honestly, to prevent the problem from recurring. Lastly, don't minimize the importance of the situation. Put it in its proper perspective, once again, with accuracy and honesty.

Most of the problems we face day-to-day do not require immediate responses. Most, in fact, require thorough and thoughtful analysis, considered solutions, and planning. Resilience sometimes requires immediate action, but often it does not.

Stop > Breath > Consider > Decide

Calm amid Chaos

Part 3 - Applying the Skills

Chapter 10 - Marriage and Long-term Relationships

Chapter 11 - Parenting

Chapter 12 - Work

Chapter 13 - Life