

Reclaiming Resiliency

Show patience, not panic, and thrive.



by Eileen McDargh

IN EARLY MARCH, SNOW STILL spots many parts of the United States. The earth looks brown and barren. But I know that if I could walk the fields and wait patiently, I'd see signs of new growth inching out of hardened earth. I'd eventually find dead-looking tree limbs swelling with rising sap, pushing buds into blossom under the warming sun.

But what if I opted not to be patient, panicked, burned the *dead-looking* trees, cut off limbs, and retreated in disgust within my cocoon? Spring might never come because my shortsighted actions jeopardized *the natural course of events*.

Such actions create a rippling self-fulfilling prophecy. I'm concerned that departed talent and trust might not be regained, that customers will retreat as quality and service suffer. Perhaps we have grown fat, lazy, and greedy instead of prudent and thoughtful.

By historical standards, we've seen far more dramatic financial times. Once the U.S. had 20,000 phone companies and 2,000 auto companies. General Motors was once a tech stock. As we say, *from breakdown comes build up*.

I intend to be the voice of reasonable optimism, to figure out a passage through this tough time. Howard Zinn said: *to have hope, one does not need certainty, only possibility*. So, figure out how to be the bearer of hope—in spite of all bad news.

Intelligent Optimism

There is hope—not *cock-eyed optimism* but *intelligent optimism* that does not deny harsh realities but seeks to learn how to fashion a life amid such difficulties. Psychologist Martin Seligman notes that *optimism can be learned*.

Consider these eight basic steps:

1. Focus on what you can control.

Don't get carried away by circumstances you cannot change. You might not change global warming, but you can control your energy consumption. You can't stop the downsizing, but you can arm yourself with marketable skills. You can't control the Stock Market, but you can rebalance your portfolio. You can examine expenses and determine what are *necessities* and what *nice-to-have items* can be dropped. Resolve to spend

money or time on things that give you pleasure and lighten your spirit.

2. Reframe the event so that you are not a victim. There is always another way to view a situation. A flight cancellation that causes you to miss (and forfeit) a major engagement is not *planned to get you*. It just is. Your choice is to decide what you can do next. When Hurricane Katrina wiped out the home of a nurse, she told me that *she focused daily on what she still had* and she had her children do the same thing. Every day started with gratitude. She refused to see herself as a victim.

3. Think enough. When you concentrate on what you don't have, you miss all the many things you do have. *You have enough intelligence*. It might not be as much as you would like, but for today, it is enough.

4. Cultivate optimistic responses. Like a farmer tending a field, optimism will never grow unless it is watered, fed, weeded, and nourished. We all have days of negativity. And, sometimes, that is a wise response because it keeps you grounded in reality. Just make sure it is *reality* and not *the imagination making extraordinary leaps into conjecture*. Weed out *conjecture*. Ask what you can do to see a result that gives you a sense of power. As Alexander Graham Bells stated, *"Sometimes we stare so long at the closed door we fail to see the one that is opening."*

5. Remember the power of example. Children of optimists are prone to be optimists. What do you choose to pass along? Even if your parents were negative, you can break the cycle by freeze-framing a situation, listening to the negative self-talk, and then giving yourself a different message. Yes, this is a hard practice. But you can make it a habit if you work it over time.

6. Sing. When all else fails, *start singing*. You can't feel negative when you lift your voice in song. Music enables you to formulate words, add nuance, and then get your toe tapping.

7. Refuse to watch or read anything that puts a dark pall over your day. Instead of tuning into gloom, read a book that transports you to another

time and a better mood. Go play with the baby next door. And if you can't stand children, take a walk with your dog, dig in the yard, or get a bucket of balls and practice your golf swing. Better that than walking around with heart and mind weighted down.

8. Refuse to participate in a chorus of negative conversations if the only thing you will hear is whining, complaining and moaning. Tell your group that they have three minutes to throw a fit, but then it must stop and the next six minutes must be devoted to either finding something positive about the situation or something that they can do. Practice this mantra, *"This too shall pass."* It always has and it always will.

Resilient Actions

Within the word *resilience* are *nine actions* you can take:

R: Remember to breathe. The ability to calm down is critical in order to take stock and move forward.

E: Enlist support of others. Love people and be lovable in return. A supportive family (genetic or hand-picked) can keep you alive. The word *wretched* comes from *wrecche* meaning *without kin*.

S: Stay focused. Intentionality lays the groundwork for what we want in our life. See it, say it and

claim it. Don't let external forces cloud your vision or deter your mission.

I: Identify your strengths. Energy and health are two elements of resiliency. Work on your *physical well being* first.

L: Laugh out loud. You'll be amazed how much better you feel.

I: Insist on optimism. Positive mental health comes from *reframing the situation*. Recall ways in which you've handled similar situations.

E: Extend yourself to others. Self-absorption deepens depression and worry. Going out to serve others lifts the cloud around you, enabling you to become both *blessed* and a *blessing*.

N: Never say never. The *resilient spirit* knows that there is always tomorrow.

C: Contribute. Ask yourself *what endures*. Innovation, engaged employees, customer-focused products and services, and shared commitment to make meaningful contributions carry the day.

E: Enjoy life. Give thanks—there is always so much to be grateful for. **SSE**

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ACTION: Reclaim your resiliency.

