

LEARNED RESILIENCE

NEWSLETTER ∞ APRIL 2020

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MISSION

Learned resilience focuses on building your adaptive capacity by developing strategies for life's changing seas. Our goal is to coach you through rough waters by building your confidence to face inevitable changes and transitions in your life. Through coaching and workshops you'll develop your inner resources and a network of support that will guide you through your journey,



Watkins Glen

Welcome to the April edition of our monthly newsletter devoted to all things about *learned resilience!*

Each month, a new issue will arrive on your virtual doorstep packed with news and ideas to help you feel more confident as you navigate the uncharted waters of our world today. As you can surmise from the photo, there is little in life that is a clear, straight course to happiness and success. There is turbulence in those waters. Rapidly changing events and emotions can seem overwhelming at times. Let's develop your personal plan and find the tools that help you overcome the obstacles that inevitably occur along your journey. You can find calm amidst the calamity.



Inspiration for April

Are you practicing good social distancing – maintaining closeness without being too close? When the distance seems too far, try the power of music for healing. Music's magic unifies people over distances and differences. On your headset, are you listening to the Police's, "Don't Stand So Close to Me", Lennon's "Isolation", or Nirvana's "Stay Away?" You might try Dylan's "Shelter from the Storm," about the redemptive power of love.

Where We Are: Managing Time and Focus

The pandemic has put us in a love-hate relationship with **time** – too much versus too little. At first, having time on our hands presents opportunities to do things we have wanted to do but delayed. For some, we had warning with time to prepare when others affected early did not. That time filled quickly with demands of family, work, or filling out forms for unemployment, medical care, child-care, and other necessities of survival. For others, reaching out to help the neediest in our communities found us with not enough time. Even the busiest face occasional moments filled with dread. It is natural to be overwhelmed at times like these. Avoid being too hard on yourself. Check out the self-compassion resources at the website, see <https://www.maryedson.com/resources.html>.

In the thick of a crisis, **staying focused** feels nearly impossible. It seems like distressing news is coming from all directions and it is difficult to tune-out when our loved ones need us most. Finding time to rebalance is out of reach. Burnout is very real. We face the pressing question: What can I do to maintain some semblance of sanity? We can start by taking a deep breath (see more about this later in the newsletter) and seizing the moment to appreciate the present and acknowledging to ourselves that we are not alone in this pandemic. People are reaching out to help one another, which fills the void when our leaders

are unwilling or unable. So, we must take charge of ourselves. With this in mind, here are some ideas to help you find calm during this calamity.



Resilience in an Age of Uncertainty

Given that we are facing the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to address a pressing question: How do we become resilient when adversity is upon us and we are unprepared? No one has all the answers, yet here are five critical ideas, or 5-Cs, you can personally put into practice immediately:

- **Calm Yourself:** Overstimulated minds with information overload do not function optimally. You may have heard the adage about putting on your oxygen mask first so you can help others in an airline emergency. Prioritizing your wellbeing is essential now. Mindfulness of your own experience is a first step to establishing mental space so you can focus on developing a plan of action. The advice that says to “breathe” actually has a physiological basis. Deep, abdominal breathing massages the vagus nerve, which coaxes your parasympathetic nervous system into the relaxation response. To learn more about this phenomenon, see <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201705/diaphragmatic-breathing-exercises-and-your-vagus-nerve>. Mindfulness of your breath and body helps you catch yourself before you overreact. By short-circuiting an impulsive reaction, you can think and respond in ways that help not harm yourself and others. A small notebook or journal can help you become mindful of your moods and enable you to work through frustrations. These notebooks and journals will become treasure troves of adaptive strategies when you face adversity in the future. To learn about beginning journaling see: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shyness-is-nice/201404/how-keep-thought-diary-combat-anxiety>.

- Constitutional Care:** No matter what stage you are in your life, when faced with long spans of unplanned time off, you may find that it is all too easy to lose track of your time and goals. This may result in feeling unmoored and drifting. Yes, take some time to regenerate your batteries while setting up a structure for your life – routines you can count on to give you a sense of purpose. Use this time for projects you have put on the back burner. On the other hand, burnout is a very real risk during times like this, especially if you are a caregiver. The oxygen mask metaphor applies again. You cannot help others if your wellbeing is at risk. You will be in better position to support others and recover your health, should something occur, when you have practiced regular self-care. Your own physical constitution is the foundation of immunity. Honor yourself by establishing routines for getting enough *sleep*, eating *nourishing food*, engaging in *exercise for strength and balance*. Get better sleep by implementing a bedtime ritual for slowing down from the day, like showering or listening to relaxing music. Plan your meals with balanced nutrition in mind and cook/freeze ahead to ease the stress of throwing something together at the last minute. Make exercise a self-care habit by making it fun. Keep it simple by taking your dog for a rigorous walk. Kick up your routine by a few notches with favorite tunes. Start a yoga or Pilates routine. If you would like to try a yoga routine at home, see <https://www.yogajournal.com/practice/yoga-sequence-help-commit-daily-practice#gid=ci020756ab60152620&pid=cat-cow-pose>.
- Connect with Others:** Let's dispel the myth that we must be self-reliant and solve our problems solo. Pandemics pose unique problems like health and financial stressors for individuals, yet pandemics are public health issues too. Individual problems cascade through society and are interrelated to the overall public wellbeing. As part of society, we are interconnected and interdependent through our communities and social systems. Just like you, others are experiencing similar worries, as well as their own unique set of problems. Going it alone to reinvent solutions is inefficient and unnecessarily painful. Reach out to your support system, being mindful to everyone's safety – family, friends, communities, experts, and government representatives, especially those whom you find constructive and helpful. Stay connected through virtual

means whether email, texting, video chats, and teleconferences. When social networking, keep it positive and useful. Venting occasionally may be cathartic, but limit it to a few minutes a day. Do not allow yourself to be engulfed in a vortex of negativity, which adversely affects your mental health. For more about how relationships can help you weather crises see

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lets-reconnect/201804/are-we-biologically-wired-help-others-during-crisis>.

- **Create Conditions for Problem Solving:** No doubt, this pandemic will be catastrophic for many people. However, avoid *catastrophizing*, as it is counterproductive to finding solutions that can reduce pain and improve outcomes. Wayne Dyer has said, "Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change." Shifting perspective can help you move out of the paralysis of panic toward problem solving. You can start shifting your perspective by creating conditions for constructive thought by tapping your resources. What enables you to be a creative thinker? What opens your vision to possibilities? It might be putting on some inspiring music, sitting down with a pen and paper, and brainstorming ideas. It may be burning off energy by running or dancing then using that flow to design a Mind Map of possibilities through an online tool like Coggle, see: <https://coggle.it/>. Try design thinking, see <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/design-thinking-explained>. Another option is to press your critical thinking skills into service, see <https://www.essentiallifefskills.net/thinkcritically.html>
- **Conceptualize Success:** Think back to when you successfully overcame an obstacle in your life or career. Reflect upon what went well, what did not go well, and what you would change. What skills did you call upon to overcome the obstacle? Write these ideas and thoughts in your journal. What can you draw upon that applies to your current dilemma? Did you reach out for certain resources or do research of your options? Whom did you call upon to help you? Do you know someone who has been in a similar situation and came through it well? If you have succeeded in dealing with a variety of challenges in the past, have confidence that you can do it again by identifying the relevant skills you used and modifying them for your current situation. Keep in mind, you can adjust your strategies along the way with different tactics. In your mind's eye,

visualize success. What does that look like to you? Hold that image in your mind and make it tangible with a drawing, diagram, or storyboard. Post it in a visible place in your workspace. If you have children, involve them in the project and post it in a readily seen location in your home, like your kitchen. Creative visualization is a helpful technique, see <https://www.newworldlibrary.com/Blog/tabid/767/articleType/Articleview/articleId/35/Four-Basic-Steps-for-Effective-Creative-Visualization.aspx>. Be sure to set up ways to hold yourself accountable, such as regular check-ins with a colleague, friend, or family member. Accountability incentivizes you to take action toward manifesting your vision – a key to success.

The 5-Cs - *Calm, Connect, Create Conditions, Conceptualize, and Constitutional Care* provide a solid foundation for building your resilience during uncertain times like these. Use these techniques to start your journey toward greater confidence and thriving despite chaos. Know in your heart that we are all in this together. Stay well!



MANTRA FOR THE MONTH

"I can be changed by what happens to me, but I refuse to be reduced by it."

∞ Maja Angelou

News and Events

Mary launched a new website and began working on two new projects – writing a book and designing a workshop, both focusing on learned resilience. As these projects come into clearer view, stay tuned for the latest updates about publication and invitations to events through



Cornell Arboretum

Do you have questions?
Would you like information
about a coaching session or
workshop?

Contact:

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this newsletter and the website (maryedson.com).

Keeping you on course is the top priority, so Mary will continue to meet with you and her other coaching clients during this time.

ABOUT THE ∞

You've likely seen the use of ∞ as a sign of infinity or eternity in mathematics, science, and elsewhere. The use of this symbol relative to resilience is evocative of the Adaptive Cycle researched and developed by Lance Gunderson and C.S. "Buzz" Holling, published in *Panarchy: Understanding Transformations in Human and Natural Systems* (2002). Their model illustrates the cycle of adaptation as exploitation, conservation, release, and reorganization. My group development research drew parallels with this model extending it through principles of complexity – self-organization, hierarchy, emergence, and learning. This forms the foundation of learned resilience. Be sure to check out the blog and future newsletters for more details about how this cycle applies to you and your life.