

LEARNED RESILIENCE

NEWSLETTER ∞ AUGUST 2020

Volume 1/Number 6

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 will develop your inner resources and a network of support that will guide you through your journey.



Welcome to the **August** Newsletter devoted to all things about *learned resilience*! Being an agile decision maker is critical now. This month we focus on four aspects of developing agility, which are relevant now - **anticipation, apprehension, appreciation, and adaptation**. We look at them as an evolution of thinking and feeling toward a workable strategy for you.

Each month, we aim to deliver valuable strategies to your virtual doorstep to build your confidence as you navigate the uncharted waters of our world. This month's newsletter is somewhat longer to address the urgent need for decision-making tools that work during crisis.

A waterfall demonstrates life's turbulence. Rapidly changing events and emotions can seem overwhelming at times. As you can surmise from the photo above, there is little in life that is a clear, straight course to happiness and success. Let's find tools to overcome obstacles that inevitably occur during your journey. You can find **calm*** amidst the calamity.

*Listen to the waterfall while you read.



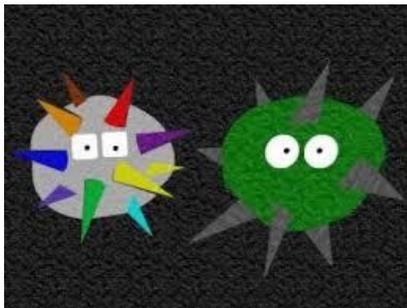
Inspiration for August

August is usually a time of anticipation - savoring the fleeting summer days and looking forward to autumn. We may recall many years of preparing for the first day of school no matter whether it was grammar, high school, college, or graduate school. August's days were mixes of expectancy and exhilaration as our summer adventures came to a close and new adventures awaited us in the classroom, at work, and in our communities.

This year is different. We face many obstacles due to Covid-19. Anticipation has become anxiety over how to stay safe while learning and working. Expectancy and exhilaration have given way to apprehension over how we will pull together a coherent plan. Moreover, plans will need revision as conditions constantly change.

The urgency of changing conditions requires us to become "agile" experts in real time. We become agile when we apply four basic principles (**people** over process, **practicality** over analysis, **collaboration** over formality, **responding** to change over comprehensive planning) to decision making. Times like these compel us to manage not only our time and priorities, but also our thoughts and emotions.

We find ourselves vacillating between the need for reliable information to form our decisions and worry about the wellbeing of our loved ones. At times, our brains are making us feel **prickly** with our hypervigilance to details while our hearts are **goeey** with concern. Here is a demonstration of prickly thinking and goeey feelings.



Alan Watts tells us consciousness is about how we manage the spectrum of human experience between [Prickles and Goo](#).

∞ Alan Watts (1969), [Seeing Through the Net](#)

Most of us fall somewhere in between extremes on a prickles and goo spectrum, as prickly goo or gooey prickles. Later in this newsletter, you will find a tool to manage these thoughts and feelings so you can be more agile during uncertainty. It will show you how to counter anticipation and apprehension (expecting the worst) with [appreciation](#) and [adaptation](#) (mindful planning and action). It will shift your energy toward cautious optimism.



AUGUST'S HAIKU

Appreciation,

Aware of each unfolding -

Moments become fine

∞ [Stephanie Mohan](#), September 2015

Reflection on Appreciation

Appreciation is so often associated with gratitude that we sometimes overlook its meaning in inquiry and learning. This haiku reminds us of that nuance. We are in a constant state of flux right now with the pandemic, economic stress, and political chaos. This haiku reminds us not only of the importance of being grateful for aspects of life we may have taken for granted in our busy lives, but also of the choice we can make to appreciate the unfolding occurring during uncertainty. Inquiring into our experience reveals the future to us

instead of us imposing expectations through our attempts to control the outcome. It is an inversion of our propensity to command our lives.

Appreciation is a type of attention, a sometimes uncomfortable to focus on our human experience. Most humans prefer the knowns of our comfort zones. Appreciation is a competency for resilience when we forego our need for certainty. It asks us to allow flow rather than direct flow. If you have family, colleagues, and friends depending upon you, multiple time pressures compound your need for timely and effective decisions. Appreciation seems to fly in the face of convenience. It can seem like an antithesis of agility; however, appreciation is an attitude not a time delay. It is a considered approach to decision-making, which illuminates and facilitates the process.

Allow for appreciation despite daily pressures. Remember, we make decisions in moments in time. We intend to make the best decisions we can when we have gathered all the salient information and compared the facts to the needs at hand. Conditions will inevitably change in different moments. We can also change our minds and make different decisions. It is reasonable to change our minds when given new information in the light of current unpredictability, especially considering our priorities and those of our loved ones. In this regard, no apologies are necessary.

Appreciation allows us to adapt our plans and learn from change, as well as be grateful for the blessings we have in our lives. August's Resilience Practice will illustrate an Agility Cycle you can make work every day at home and work.

Resilience Practice

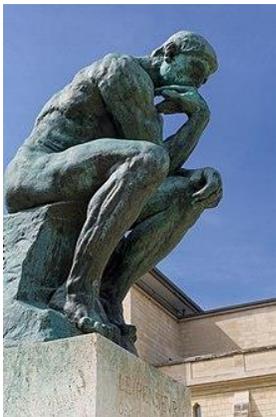
Managing anticipation and apprehension with appreciation and adaptation



Figure 1. Learned Resilience – Processes of the Agility Cycle

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When timely decision-making is of the essence, appreciation and adaptation are attitudes and processes that support agility. Think of the four aspects (anticipation, apprehension, appreciation, and adaptation) as a cycle (Figure 1). Start with anticipation of an event, like the beginning of the school year or returning to work. We face a mix of emotions in anticipation – hope for a positive experience and wonder about the future implications. In anticipation, we may gather information in preparation for the event. Some of the information we gather may alert us to related risks. Our assessment of risks, mixed with worry about unknowns and possibly self-doubt or lack of confidence, moves us into feelings of apprehension. Currently, the



*Le Penseur in the
Jardin du Musée Rodin
Paris (O'Brien, D., 2015)*

pandemic compounds those risks, adding to our anxiety.

If we are unaware of our feelings at this stage, we can become stuck. The paralysis renders us unable to make decisions and magnifying risks through delayed responses. You may recall the term analysis paralysis. In the cycle, analysis paralysis

occurs between thinking and feeling. Anticipation and apprehension become their own reinforcing cycle of expectations and dread. Our fears prevent action despite additional information we attain. How can we break the cycle between thinking and feeling to move into appreciation (process) and adaptation (action)?

Mindfulness, a pause to reflect upon our experience, specifically, where we are in the agility cycle, raises our awareness and brings our

attention to this prickles and goo trap. Yet, mindfulness itself is a process and attitude, so what does that mean in daily practice?

Whenever we get a sinking feeling we are trapped in a no-win situation, we have an opportunity to reflect and ask ourselves, "Am I having a prickly goo moment?" Figure 2 shows the path out of this trap.

We can work through these three steps:

- Starting with listening skills (see last month's newsletter) to raise our awareness of emotional traps,
- Centering attention on feelings related to the most problematic decisions, and
- Taking action to resolve those feelings by boosting our confidence in our abilities to face whatever comes our way.

If you like to work through issues by writing, then journaling may be an effective tool for you. If you prefer creative, visual tools, try [Mind Mapping](#). Figure 3 shows an example using [Coggle](#), an online tool.

Having a Prickly Goo Moment?

A prickly goo moment is a mental trap causing discomfort over a lack of agency as one is stuck between feelings and thinking, unable to decide how to act on one's behalf. The remedy is a mindfulness escape hatch.



Figure 2. Learned Resilience – Mindfulness Escape Hatch

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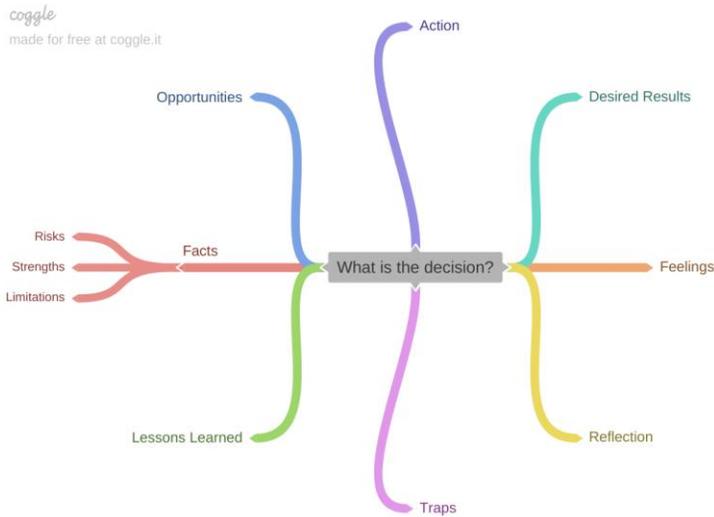


Figure 3. Mind Mapping

using the escape hatch (awareness, attention, and action) frees us from the prickly goo trap. It enables us to move from paralysis to appreciation. This practice also “primes the pump” for appreciation by breaking the feedback loop of negativity through constructive

reflection and action. It returns our attention to our position in the agility cycle during decision-making.

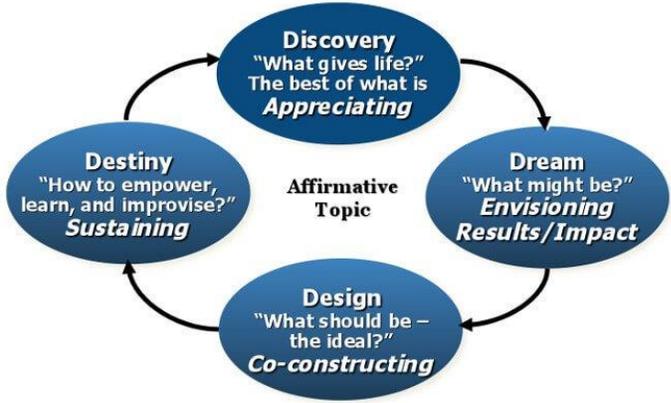


Figure 4. Appreciative Inquiry . How do we empower, learn, and improvise? Cooperrider & Godwin (2011).

Knowing where we are in the cycle prompts us to ask different questions at another level, using a wider lens rather than zoom. The change in perspective invites us to ask open-ended inquiries into our experience and our abilities to achieve desired results – a process

called appreciative inquiry (Figure 4).

For example, let’s work through the four dimensions of appreciative inquiry as you make decisions about returning to work or school

this fall. Here is what it might look like *in a pandemic when we have limited control over our environment.*

1. **Discovery** – What gives value and meaning to school or work? What must be retained for continuity and coherence (e.g. previous learning, skills, income, health, etc.)?
2. **Dream** – What might be the best outcome (e.g. minimal disruption)? What might be the worst outcome (e.g. lost learning, lost income, lost health, lost security, lost opportunity)?
3. **Design** – Who needs to be involved in co-creating the plan? What would be an acceptable outcome? What essentials need to be in place to achieve the outcome? What precautions must be in place to ensure the outcome?
4. **Destiny** – What do we need to feel empowered? What do we need to learn so we can be better prepared? What needs to change to make this work? What boundaries are necessary to make this livable? What must be honored in our daily routines to make these changes sustainable?

This month's resilience practice has taken us through an agile decision-making process that moves us from thinking and feeling traps to appreciation and adaptation. Appreciation sets the stage for learning and adaptation. Next month, we will delve deeply into adaptation beyond planning to ongoing action, evaluation, and learning. We will close the loop with how all this makes you agile in the face of a storm. Until then, remember to be as understanding and kind to yourself as you are to others.

MANTRA FOR THE MONTH

*“Trade your expectation for appreciation
and the world changes for you.”*

∞ Anthony Robbins



News and Events

Mary has accepted an appointment from Cornell University to facilitate their professional development certificate courses through their online platform, [eCornell](#). She continues to provide articles to [Mutual Aid](#) in the [Ithaca area](#). These articles are available to you in the [website blog](#). Share these resources with others as you see fit.

She has begun working on two 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 this newsletter and the website ([maryedson.com](#)).

Keeping you on course is our top priority, so Mary will continue to meet with you and her other coaching clients during this time. Please reach out whenever you feel the need, even if to ask a question about this newsletter or explore ideas.



CLOSING THOUGHT

"A true champion can adapt to anything."

∞ Floyd Mayweather, Jr.

Cornell Arboretum

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

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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.

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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