

Building Personal Resilience in Twelve Steps

Step 11: Change Wise



“One step each week. You will be amazed at the difference it will make”

Fresh Eyes on Past Experience.

We can learn from both good and bad events but only if we spend long enough reflecting on how we experienced them. Frankly at the moment we are all going through so much and this can, if we take a moment to focus and contemplate, give us the opportunity to be “change wise”. Being change wise will help to build your resilience to withstand challenging and difficult events as well as prepare you for the future.

It uses a relatively simple technique, called reframing, and draws again

from the greatest expert there is on personal resilience --- you!

Reframing allows you to look back at a specific event and your reaction to it to see what you can learn from that experience. It uses “the benefit of hindsight” (reflective thinking) and proves the value of that well-worn phrase, “if I knew then what I know now” to revisit your own past then imagine how you might deal with things differently now. “Wise after the event” would be another of our well-used phrases but that is precisely what reframing enables you to do to -- build resilience for future challenges.

- Start by looking back and remembering an event from, say, the last few months, which was tough or difficult. It may have been a sudden change in how you were living your life, a breakdown in a relationship, the loss of a job, health issues. Or it may have been a particularly challenging work-related task or a major demand on you, such as moving to a new house. For now, it does not matter whether you feel you handled it well or handled it better.

- Remember it as clearly as possible. Put in “in a frame” by visualizing every aspect of it. Try to recall the sequence of events precisely. Now remember your feelings during those events and afterwards. Keep going back over the events and get as much detail into focus as possible. Spend time on this to remember the sequence of events, what exactly happened and what your emotions were. Please do not hurry this stage, albeit it may bring back some painful memories, take the time and create the space to bring it clearly and fully to mind. By all means take several days on this. If at all possible, write it all down, or even draw the experience if it is particularly visual to you.
- When you have the events, the sequence, the motions clear in your mind decide what was the impact of that event at the time and whether there has been any lasting impact on you up to the present day.
- Now start *re-framing* the event. Looking back, how do you think you handled that event? What did you do well? What did you do badly? Could you have done things differently? Start using those well-worn phases “If I knew then what I know now” and “benefit of hindsight” Did you over-react or misread the situation, or did you fail to see how important it was? How aware were you then of what was going on?
- Very specifically ask yourself this question. If the same situation were to arise today what would I do? Perhaps your answer may be a resounding “exactly the same” teaching you that you handled things correctly.
- Finally put to yourself the big question. What have I learned about myself and about others through this experience? We can learn from our successes. But we learn just as much, if not more, from things when they do not go so well or when we seemingly get things wrong. “If that happened now, I would handle it this way...” may well be your reflection on the event.

Can you see what you have done? You have taken a difficult event, revisited it and assessed it for yourself. Then you have gone on to work out what you could have done differently and what in the future you would do. Instead of rushing headlong into the future you have paused, remembered, re-framed, and drawn new wisdom from your experience.

This is personal resilience in action - learning from the past enabling you to be stronger and “change-wise” for the future.

Building our resilience increases our self-awareness and capacity to respond positively to challenging events or situations. Often people think that an event happens to them and it makes them feel a certain way. In fact, there is another step in the process in between which determines how you feel - this is your thoughts/interpretations and beliefs about the event. Reframing your mindset about an experience helps to build a positive outlook about handling future difficult or potentially challenging events and enables us to move on earlier from setbacks.

Being change-wise also helps us to look forward, to accept, to find purpose and energy, set new goals. There's an old adage "I look back to learn, I look forward to achieve".

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The Wellbeing Team