

Building Personal Resilience in Twelve Steps

Step 12: The New Normal



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

Creating a vision for the future

Every generation creates “the new normal” based on the changes they experience. They owe this to themselves as well as to those who follow them. Sometimes the change is slow, gentle, evolutionary. Other times, such as our most recent experience, change is sudden, drastic, revolutionary. But things never “go back” to what they were. The day after is never the same as the day before.

Nor should it be. The new normal should build off our experiences, apply the lessons learned, create a new vision for a better future. All of us share the opportunity for making this happen as well as carry an individual responsibility for turning our words of resolve into action.

But what about you? One way or another over the next few weeks you will have the same question being asked time and time again. *“How are you?” “What was it like for you?” “How are you feeling?”* Have you taken the time to ask yourself?

Things have changed and will continue to change, that is obvious. Our work environment may well have changed, how we do business with others, how we interact both formally and informally with our colleagues, our managers, our customers will seem so different. But have you changed, and if so, how are you recalibrating your life when there are so many other competing demands and uncertainties?

Turn away for a while from observing the national or international situation and spend some time looking at yourself and what it all means for you. Understand what is happening to you and take some element of control over where this may lead you.

It’s important to begin to make decisions based on your own experience, your own perceptions, your own wishes for the future.

True, we have been “in this together” and will have a lot of shared experiences, but we are all different and how we now want to take our lives forward, including our working life, is our opportunity and our responsibility. It may mean changing some habits along the way.

Yet we know it is hard to break old habits and do things differently but that is what “the new normal” really means. Why do we like to cling on to the old “normal”? Sometimes we seem to crave for the exceptional, the abnormal --- excitement, challenge, mischief but only because we see it as a daydream or short adventure. For many of us, having things that are comfortable, predictable and ordinary is far more to our liking.

It’s understandable that whilst we might say the words about “change” our follow through actions seldom match, but it is the goal now we need to set for ourselves and those around us.

The things we set out in this blog will take longer than the week. They may take you the rest of your life because creating the “new normal” is not a one-off event. We shall propose three tools to help you to learn from others, reflect on your own experience, and build an action plan. There is nothing elaborate about them, but they will need your patience and persistence.

- 1) **Learn from others.** Already over the past few weeks you will have started to create a “new normal” by learning from the experience of others. You may well have heard the term “active listening”, concentrating deeply on what the other person is saying, but we would go further at this stage to “*generous listening*”.

By this we mean going out of your way to sit with a wide range of people in small group or a one to one setting and purposefully ask them to share their experiences over the last few months. Find out what has changed for the better for them, find out what has been almost unbearable. Establish how in the future they would like things to be - what they will be glad to get back to, what they would dearly like to change.

Generous listening is not a five minute catch up. Make plentiful time and space to do this with your contact list, your family and your closest friends. Do not feel that you need to make notes at the time since that can be distracting, if you listen generously you will be able to recall what was said after the meeting when, of course, you can jot down the key points.

Start by generous listening to others. Turn off your own thoughts for a while and really take on board what others are saying.

- 2) **Reflect on your own experience** and after you have generously listened to others, since what they share with you may well shape your own reflections and provide a fresh perspective.

Go for a walk or sit quietly, whichever is best for you to think and reflect. Simply allow yourself to think about what you have been through. Pose to yourself the same questions you posed to others. Find out what has changed for the better for you, and what has been almost unbearable. Explore how in the future you would like things to be - what you will be glad to get back to, what you would dearly like to change. You may need to do this several times, and there is no need to rush things, mull over your thoughts, savour them and recognise that as you collect them you are putting words to your experience and shaping your thoughts.

When you feel ready then write down those reflections. You may want to do this in the form of notes, or you may even want to write yourself an action plan. Whatever works for you.

Practice “generous listening” on yourself and then write down your reflections.

- 3) **Stop - Continue - Change.** Take a moment to gather up your thoughts and those of others and when you are ready decide if you want to do this task on your own, or with your family, or with your work colleagues. Different perspectives, hearing how others feel will be interesting and perhaps thought-provoking.

Create a “Traffic Light” template with three columns.

The Red Traffic Light column standing for things you want to “stop doing” in the future. Those old norms/habits you want to banish forever.

The Orange Traffic Light column standing for things you used to do (old norms) which you still want to continue doing in the future. This is effectively taking some of the best of the old norms and refreshing them for the future.

The Green Traffic Light column standing for things you want to start doing in the future. These may be as a result of your reflections, or those of others, on what you now want to happen in the future. Or it could be things you started to do only recently that really seem worthwhile for your “new norms” in the future.

I suggest that you complete this exercise in a few stages, whether you are doing it on your own or with others. Leave it around for a few days and mull it over in your thoughts. Add or change things in the columns.

When you are satisfied you have truly completed your Stop-Continue-Go traffic lights then make it a final document, maybe share it with others and plan with them on how to take things forward, or use it as a personal action plan for how you visualise your future.

At the heart of resilience is self-awareness, self-control and being adaptable. It is not about avoiding experiences, even those that are particularly difficult, but it is about allowing yourself and others to think about them, articulate them, share them and finally learn from them so that you become stronger through the experience.

During these past 11 weeks so much has happened so quickly and so drastically. It takes time to take it all in and even more time for us to learn from the experience so that we can shape, adapt and even embrace the new normal.

You are resilient and strong. You have come through things. You can ride the waves of your life.

Thank you for reading the *Twelve Steps to Building Personal Resilience*. We hope you have found them useful; we have certainly made some changes throughout writing them!

Stay safe and well.

The Wellbeing Team