RIT Resiliency Framework

GREGORY T. EELLS, PH.D.
DIRECTOR, COUNSELING & PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES
CORNELL UNIVERSITY
Grab the tiger by the tail
Resilience - Defined

• Good outcomes despite high-risk status.
• Competence under stress.
• Recovery from trauma.
• Using challenges for growth that makes future hardships more manageable.
• Local t-shirt- “Cornell University-Where your best hasn’t been good enough since 1865”.
Recognize Reality

• Expect to suffer.
• Expect to be challenged and confronted with limitations.
• Be willing to take risks.
• Accept the painful emotions that come with this process.
Recognize Reality

“It is comfortable to live on the surface so long as it remains unshaken. It is painful to break away from it and descend into an unknown ground. The tremendous amount of resistance against that act in every human being and the many pretexts invented to avoid the road into depth are natural. The pain of looking into one's own depth is too intense for most people. But there is no excuse which permits us to avoid the depth of truth, the only way to which lies through the depth of suffering. For in the depth is truth, and in the depth is hope, and in the depth is joy.” —Paul Tillich
First Nobel Truth of Buddhism

Life is Dukkha, pain that seeps at some level into all finite existence. An axle which is off-center with respect to the wheel, A bone slipped out of it’s socket.
Attitude – Fixed Mindset

• Doesn’t make mistakes; Finishes tasks quickly, with ease.
• Potential is innate; “you’re a natural”
• Being smart defined as special or better than others.
• Sense of urgency to succeed.
• Failure is intolerable and provides no future direction. Fear-scarcity
Attitude - Growth Mindset

• The harder the better.
• Potential is developed over time.
• Luxury of becoming.
• Improving individually, no different than others. Success is cultivated.
• Failure hurts but isn’t defining.
• Inherent value known.
• Love-abundance.
Be Whole-Hearted

• Connection comes from **worthiness**.
• **Whole Hearted** - a strong sense of love & belonging.
• We all deserve love and belonging. Some people will tell you that you don’t deserve love and belonging.
• Do not believe this lie. They are only telling it to you because they don’t believe they deserve love and belonging.
Be Whole-Hearted

• **Courage**- tell the true story of who you are with your whole heart.

• **Compassion**- Be kind to yourself first then others.

• **Connection**- as a result of authenticity. Let go of who you think you should be to be who you are.
Be Whole Hearted

• **Fully Embraced Vulnerability** - what makes us beautiful makes us vulnerable.

• Willingness to say I love you first. Willing to invest in something that may or may not work out. Vulnerability is the birthplace of love joy and belonging.
“All our defects are the ways the glories get manifested.” - Rumi
Emotional Avoidance

What traps us?
• Psychological problems can be defined as the presence of unpleasant feelings, thoughts, memories, bodily sensations.
• Undesirable experiences are signals that something is wrong and has to change.
• Healthy living won’t occur until negative experiences are resolved.
Emotional Acceptance

• Alternative to avoidance.
• Active and aware; embraces what's going on inside.
• Creative Hopelessness.
• Accept what is.
Reframe Experience

• What does it mean? unavoidable, temporary, subjective?
• Normalize setbacks—part of successful journey (everyone experiences).
• Importance of perceptions and the way you interpret the setback.
Reframe Experience

• Who in here has never experienced a setback?
• One of my most stressful setbacks was my pursuit of a faculty position.
• Anyone else willing to share a setback with the group?
The greatest discovery of any generation is that a human can alter his life by altering his attitude.

— William James
Refine Experience
Learned Optimism

- **Permanence**: Negative evaluations, staff anger and dissatisfaction, student suicides, etc. These conditions come and go. Networks of colleagues can offer considerable stability. Impermanence. (Taoist farmer).

- **Pervasiveness**: Allow positive events in your role to brighten your entire experience rather than letting the negative events darken the other areas (Milton Erikson).
Reframe Experience-Learned Optimism

• **Personalization**: Acknowledge the contextual causes of difficult events and your own internal contributions to positive events (My first staff meeting).
Reframe Experience-Cognitive Behavioral Responses

• **Mind reading.** You assume that you know what people think without data.

• **Fortune-telling.** Things will get worse. “I’ll fail that exam,” or “I won’t get the job.”

• **Catastrophizing.** What has happened or will happen will be unbearable.

• **Labeling.** You assign global negative traits to yourself and others. “I’m undesirable,” or “He’s a rotten person.”
Reframe Experience-Cognitive Behavioral Responses

• **Discounting positives.** You claim that the positive things you or others do are trivial.

• **Negative filtering.** Focus almost exclusively on the negatives and seldom notice the positives.

• **Overgeneralizing.** You perceive a global pattern of negatives on the basis of a single incident.
Reframe Experience-Cognitive Behavioral Responses

• **Dichotomous thinking.** View events or people in all-or-nothing terms.

• **Blaming.** You focus on the other person as the source of your negative feelings, and you refuse to take responsibility for changing yourself.

• **What if?**

• **Inability to disconfirm.**

• **Emotional reasoning.** Feelings guide interpretation of experience.
Reach for Support

- What are your internal resources? (Admit/acknowledge when you are struggling? What has got you through in the past? What are you grateful for?

- What are your external resources? (Who do you count on/ Who are the people who have been your role models? How do others need you?)
MISTAKES

It could be that the purpose of your life is only to serve as a warning to others.
Physical Fitness

• Sleep and appropriate diet.
• Try different forms of exercise.
• Set well-defined goals.
• Gradually increase the intensity of training.
• Find people to support you.
• Notice and focus on positive feelings
• Make fitness a part of your sense of self.
Research on the Benefits of Gratefulness

**Psychological** (Positive affect: alert, energetic, enthused, attentive)

**Physical** (exercise, better sleep, fewer symptoms)

**Interpersonal** (more helpful and connected, less lonely and isolated)

Five ways to stay grateful

1. Keep a gratitude journal.
2. Remember the bad while vowing to practice gratitude.
3. Make a “what I take for granted” list.
4. Identify ungrateful thoughts.
5. Come to your senses.
Gratitude Perspective

“I believe that life is not always fair. It has certainly been true in my case. It is not fair that I should have wonderful, caring, supportive parents who raised me right, and brothers and sisters that are there when I need them. It’s not fair that I should be blessed with a beautiful, talented wife and together we should have two equally, beautiful, talented daughters who make us proud daily. No, life is not fair. Why should I have had so many years of good health and energy and good friends to camp and backpack with through the years...

ALS is a terrible disease, but it does not negate the rest of my life.”
Social Connection

• We are social creatures, part of the superorganism of human society.
• An important component of resilience; protective against mental illness.
• Biologically, isolation is toxic.
• Learning the Tap Code
• Intimacy---------------------------Control
  (Love)                          (Fear)
Social Connection - Altruism

- Mental health and resilience are related to helping others.
- When we help others our brain is rewarded with Dopamine.
- Happiest Girl in The World - You need your community and they need you!
Surround yourself with Resilient Role Models
Reflect and Rally

• Values—you are steering this ship.
• What have you learned?
• Make a plan for moving forward.
Reflect and Rally

• According to the Center for Disease Control, about 4 out of 10 Americans have not discovered a satisfying life purpose.

• Having purpose and meaning in life increases overall well-being and life satisfaction, improves mental and physical health, enhances resiliency, enhances self-esteem, and decreases the chances of depression.

• The single-minded pursuit of happiness leaves people less happy.
Reflect and Rally

• Happiness is about drive reduction. If you have a need or a desire you satisfy it, and that makes you happy.

• People become happy when they get what they want.

• Meaning transcends the self while happiness is all about giving the self what it wants.

• People who have high meaning in their lives are more likely to help others in need.
“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.” - Victor Frankl
Values –

Meaning and Purpose

Victor Frankel- Man’s Search for Meaning.

• After choosing not to escape the concentration camp to stay with his patients he “gained an inward peace” he had never experienced before.

• Pursue what matters
  What are you willing to suffer for?
What Have You Learned?

• Encountering obstacles when we are pursuing our purpose is an indication we are making progress and is a requirement for victory.

• Resilience occurs when the benefit we obtain from confronting an obstacle is enough to make us grateful and accepting that it stood in our way in the first place.

• What we want does not represent the greatest benefit an obstacle has to offer.

_The Undefeated Mind._ A. Lickerman, MD
Learn not to take ourselves too seriously.
When we do we miss things

Which of the following is the largest?

A: A Peanut
B: An Elephant
C: The Moon
D: A Kettle

ELEPHANTS
Larger than the moon
Developing a Plan-Training

Military example:

• Acquire information about what is feared.
• Learn skills to move through fear.
• Develop a plan and a back-up plan.
• Confront the fear with a trusted colleague.
• Practice, Practice, Practice.
• Vygotsky-Zone of Proximal Development.
Training

Zone of proximal development
(Learner can do with guidance)

Learner can do unaided

Learner cannot do
Developing a Plan-Training

• Our goal in higher education is to prepare students for future setbacks and challenges by providing experiences that are in the range of the ZPD.

• Use dependent neuroplasticity- the more a skill is rehearsed the more space and wiring the brain devotes to the new skill.

• Practice must be the correct skill. Ideally a mix of didactic and experiential learning.
Developing a Plan-Training

“We have places of fear inside of us, but we have other places as well-places with names like trust and hope and faith. We can choose to lead from one of those places, to stand on ground that is not riddled with the fault lines of fear, to move toward others from a place of promise instead of anxiety. As we stand in one of those places, fear may remain close at hand and our spirits may still tremble. But now we stand on ground that will support us, ground from which we can lead others toward a more trustworthy, more hopeful, more faithful way of being in the world.”

Parker Palmer in Let your life speak: Listening for the voice of vocation (2000)
Hidden Cost to Resilience?

• Important to acknowledge that the appearance of resilience is not necessarily an unmitigated good.

• Brody (2013) suggests physical consequences to appearing resilient on the outside, in African-American youth in rural Georgia.

• Most of what we have covered are effective strategies for mitigating the suffering in life but the larger cultural context may exact a price.
Hidden Cost to Resilience?

- Stereotypes impact our performance negatively at an unconscious level especially when they are highlighted.
- **Claude Steele** - A friend (African American man) in a White neighborhood noticing signs of fear at his presence. When his whistled Vivaldi and Beatles tunes noticed a palpable reaction of relief and much more eye contact. *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect us and What We Can Do About It.*
Conclusion

Recognize Reality
Reframe Experience
Reach for Support
Reflect and Rally