

Good Sailors are Not Made on Calm Seas

Social scientists are always researching for better ways to help people survive profound stress and adversity. The formidable research question has been that of identifying specific actions human beings can take to manage adversity or be less vulnerable.

In the 1960's, Dr. Richard Lazarus (**Emotion and Adaptation**) introduced the concept of "coping" as the ability of human beings to successfully handle constantly changing demands and very difficult situations. The Lazarus research showed that effective coping included mental, emotional and behavioral efforts to capably manage circumstances that might, at first, exceed the person's coping ability.

C.R. Snyder in **Coping: The Psychology of What Works**, acknowledges that one of the contributions of Lazarus seminal research was of emphasizing coping as a process-oriented dynamic, rather than a trait-oriented, as an interactive instead of automated venture, and this statement implies a developmental rather than a mastery model.

The saying, "Good sailors are not made on calm seas", is one of the many indicating that people can be made stronger at the broken places. New studies of hope, optimism, attitudes, coping and resiliency have led to an improved understanding of how people endure and overcome difficult experiences. (**Brian Domino and Daniel W. Conoway, Optimism and Pessimism: Implications for Theory, Research and Practice**", Edward Chang Ed, Washington, DC American Psychological Association).

Resiliency and extreme behavior psychology is very illuminating for understanding complex and survival human behavior. A few years ago the American Psychological Association formed a Task Force for Resiliency. In this task force resiliency was defined AS AN INTERACTIVE PRODUCT OF BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, APPROACHES, BEHAVIORS AND PHYSIOLOGY THAT HELP PEOPLE FARE BETTER DURING EXTREME ADVERSITY AND RECOVER MORE QUICKLY FOLLOWING IT.

The scientific point is that the optimistic and pessimistic belief of human beings create a kind self-fulfilling prophecy. Humans tend to interact with the world in ways that confirm their beliefs, prejudices, and predictions. People with positive explanations for their set-backs and persevere in their efforts. People with negative attitudes accept set-backs as proof of what they expected and as an excuse for not working, for not giving the extra-mile, for not activating their extreme capabilities and for not working to make things turn out well. Many people act in this traditional way, but only a few are aware of the process.

The psychologies of hope and optimism contribute to a kind of resiliency foundation because they are future oriented. The empirical findings are clear and interesting. PEOPLE WHO FEEL HOPEFUL AND OPTIMISTIC INCREASE THEIR CHANCES OF BOUNCING

BACK. Instead of saying everything works bad for me, they express that even while they have to face many difficult situations they are confident that they are going to make it.

Hope makes the person endure through very difficult times and experiences. Optimism provides thought and images of things turning out well. **Hope is what people have and optimism is what people believe.**

A positive psychology is usually related to actions people can take, step by step, with patience and in an incremental manner, to get them from where they are to where they want to be.

As Lazarus instructed, coping is an interactive process, different for each individual, in which a person keeps learning how to be better at handling very difficult physical, mental and emotional challenges. The special thing about resilient people is that they can combine them all!

A very profound dimension of this body of research is that highly resilient people are imbued with a mixture of hope, optimism and positive attitudes, and the ability to imagine a desire condition in a way that motivates and guides a purposeful coping action.

RESILIENT PEOPLE EXPECT AND NEED GOOD OUTCOMES, AND THE BEAUTY OF THIS PROFOUND HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY IS THAT THEY OFTEN GET THEM.

The learnings are that even tragic circumstances can be shaped (holocaust, World Trade Center, Haiti, Chilean miners, prisoners and extreme poverty) in ways that you can influence. Reality is always kind of plastic and it is more malleable and shapable than most people think. People with hope, optimism, positivity, and coping skills have an amazing ability to get good outcomes where other people think that they cannot live, survive and prevail.

At certain point in life there are more yesterdays than tomorrows. So we all should spend all of our tomorrows very carefully and appreciating all of them. Some researched key strategies are the following:

1. No matter what has happened to you, define yourself as a survivor with choices about how can you respond to any situation.
2. Have a purpose worthy of your commitment to make your choice and behavior meaningful and compelling.
3. Choose lifelong learning as your ticket to renewal and to revitalization at any age and any condition.
4. Take care of your body and maintain good health habits and your body and mind will do a better job taking care of you.
5. Cultivate a bias for action and for making an intelligent move.
6. Catch yourself being effective daily instead of depending on the approval of others.
7. Take your life and work seriously and create your own village of support and encouragement.

The person, who has no imagination, has no wings and no escape...