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[RESILIENCE](#)

10 Traits of Emotionally Resilient People

Part 1 of 2 in this blog series, "Cultivating Resilience for Total Well-Being"

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Ten years ago this month, Hara Estroff Marano, Editor-at-Large for *Psychology Today*, wrote in her article "[The Art of Resilience](#)":

"At the heart of resilience is a belief in oneself—yet also a belief in something larger than oneself.

Resilient people do not let adversity define them. They find resilience by moving towards a goal beyond themselves, transcending pain and grief by perceiving bad times as a temporary state of affairs... It's possible to strengthen your inner self and your belief in yourself, to define yourself as capable and competent. It's possible to fortify your psyche. It's possible to develop a sense of mastery."

So how do we fortify our psyche to ride the waves of adversity rather than being pulled under by the torrent? How is it that some people handle incredible amounts of stress while others quickly fall apart?

Those who master resilience tend to be skilled in preparing for emotional emergencies and adept at accepting what comes at them with flexibility rather than rigidity—*times are tough but I know they will get better*. The old metaphor applies: Resilient people are like bamboo in a hurricane—they bend rather than break. Or, even if they feel like they're broken for a time, there's still a part of them deep inside that knows they won't be broken forever. Here's how they do it.

10 Traits of Emotionally Resilient People:

1. They know their boundaries. Resilient people understand that there is a separation between who they are at their core and the cause of their *temporary* suffering. The stress/trauma might play a part in their story, but it does not overtake their permanent identity.

2. They keep good company. Resilient people tend to seek out and surround themselves with other resilient people, whether just for fun, or when there's a need for support. Supportive people give us the space to grieve and work through our emotions. They know how to listen and when to offer just enough encouragement without trying to solve all of our problems with their advice. Good supporters know how to *just be* with adversity—calming us rather than frustrating us.

3. They cultivate self-awareness. Being "blissfully unaware" can get us through a bad day, but it's not a very wise long-term strategy. Self-awareness helps us get in touch with our psychological/physiological needs—knowing what we need, what we don't need, and when it's time to reach out for some extra help. The self-aware are good at listening to the subtle cues their body and their mood are sending.

On the other hand, a prideful stubbornness without emotional flexibility or self-awareness can make us emotional glaciers: Always trying to be strong in order to stay afloat, yet prone to massive stress fractures when we experience an unexpected change in our environment.

moment, it's better to come to terms with the truth of the pain than to ignore it, repress it, or deny it. Acceptance is not about giving up and letting the stress take over, it's about *leaning in* to experience the full range of emotions and trusting that we will bounce back.

5. They're willing to sit in silence. We are masters of distraction: T.V., overeating, abusing drugs, risky behavior, gossip, etc. We all react differently to stress and trauma. Some of us shut down and some of us ramp up. Somewhere in the middle there is [mindfulness](#)—being in the presence of the moment without judgment or avoidance. It takes practice, but it's one of the purest and most ancient forms of healing and resilience-building.

6. They don't have to have all the answers. The psyche has its own built-in protective mechanisms that help us regulate stress. When we try hard to find the answers to difficult questions in the face to [traumatic](#) events, that *trying too hard* can block the answers from arising naturally in their own due time. We can find strength in knowing that it's okay to not have it all figured out right now and trusting that we will gradually find peace and *knowing* when our mind-body-soul is ready.

7. They have a menu of self-care habits. They have a mental list (perhaps even a physical list) of good habits that support them when they need it most. We can all become self-care spotters in our life—noticing those things that recharge our batteries and fill our cup.

In part two of this resilience blog series, my guest Karen Horneffer-Ginter, author of [Full Cup, Thirsty Spirit: Nourishing the Soul When Life's Just Too Much](#), shares her [25 ideas for cultivating resilience](#). Her blog just might inspire you to create your own self-care menu. Karen has taken the menu idea a step further by designing a [self-care poster](#) that serves as visual inspiration to *nourish the soul when life's just too much*.

8. They enlist their team. The most resilient among us know how to reach out for help. They know who will serve as a listening ear and, let's be honest, who won't! Our team of supporters helps us reflect back what they see when we're too immersed in overwhelm to witness our own coping.

We can all learn how to be better supporters on other people's team. In the *Los Angeles Times* article, "How Not to Say the Wrong Thing," psychologist Susan Silk and co-author Barry Goldman help readers develop a strategy for effectively supporting others and proactively seeking the support we need for ourselves. Remember, it's okay to communicate to our supporters what is and isn't helpful feedback/support for our needs.

9. They consider the possibilities. We can train ourselves to ask which parts of our current story are permanent and which can possibly change. *Can this situation be looked at in a different way that I haven't been considering?* This helps us maintain a realistic understanding that the present situation is being colored by our current interpretation. Our interpretations of our stories will always change as we grow and mature. Knowing that today's interpretation can and will change, gives us the faith and hope that things can feel better tomorrow.

10. They get out of their head. When we're in the midst of stress and overwhelm, our thoughts can swirl with dizzying speed and disconnectedness. We can find reprieve by getting the thoughts out of our head and onto our paper.

As Dr. James Pennebaker wrote in his book [Writing to Heal](#), "People who engage in expressive writing report feeling happier and less negative than before writing. Similarly, reports of depressive symptoms, rumination, and general [anxiety](#) tend to drop in the weeks and months after writing about emotional upheavals."

Writing is one resilience strategy we can literally keep in our back pocket. But there are other ways to *get out of our head*. Looking back at #5, it's actually okay to distract ourselves sometimes. That is, it's okay when the distraction serves to get us out of rumination mode and bring us back to the present moment. Healthy distractions include going to the gym or going for a walk, cooking & baking, volunteering, or any of the self-care items on your self-care menu from #7. [For more ideas, read part 2 of this blog here.](#)



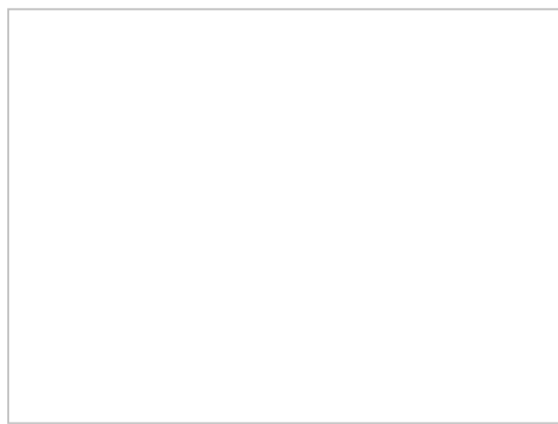
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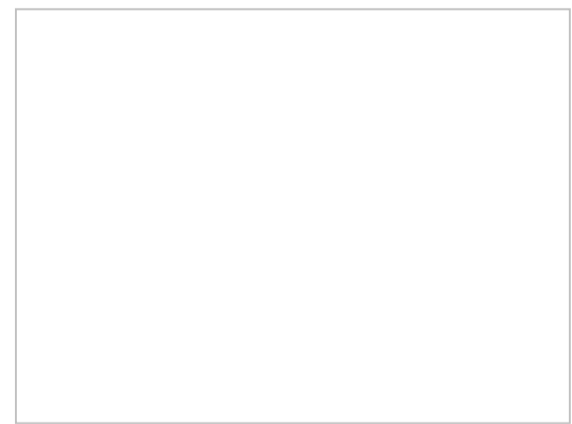
Brad Waters, MSW, is a career coach-consultant who helps people clarify career paths, make job transitions, and improve resumes. He holds a master's in social work from the University of Michigan.

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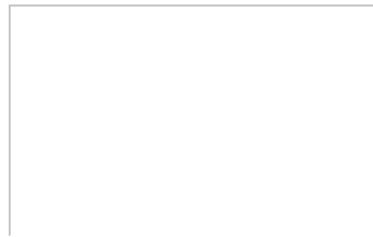
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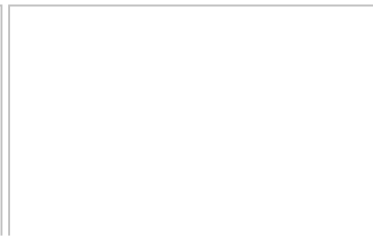
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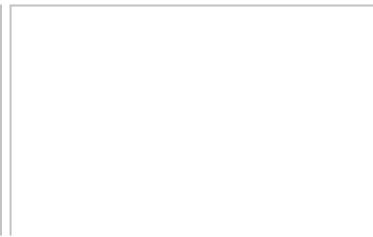
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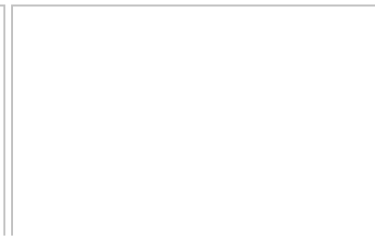
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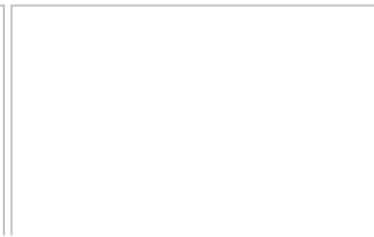
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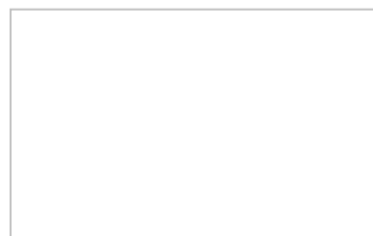
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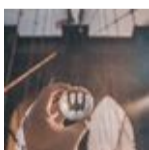


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