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How Resilient, Positive People Thrive Amid Constant Change

Positive people have the ability to recover more quickly from negative experiences on a physical and emotional level.



Constant change and uncertainty are conditions that apply to everyone, not just university faculty, says Martin Fiebert, a professor of psychology at California State University, Long Beach. “In recent months, stress has increased. Things that people have taken for granted are suddenly in jeopardy. That includes jobs, salaries and the amount of work that needs to be done with fewer resources. This can create a certain amount of apprehension, and it can present a challenge for some people.”

What can we learn from individuals who seem to regain perspective and balance more quickly in stressful situations? The study of positivity and positive psychology offers some valuable insights.

Reporting on research into what makes certain people more resilient than



others, author Barbara L. Fredrickson, Ph.D. describes positivity as a “secret reset button.”

“Positive people bounce back—even at a core physiological level—because their inner wellspring of positive emotions bubbles over,” Fredrickson states in *Positivity*¹. Her book and companion Web site offer positivity self-tests as well as tips for decreasing negativity and increasing positivity.

Positive psychology is described by researchers Martin E. P. Seligman and

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi² as a feeling of well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present).

Seligman’s research has demonstrated that it is possible to be happier—to feel more satisfied, to be more engaged with life, find more meaning, have higher hopes, and probably even laugh and smile more, regardless of one’s circumstances.³ Csikszentmihalyi studies

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The Power of Positivity and Resilience

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what makes people truly happy, satisfied and fulfilled. His work in flow theory describes the great satisfaction people feel when they enter a flow state, becoming fully absorbed in an activity and losing their sense of time.

The importance of being “in the moment” is the central theme of Eckhart Tolle’s 1999 New York Times bestseller, *The Power of Now*. “Tolle suggests that we create our own suffering by living in the past and by anticipating the future

with a catastrophic outlook,” says Fiebert. “He offers a framework we can use to overcome this. It includes techniques like meditation and other self-awareness exercises, which we can use to bring ourselves wholly into the present. With practice, we can improve the way we experience things emotionally and cognitively.”

A sense of perspective plays an important role in resilience, too. Remember that you have survived many other changes and stressful situations in your lifetime.

“It’s a human tendency to reach homeostasis with our environment,” says Fiebert. “Some people flow with the changes more naturally, but almost all people will find their way, in time.”

¹ Barbara L. Fredrickson, Ph.D., *Positivity*, Crown Publishers, New York, 2009.

² Martin E. P. Seligman, University of Pennsylvania and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Claremont Graduate University, *American Psychologist*, January 2000.

³ Authentic Happiness Web site, <http://www.authentic-happiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>, accessed 7/21/2009.

“The mind is a superb instrument if used rightly. Used wrongly, however, it becomes very destructive.”
Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*



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Resources

Companion site to *Positivity*, by Barbara L. Fredrickson: www.positivityratio.com

Positive Psychology Center: <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu>

Quality of Life Research Center: <http://qlrc.cgu.edu>

How High Can You Bounce? Turn Your Setbacks into Comebacks, by Roger Crawford, Bantam Books, New York, 1998

The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles, by Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte, Broadway Books, 2002.

Attitudes of Gratitude: How to Give and Receive Joy Every Day of Your Life, by M. J. Ryan, Conari Press, Berkeley, Calif.

Journaling Can Help Us Reflect, Chart Progress

Writing about the things that weigh heavily on your mind, or about the things that uplift you, can be a healthy coping technique.

Use the journal style that fits your life. You may opt for a freeform, handwritten journal or password-protected notes on your computer or handheld device. For those who seek some structure to their journaling, there are many jour-

nalizing guides and online resources available. One example of the new tools available for this purpose is MyTherapyJournal.com.

Founded by brothers Alexis and Rodolfo Saccoman, the membership-based site can be used as an alternative to a personal diary. Members can customize their secure private journals to prompt them with questions in various categories, including

gratitude, insecurity, grief, joy, family time, forgiveness and anger. The site can be used to track a personal growth journey.

An especially easy-to-maintain journaling style is to keep a log of small moments, events and happenings for which you are grateful. A gratitude journal can help you appreciate and reflect upon all the positive things in your life.