

“Everyone is on their own journey” sums up my experience when searching for personal examples of resilience as I had to dig through my archive of memories to trace back the life altering events which trajected me to where I am today. These memories varied from traumatic ones (which still impact me to this day, to past mistakes and pitfalls (which I eventually overcame). Overall this exercise was very therapeutic as it helped me find inner peace with my own insecurities about where I am today in life, compared to my personal and societal expectations. It has also given me strength and confidence knowing that I have been successful at exhibiting resilience multiple times in this crazy thing we call life.

According to Wikipedia, resilience (phycological) is defined as “...the ability to cope with a crisis or to return to pre-crisis status quickly. Resilience exists when the person uses mental processes and behaviors in promoting personal assets and protecting self from the potential negative effects of stressors...”. Google defines the word ‘resiliency’ as “the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness, the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity”. That said, in my own words and for the sake of this submission, I believe resilience is the ability or process to successfully overcome a mentally stressful situation or set of circumstances.

From my due diligence on the subject of resilience, I am choosing to share what I believe to be the crux in exemplifying resilience and that is understanding one's own mental health. Mental health and resilience are directly correlated as one has to be able to successfully problem solve their way through the dynamic of a stressful situations to eventually overcome it. Thus overcoming mental stress is a key component when one is trying to successfully exhibit resilience as there is a cause and effect relationship. Therefore, if one is not successful at navigating their way through mental stress, then resilience will more of a challenge to achieve.

“Stress”, which Google defines as “a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances” will be a constant in all of our lives as life is neither perfect nor fair. For myself, being in their late 30’s, who is married with two kids, lives in San Francisco, and is currently in the “rat race”, certainly has stress ever present. Sometimes resilience is easy to exemplify over stress and sometimes there are factors outside of my control and resilience may be more of a challenge to achieve. However, what gives me solace when trying to navigate through stress or stressful situations is being aware that the we as human beings have the power of “choice” and the ability to “choose” to combat our stress.

It certainly took me years of self improvement to understand the fundamentals of mental health and stress to ultimately be comfortable about talking about it with others. Isn’t it our parents, society, and/or our education system’s responsibility to set up us for success on how to properly deal with stress so that it would be easier to exhibit resilience? This may be a question arissen from my millennial tendency of entitlement, but I can make a valid argument that the current schooling system and society in

general does not prioritize or hold in high regard the importance of mental health. It does not instill “important/essential” life skills such as emotional intelligence, effectively communicating one's feelings, self improving one's lifestyle and diet, management of finances, which are all directly linked to stress. Society seems to value other such things as how prestigious the college you went to is, what your vocation is, what zip code you live in, and how much money one makes. It is my opinion that there needs to be a shift in the national narrative as mental health can be the bane of one's existence. Mental health controls our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

Mental health illnesses are on the rise and has been recently been highlighted in popular culture by the recent deaths of Anthony Bourdain, Chester Bennington, and Robin Williams (all of which committed suicide). Mental health disorders and/or symptoms haunts us all in some form or another whether it is (to name a few mental health disorders) anxiety, addiction, depression, borderline personality disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, attention deficit disorder. Although I myself have not been clinically diagnosed, I can say that I have felt “symptoms” of many mental health disorders. But how are we to exemplify resilience over our mental health issues when they have traditionally been so taboo to talk about and discuss with others? My first step in understanding my own mental health was when I found psychotherapy after learning my father was having an extra-marital affair.

This was a devastating event for me to learn about and at the time I did not have the capacity to problem solve through it nor did I have the necessary tools to be able to exhibit resilience over it. Wikipedia defines Psychotherapy as “the use of psychological methods, particularly when based on regular personal interaction, to help a person change behavior and overcome problems in desired ways. Psychotherapy aims to improve an individual's being and mental health, to resolve or mitigate troublesome behaviors, beliefs, compulsions, thoughts, or emotions, and to improve relationships and social skills”. In simple terms, I describe therapy as the act of sharing your personal issues with an unbiased 3rd party whose sole duty is to provide emotional support and to offer their professional opinions.

My goal when first going to therapy was to learn how to sort through the dynamic surrounding my father's affair and also to understand my own mental health struggles. At the time I was feeling symptoms of anxiety and depression, which include but were not limited to fatigue, irritation, addiction, sleep and concentration issues, vertigo, weight gain, anger, and challenges maintaining interpersonal relationships. Being a film/TV buff, I had always seen therapy as a solution when one was overcome with mental anguish. The company, which I was working at the time, had great medical benefits and covered my therapist sessions with a \$35 co-pay (therapist was in network with my PPO insurance) so I thought to myself, “what the heck, what I was doing up to that point isn't working, so why not try it out”.

On a side note, without “good” insurance benefits or coverage can be quite expensive ranging from over \$100 a session. As a best practice, I would recommend that you interview many candidates to make sure the doctor patient relationship is a good fit as many doctors have different communication styles, beliefs, values, and psychoanalytical approaches.

It took about six months of going to therapy, one hour per week, to develop the framework and foundation that would eventually enable me to execute a strategic approach to create a productive dialogue with my father which eventually led him to apologize to my family. Through the therapy sessions I was able to talk through the stress surrounding my father's affair, which was so hard for me to do prior to that due to my lack ownership/maturity/commitment in wanting to confront it. Therapy not only helped me with the immediate solution, it also taught me an important lesson in forgiveness and that it was a process and not a feeling. Moreover, forgiveness was a path that you had to choose to take when you were ready. Beyond that, therapy also enabled me to identify emotional “triggers” of stress, and how to be aware of them and talk myself through them.

This was a turning point as I was able to become resilient over something which was the single most challenging issue that impacted my life up to that point. Therapy helped changed my life trajectory as from that point I was able to exemplify resilience to improve my mental and physical health, relationships, and outlook on life. I was able to take control of my life by understanding the current state of my mental health and stress levels which was ultimately impacting my mind, body, and soul. This is a daily struggle and I am still trying to learn how to effectively problem solve my daily stressors through practicing self awareness, meditation, reading self help books, and actively listening openly to peer feedback. I am also currently back in therapy after undertaking this project.

My hope is that the conversation on mental health continues to where it will be held in the same regard as physical health/wellness and it being implemented within the educational curriculum taught to our youth. I wish it will no longer be a taboo subject (by appearing to be physically weak) with our friends and families, and that we will all be able to openly share our struggles. I hope I was able to shed light on the mental health and stress. I urge you to self evaluate your current mental health when you are having struggles exemplifying resilience. This may or may not work to solve the situation at hand, but at the very least you are taking the first step in understanding your own mental health and stress levels. That said, one can not help someone that does not want to be helped and in this case if you are not ready to confront your own mental health then I wish you the best as “everyone is on their own journey”.