



**online courses**

BY MATINA JEWELL

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RESILIENCE IN ACTION

# RESILIENCE IS A MUSCLE

*Performing under pressure*



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RESILIENCE IN ACTION

# Resilience is a muscle

Performing under pressure.



Watch the Video

🕒 10 min 10 sec

*noj*

## Video Transcript

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Every year, I am lucky enough to work with hundreds of leading organisations from around the world. This gives me great insight into common themes occurring across industries and companies. Our resilience to respond appropriately to the pace of change are shared challenges we are all facing, especially when unexpected disruptions like a pandemic, impact the world in unprecedented ways.

Our inherent resilience, as individuals, as teams, organisations and even as countries is being tested now more than ever, to get us through these crisis periods.

So, what is resilience and why is it in such high demand for so many organisations globally?

Well to me, resilience is simply the capacity to recover quickly from difficult, tough or trying situations. Part of this, I believe, relates to our ability to adapt and change as quickly as possible to uncertain variables and new environments.

From my own personal experiences in both my military and business careers, I think resilience is linked to mindset and therefore is associated with an emotional state. What I mean by this is, if we have confidence and the belief in ourselves, in our teams, our organizations or even our government and world leaders to get through these tough, changing, challenging times, then we can have the capacity to be more resilient.

In many ways, it self-perpetuates. If we have a positive perspective and a mindset that forms a foundation of confidence, then it enhances our resilience.

With this inherent self-belief, we can then flip it, to see the situation as an opportunity; to not only survive the difficult times, but that new efficient and effective ways of operating could come from these challenges. As an individual, team or organisation, we might actually capitalise and improve through tough conditions. It then becomes a mindset choice, to thrive rather than struggle in survival mode through the change.

So, is resilience a muscle that can be trained, or is resilience simply a trait you are born with? I am frequently asked this question by clients and my response is, 'both'. I certainly agree that some people have stronger natural traits of grit, determination and internal drive that help make them more resilient than others; but likewise, I believe that resilience can be enhanced and trained to help people and businesses become more robust to be able to cope with change.

I think resilience training is something that the military does particularly well. Our forces need to be tough and adaptable on and off the battlefield. A crucial part of how the military builds resilience is by training for warfare, which means, simulating the difficulties, uncertainty and the chaos of a warzone. Our service men and

women don't just sit around in an office planning to go to war. Rather, they get out in the field, endure sleep and food deprivation, the harsh living conditions, physical exertion along with the uncertainty and challenging situations; both mentally and physically. They simulate a war environment as close as possible to battlefield conditions. And they do it frequently.

A crucial aspect of the army officer training that I received was the constant application of high-pressure situations, where we needed to operate calmly, continue making decisions, and to function at a high level, in the face of time-pressure, incomplete information and at times, almost in a state of shock and confusion. All of this, without knowing how long the situation might continue, sometimes hours, days, weeks or even months! The field training exercises would test our physical and mental capabilities both individually and as a team.

In my experience, the military does one particular thing very well to increase resilience, and this is done very differently to what I've observed in the corporate and business arena; the military actually plan for failure. They practise scenarios where it all goes terribly wrong. You see, on the

battlefield there are so many factors that you simply don't have control over, not least, the enemy's responses and actions. So, they need to practise that level of uncertainty in training so they can remain flexible and be better prepared when they experience real warfare.

In military leadership roles, I was often completing training scenarios where it didn't unfold as I had expected it to, where I had to adapt quickly in those environments to find solutions to sudden unforeseen events, making decision after decision, all while trying to remaining calm. You know, I can still hear the training staff yelling at me, 'What are you gonna do now troop commander? Make a decision. Just make a decision and make it now!'.

Looking back, I am so thankful I had that level of pressure cooker training prior to my five overseas missions, and particularly before my service as a peacekeeper with the United Nations during the Lebanon War.

That intense training to perform under pressure was fundamental in equipping me to have the resilience to keep going and to survive.

Drawing on my 15-year military career and my experiences working with business leaders across the globe, I

created a resilience framework; what I call the 7 P's for building resilience:

The first step is 1. Physical and mental self-care. To be resilient we need to look at our health and wellness holistically so we can be in the best physical and mental 'foundation state' possible. Our holistic fitness includes our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual fitness, and combined gives us the foundation to be at an optimal level of resilience.

Physical and mental self-care extends to how we manage ourselves to ensure;

- we get sufficient quality sleep,
- nutrient rich food and fluids to fuel our body and mind appropriately,
- daily movement and exercise,
- finding balance in our lives from work, family, hobbies and including taking time to relax and rejuvenate,
- our sense of connection and perceived strength of our relationships with our colleagues, family, friends and others; and
- mindfulness, breath, gratitude, and meditation in what-ever form works for you.

The second step is 2. Pressure. Improving how we manage pressure by actually practising being in high pressure situations. Then importantly, when we can, we need to rest. Even

micro-breaks help. We need to adjust our 'combat' ready state, with appropriate energy and outputs so that we have capacity to continue operating for extended periods of time.

Step 3. Positivity. Each 'win', where we succeed through a challenge, helps build our confidence to face the next situation with a more positive mindset.

Step 4. Plan for failure. In expecting the best, but planning for the 'worst case scenario', then it's less of a surprise when it doesn't pan out the way we hoped. With contingency plans in place, we are better equipped and more likely to have the flexibility and mindset needed to adapt and overcome unforeseen events.

Step 5. Perspective and Expectations. Manage expectations so that uncertainty is not an obstacle. Practice using perspective shifts to help view any situation through a positive lens; this is vital to maintaining positivity for resilience. We will cover the power of perspective in more detail later in this course.

Step 6. Purpose. Focus on the overarching mission purpose as this tends to combine and unite people during difficult situations and if that purpose helps others it often has a

double positive effect. Purpose also assists to increase connection and contribution of individuals. In module 6 of this program we further explore the importance of purpose and how having a clearly defined purpose can boost your resilience significantly.

And finally, Step 7. Prize - Reward small steps and create a culture that celebrates the 'wins', even the incremental small wins help build resilience.

You will find a copy of my 7 P's of resilience framework in your workbooks and an activity to help you put these steps into practise in your own life. So now it's time to head to the workbook and let's start building your resilience muscle.

## Reflecting on the Video

1. What is your key takeout from the video?

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2. How do you define resilience? What does it mean to you to be resilient?

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3. Thinking about this, is there anything you would like to stop/start/continue in your work or life in general? This could be anything from reviewing self limiting beliefs to dealing with uncomfortable emotions better.

Stop:

Start:

Continue:

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4. Thinking of the different hats that you wear, what are three things that you are willing to commit to?

Work:

Home:

Other:

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5. Consider sharing one or more of these commitments with an accountability buddy (or if you wish, broadcast it to all your friends via your social media)?

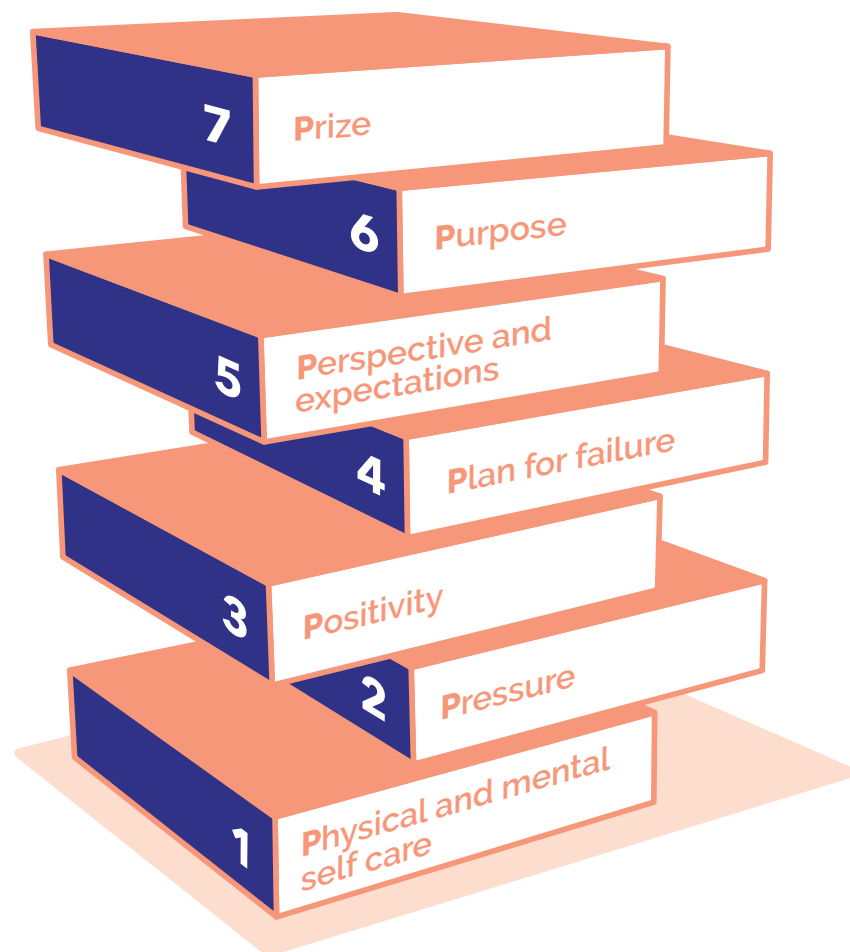
☐ Done

6. Take at least one positive action on one of those commitments today.

☐ Done

7. Take a positive action on each of those commitments.

☐ Done



## 7Ps of Resilience

Drawing on my 15-year military career and my experiences working with business leaders across the globe, I created a resilience framework; that I call the 7 P's for building resilience.

### Brief

The following 7 P's are the critical elements I rely on to build and maintain resilience in myself, and my teams. <sup>1</sup>

1. **Physical, Mental, Emotional & Spiritual Self-Care.** Resilience begins with our health and wellness so we can be in the best shape possible. It includes basics, like getting quality sleep and ensuring we fuel with high quality whole foods, through to the mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of ourselves. This area also talks to connection and contribution to family, friends, colleagues, and communities. And finally, character – your values and sense of how you want to 'be'.
2. **Pressure.** We all have different perceived tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty. I am also an advocate for practising being in high pressure situations and prioritising rest and recovery when appropriate. We do not always need to be 'combat ready', instead we need to adjust our stance with appropriate energy and output so that we have capacity to continue operating for extended periods of time. Managing our perceptions of stress and pressure significantly impacts how we cope and how we deal with setbacks and challenges.

3. **Positivity.** Previous wins, succeeding and overcoming challenges all help to build confidence and face new situations and experiences positively. Am I usually optimistic? Do I move past loss and discouragement and see difficulties as temporary with an expectation that I will overcome them? Do I have tools in my kit bag, like a quick humour reset? Do I value fun? Do I laugh at myself?
4. **Plan for Failure.** Can I adapt quickly to changing developments? Do I have plans that include 'worst case scenarios', so I am less surprised when they happen? Do I have back-up plans? Do I learn from others? Do I have flexibility within my mindset most of the time when doing decision-making and iterating, rather than making no decision?
5. **Perspective and Expectations.** Do I manage the expectations of myself and others so that fear and uncertainty present as less of an obstacle? Am I curious around my perspective, to help view the situation through a positive lens? Do I see change as an opportunity and see setbacks as learning opportunities?
6. **Purpose.** Do I have a well-defined purpose to help provide the strength, durability, and grit to persist during challenging times? As a team, do we have an overarching purpose to help build connections and contributions?
7. **Prize.** Do we create a culture that rewards resilience, recognising and rewarding valued actions (including the small steps)?

## Task

Complete the resilience 'muscle builder' table below.

1. What do you want to continue/start/stop doing and consider how it will feel? <sup>2</sup>

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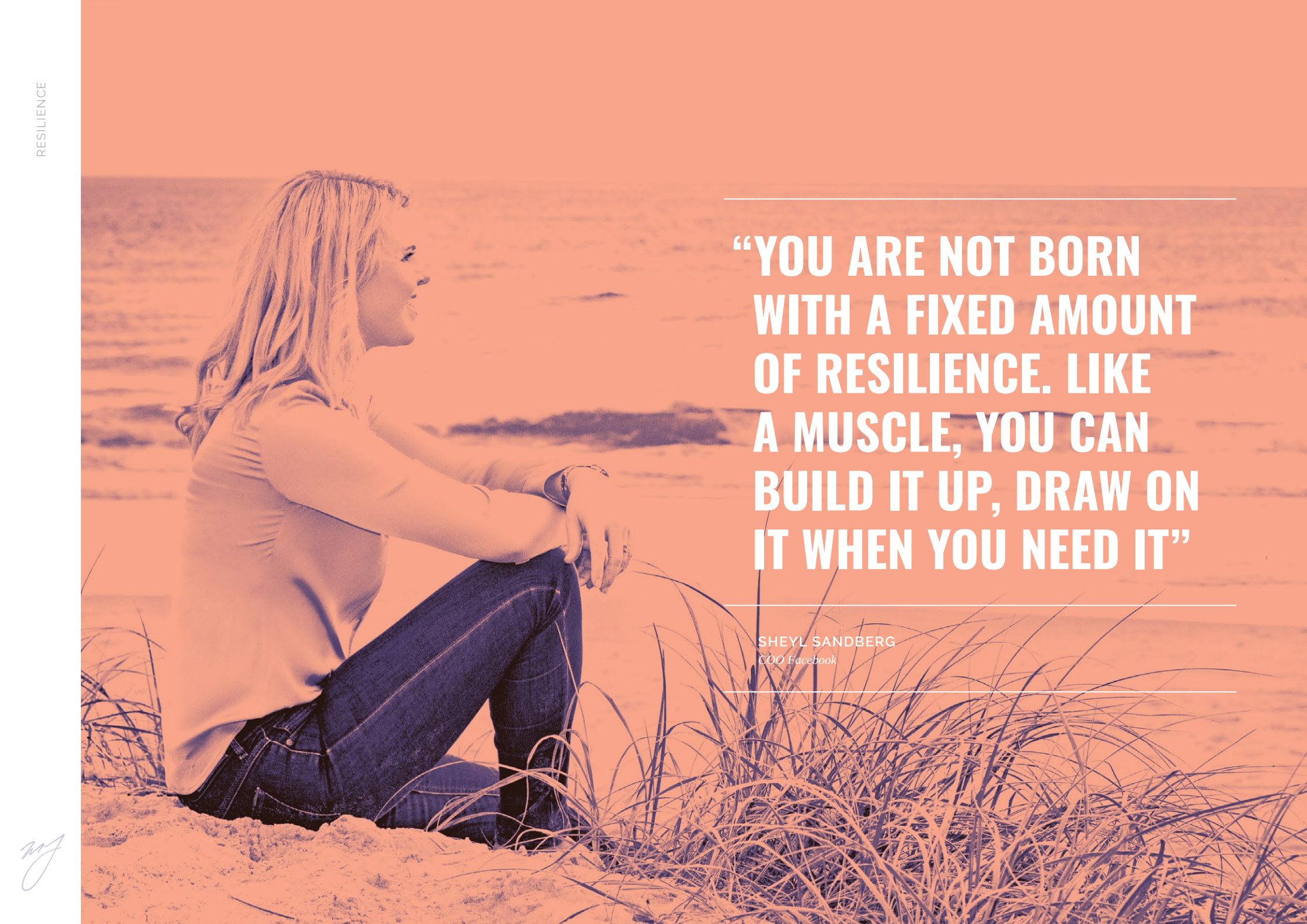
2. The 7 P's are the focus areas I use to build and maintain resilience in myself and my teams, there may be something more important to help you build and maintain your resilience. Feel free to make it your own.

<sup>2</sup> Considering the positivity of the feeling has been shown to improve motivation and commitment toward achieving a goal.

3. Choose an area of focus

| 7P's for Building Resilience® | Continue. | Stop. | Start. | Feeling? |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-------|--------|----------|
| Self-Care                     |           |       |        |          |
| Pressure                      |           |       |        |          |
| Positivity                    |           |       |        |          |
| Plan for Failure              |           |       |        |          |
| Perspective and Expectations  |           |       |        |          |
| Purpose                       |           |       |        |          |
| Prize                         |           |       |        |          |
| Anything else?                |           |       |        |          |
| Focus Area                    |           |       |        |          |



A woman with long blonde hair is sitting on a sand dune, looking out at the ocean. She is wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark jeans. The background is a vast, calm ocean under a clear sky. The entire image has a warm, orange-toned overlay.

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**“YOU ARE NOT BORN  
WITH A FIXED AMOUNT  
OF RESILIENCE. LIKE  
A MUSCLE, YOU CAN  
BUILD IT UP, DRAW ON  
IT WHEN YOU NEED IT”**

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SHEYL SANDBERG  
*COO Facebook*

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## Get Fighting Fit

Energy is a funny thing. You have got to work to get more of it. But work too hard and you lose it. As we will learn shortly, there is a balancing act between putting ourselves under 'load' to perform... and recovery.

### Brief

- I wanted our first adventure together to kick-off on the right foot.
- This exercise is about raising your self-awareness.
- If resilience can be built like a muscle, we need to manage our training and energy for success.

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*In The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal, Tony Schwartz and Jim Loehr propose that there are four key areas of our life which we need to manage in order to excel, prevent burnout and to develop our resilience. Those areas are physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.*

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**“When I want real change, I need to commit and make the contract with myself.”**

MATINA JEWELL, 2020



## Challenge: Let's get moving!

Let's run a little experiment to test the link between our mental state and physical exercise, this could be as simple as a 20 minute walk.

1. What would an ideal 'active' day look like for you in terms of exercise?

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2. Nail your ideal active day, 3 times this week.

☐ Done

3. How did it feel immediately after exercise? And for the rest of the day?

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4. Consider challenging yourself to 2 or 3 ideal exercise days next week.

☐ Done

5. What else could you do for you, to ensure your commitment to 'move' does not get swallowed-up in life's conflicting priorities (e.g. make exercise your first ritual of the day)?

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## Top-tip

The science is in the potential benefit to our health, around the importance of being exposed to sunlight when we wake in the morning. Consider exercising outside first thing and tick both boxes! <sup>3</sup>

### According to Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges:

"Researchers believe that during vigorous aerobic exercise, the "anxiety-sensitive" person is forced to tolerate many of the same symptoms (that is, rapid heart rate, sweating, and rapid breathing) that frighten him or her during periods of anxiety. Over time, the "anxiety-sensitive" individual who continues to exercise vigorously can learn that these symptoms of arousal are typically not dangerous, and the fear that these symptoms trigger gradually decreases in intensity"

SALMON, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-sleep-daylight/morning-daylight-exposure-tied-to-a-good-nights-sleep-idUSKCN18E23E>

## Recover: Rest

Resilience is NOT always about doubling-down to push through. High achievers know it is also about resting to ensure sustained optimal performance.

Next, a rest-test! Consider how you might rest to recover?

1. How many hours quality regenerative sleep would you ideally get each night? What's your routine; what time would you go to sleep and get up?

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2. Without wanting to sound like your mum... Do it! Get your ideal sleep for 1 night.

☐ Done

3. Note how you feel. What was the knock-on effect of that on your productivity and flow?

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Challenge yourself to prioritise getting your ideal level of sleep for at least 2 or 3 days in the coming week and be conscious of how you feel.

☐ Done

4. What else could you prioritise in your routine to help rest/recovery for sustained optimal performance?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

5. Consider whether you get enough 'respite from people'?

**A survey of 18,000 people from 134 countries chose the following as 'rest' activities, as one of three choices. Curiously, all involved what could be done (by choice), alone.**

### Top restful activities

■ % of people choosing each activity as one of three choices



Source: The Rest Test, Hubbub at the Wellcome Collection

BBC





Intake: Food as Medicine

We are what we eat, as the saying goes. Seeing food as medicine for prevention of ill-health is worth pondering.

1. What would a day of your ideal diet look like?

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2. Follow your ideal diet for a day?

☐ Done

3. How did it feel, after you ate a healthy meal? What about immediately after greasy/heavy/fast food?

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4. Consider challenging yourself to eat your ideal diet for an entire week, with 'one day off' to treat yourself.

☐ Done

## Trigger Warnings and Taming the Amygdala

Being able to reflect is a powerful way for us to improve our emotional intelligence, and our resilience.

### Brief

Being able to reflect is a powerful way for us to improve our emotional intelligence and our resilience. But as we know, for real change we need to be prepared to use that reflection to help shape our future actions. The trouble with stress and stressful situations, is that it has a way of clouding our judgement. And it can throw all our good planning and intentions out the window!

That's why for this challenge, may I ask that you to think about your typical stress 'triggers'?

The things that 'get your goat', 'rile-you-up' and get you 'seeing red'. Think back to something that got a substantial response in you.

This is known as the amygdala hijack.

And what happens when something conflicts with a deeper story that we might be telling ourselves; a clash with the filter (or perhaps an irrational 'core belief') that we are putting out to the world.

## Task

The following tasks can be completed in conjunction with the 'Taming the Amygdala' Tool over-page.

1. Think of 3 triggers for you.

### Examples:

- Your kids are not doing what you have asked them to do (despite asking them 10 times!).
- Someone in a position of power instructing you to do something that you consider completely unreasonable.
- Your partner doing something contrary to your expectations.

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2. What is your typical response to that situation? Now, and this may be difficult for you if we are being honest with ourselves, think about what is really going on.

Can I ask you to try something here? Could you try to really make a deliberate effort to park:

- Your bias.
- Any penchant for judgement.
- Preconceived ideas and beliefs?

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3. Can you identify the emotion you feel?

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4. Try separating yourself, from yourself. What I mean is, think of yourself in third person, looking at yourself. Now, may I ask you to consider what is behind that knee-jerk, automatic reaction to the trigger? What is the story you are telling yourself?

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5. Then, finally, think forward to what your ideal alternate/considered response would be rather than the automatic reaction.

Roleplay one of your ideal responses when triggered by the pre-condition. Preferably role play with a real-live human, but you can use your imagination if you prefer!

☐ Done

6. Commit to nailing your ideal response without automatically reacting the next time you are exposed to the trigger.

☐ Done

7. Repeat for the other two ideal responses.

☐ Done

8. The next time you override your automatic trigger response, celebrate it. And celebrate it when you see it in action for those around you. For me, it might be to simply give my partner a hug when I see him offer a considered response, rather than reacting to something that has in the past, triggered him.

☐ Done

Taming the Amygdala Tool

| Trigger | Response and instinctive action(s) | What is the emotion you are feeling (e.g. mad, sad, glad, happy...)? | What is really going on? What's the story behind the story? | What would a more constructive, 'ideal' response be? |
|---------|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
|         |                                    |  |   |  |
|         |                                    |  |   |  |
|         |                                    |  |   |  |
|         |                                    |  |   |  |



## Bonus Exercise 1

### Be Mindful

#### Brief

**Exercise mindfulness.** People all over the world - and increasingly in leading organisations at work too - are turning their attention to mental training practices associated with mindfulness.

And for good reason.

Social psychologists have shown that mindfulness can lead to significant improvements in areas like judgement and insight-related problem solving, cognitive flexibility, and even three critical dimensions of work engagement - vigour, dedication and absorption. Others, such as preventative medicine researchers Kimberley Allen, have proved that online mindfulness programs can not only reduce stress and improve resilience, but also serve to improve general well-being and organisational performance.<sup>5</sup>

“*Mindfulness practices that specifically emphasise acceptance teach us a non-judgmental attitude toward our experiences—meaning, learning not to label our thoughts, feelings, or experiences as good or bad, and trying not to change or resist them in any way*”

BERKLEY'S MINDFULNESS AND RESILIENCE TO  
STRESS AT WORK, EDX COURSE.

<sup>4</sup> Berkley's Mindfulness and Resilience to Stress at Work, EdX course, <https://courses.edx.org/courses/course-v1:BerkeleyX+GG202x+1T2020/courseware/aa34d98ed7f34c4684fd28a5c6538335/724139027a904bacb0c76fe73cba99ba/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://hbr.org/2016/06/627-building-resilience-ic-5-ways-to-build-your-personal-resilience-at-work>



## Task

Are you new to mindfulness? Or are you a qualified yogi, recently returned from a 10-day silent retreat? Either way...

1. Try spending 2 minutes practicing mindfulness.

In a guided mindfulness exercise, you might hear a voice gently say:

- For two minutes, you simply concentrate on being present.
- Focus on the breath.
- If you drift off to a thought, acknowledge it, without any judgement and come back to being present.
- Are your feelings taking over? Acknowledge it, without any judgement and come back to being present.

Are you a little more advanced? Try imaging you are breathing into your entire body through your skin. (Some are thinking WTF? I know right, it sounds crazy right? Go on. Try it!)

**Top Tip:** Why not try 'habit stacking' - couple two minutes of being mindfully present with an activity that you already do like exercising, making a cup of tea or brushing your teeth.

☐ Done

2. How did you find the exercise? Was 2 minutes easy or difficult? Where did your thoughts and feelings go? Were you able to acknowledge them without chastising yourself and come back to being present? What else did you notice and how did you feel immediately afterwards?

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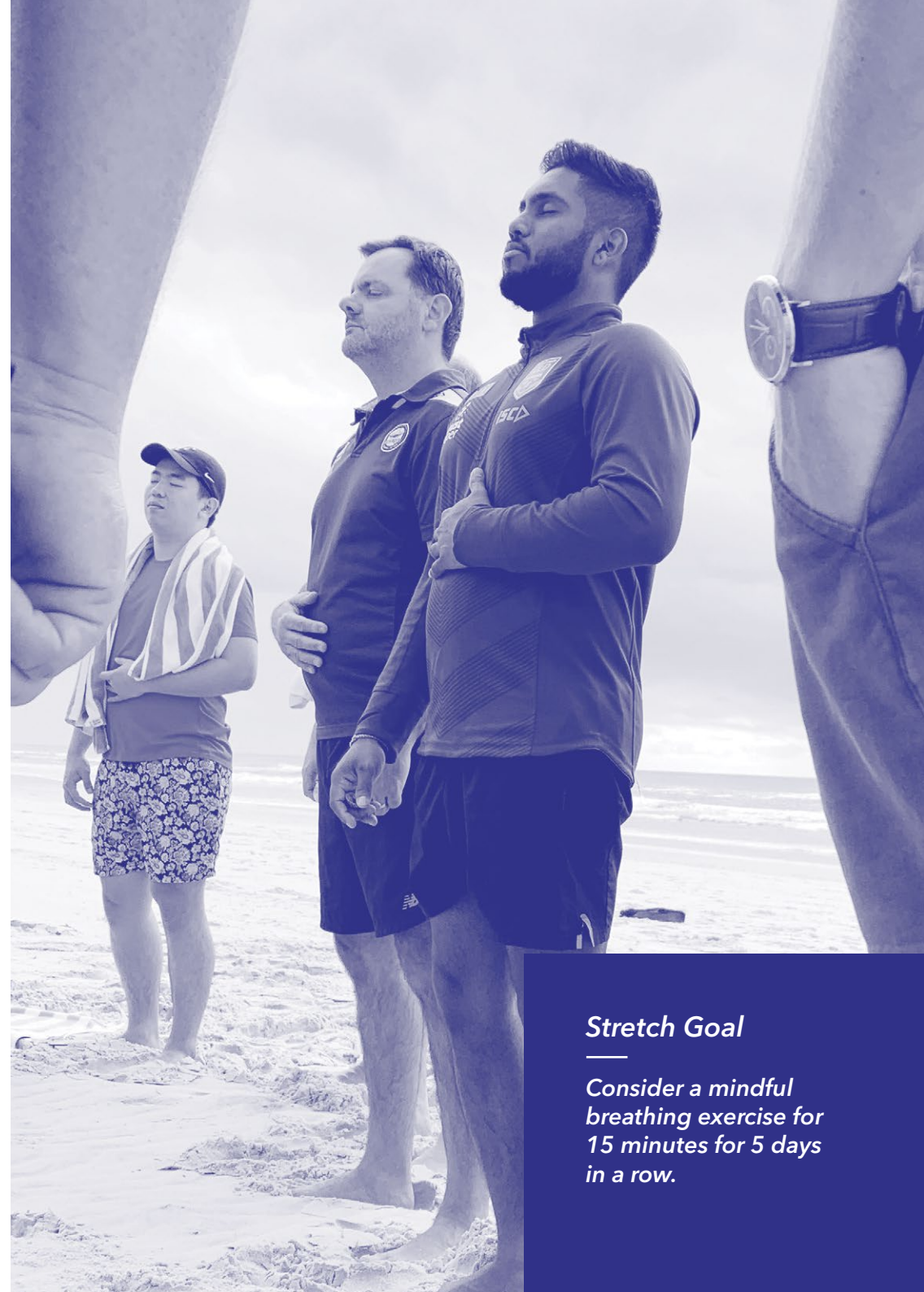
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3. Would you consider practising mindfulness again? If so, let's set a reminder for three days this week.

☐ Done



### Stretch Goal

Consider a mindful breathing exercise for 15 minutes for 5 days in a row.



## Bonus Exercise 2

### Embrace A Challenge

#### Brief

Like building muscle strength at the gym, our capability to tolerate stress and pressure can be improved incrementally.

Let us put ourselves under some strain to achieve something that is meaningful to you.

## Task

Think of a 'big-ticket' goal (your choice, no one else's). Perhaps it is something you have been putting off or avoiding.

1. What is the goal?

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2. What is one high-leverage impact activity that could efficiently move you toward that goal, immediately?

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3. Do it, within 24 hours.

☐ Done

4. What could you do to meaningfully move toward your big-ticket goal within the next week? Or, if you like, build-out an action plan (with headings including: Activity, Timing, Responsibility, etc).

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5. Go get it!

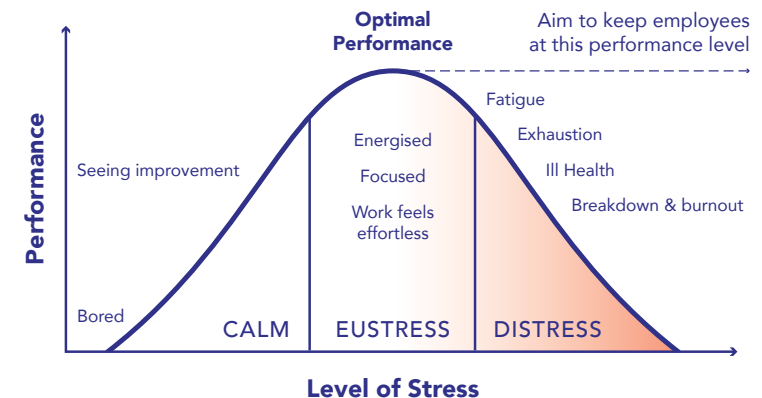
☐ Done

## Bonus Exercise 3

### Select Readings

#### Reading: Understanding Stress Eustress – Finding the Sweet Spot

I am sure you know this, but it is worth a friendly reminder of the important fact that not all stress is created equal. There is such a thing as 'good stress' (known as Eustress). Harness that, and you're on your way to better motivation, better productivity and better health. But push it too far (distress), or don't push it enough, and that's where our personal and professional lives start to suffer. Stress that causes us to experience difficulty or unhealthy strain – "distress" – is a major cause for concern as it directly and adversely affects personal and business success.<sup>6 7</sup>



#### Research: Vigour

According to Shirom (2004), having 'vigour', that is having the capacity to put our full energy and motivation into work, leads to an increased sense of control, adaptability, and helps build our resilience. In fact, it is seen as the opposite of burnout.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <https://hbr.org/2016/06/627-building-resilience-ic-5-ways-to-build-your-personal-resilience-at-work>

<sup>7</sup> <https://hbr.org/2016/06/627-building-resilience-ic-5-ways-to-build-your-personal-resilience-at-work>

<sup>8</sup> <https://positivepsychology.com/resilience-in-the-workplace/>



## Reading: Robert Sapolsky on the Psychology of Stress

“ Do you remember the term homeostasis from Year 9 Biology?

Homeostasis is having an ideal body temperature. An ideal level of glucose in the bloodstream. Having an ideal level of... everything. That is being in homeostatic balance.

Now, a stressor is anything in the outside world that knocks you out of homeostatic balance.

Say you're a zebra and a lethal lion has leapt out and ripped your stomach open and your innards are dragging in the dust and dirt, but you still need to get out of there. This counts as being out of homeostatic balance. Or you are a lion who is half starved to death. And if you don't manage to chase something down to eat right now, you're not going to survive the night.

In a short-term **physical** crisis, the stress response is what your body does. You secrete adrenaline and "elevate" several other hormones that I will not torture you with. The stress response occurs and then the body naturally re-establishes a move back toward homeostatic balance. And that is that for the zebra or lion.

If you are human, some of the time we turn on the stress response because we think we are about to be stressed in the future. And if it turns out that if you're right, that could be helpful; there is an aerial attack by fighter jets inbound, let's head to the bunker before then and we experience the increase in blood pressure that goes with it. It is an anticipatory stress response. Great!

On the other hand, if you think that way all the time and you are constantly assuming that there are stressors coming that **do not** really exist, we have technical terms for you - you are being neurotic! You are being anxious. You are being paranoid. You could even be hostile. In truth, you are being profoundly human.

So, while a hippo will not get too worried about bank lending rates, we do. And that is the central concept. We are cognitively, socially, sophisticated primates. We turn on the exact same stress response as does that zebra running for its life from the lion. And we turn it on for purely psychological reasons. We turn it on with memories, with emotions, with thoughts. And the thing is, that is not what it evolved for."

"What stress is like for 99% of the beasts on this planet is three minutes of screaming terror in the savannah after which it is either over with or you're over with. And what do we do? We turn on the identical stress response for 30-year mortgages.

And that's where you begin to get the wear and tear on the system".<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> [https://courses.edx.org/courses/course-v1:BerkeleyX+GG202x+1T2020/courseware/798e722bdb7b4a8189cd7d0890fc0dcd/4fb1f966807c494ca26898d6c7d25fd2/?activate\\_block\\_id=block-v1%3ABerkeleyX%2BGG202x%2B1T2020%2Btype%40sequential%2Bblock%404fb1f966807c494ca26898d6c7d25fd2](https://courses.edx.org/courses/course-v1:BerkeleyX+GG202x+1T2020/courseware/798e722bdb7b4a8189cd7d0890fc0dcd/4fb1f966807c494ca26898d6c7d25fd2/?activate_block_id=block-v1%3ABerkeleyX%2BGG202x%2B1T2020%2Btype%40sequential%2Bblock%404fb1f966807c494ca26898d6c7d25fd2)

## Notes