

RESILIENCE IN ACTION

FACING FEAR

Fast Rope from a Chopper



online courses

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Fast Rope from a Chopper.



Watch the Video

🕒 8 min 23 sec



Video Transcript

Welcome back to the resilience program. So far, we have covered performing under pressure and the need to exercise the resilience muscle so we can find calm in the chaos of a crisis, and the need for flexibility so we can adapt to changing environments.

In this section of the program, I am going to share the tips and tools I use for facing fear and being able to continue making decisions and operating in highly stressful or even life-threatening situations.

The importance of learning how to face my fears and continue functioning became apparent to me when I was a young army officer, just 23 years of age. Because of my highly specialised knowledge in amphibious warfare and water transport operations, I found myself in a rather unusual situation where I was posted to a Navy ship as part of the ship's actual crew.

I had also just been promoted to the rank of Captain. So, on my first day of this new posting I arrived in Sydney to take up my appointment as second in command of the Army department onboard HMAS Kanimbla. But only 2 weeks into this new job, my boss, who was a rank above me, an Army Major, fell ill and left the ship at short notice and never returned!

Subsequently, I found myself promoted for the second time in only two weeks. I was now Acting Major commanding the army department on Australia's largest Naval vessel, HMAS Kanimbla, for the next two years. This meant I

was now responsible for the planning, coordination, and execution of the amphibious offload of up to 1,000 soldiers, their vehicles and equipment, from not only Kanimbla but from multiple navy ships simultaneously. To complete these operations, I had at my disposal at times 6 helicopters and 10 watercrafts.

I was suddenly finding that this new job simply required being thrown in the deep end constantly, and learning how to swim, fast! It also meant that I was frequently feeling fear as I continued to feel completely out of my depth.

Just when I thought I was starting to get a handle on the role, I was informed by the ship's captain that he needed me to fulfil an extra two functions; firstly, the ship's diving officer which required completing the physically demanding navy divers course and secondly; learning to fast-rope from helicopters.

Now fast roping is a special technique designed to get you from a helicopter, down to the ground, in ultra-quick time. In order to do this, there is simply no safety equipment whatsoever!

If you look closely at this photograph you will see that there is not even a repelling harness, and there is no great big safety net to break your fall if you should completely stuff this one up! But instead, you simply have your hands and your feet on the rope using a special technique that is designed to control your very, very rapid descent down to the ground, onto a wharf or even to board a smuggler ship in the North Arabian Gulf.

Because of the safety considerations with this activity, in the Australian Army, fast roping is only ever performed by our special forces soldiers, so this was a skill I never expected to be asked to qualify in given I was a female logistics officer, so it was something I had never imagined being asked to do during my career. But special waivers were signed off by the Chief of the Defence Force allowing me to do this on operations in the Middle East.

Learning to fast-rope was not only a huge physical challenge, in the sense that I had to have the strength and endurance to hold myself on the rope, dressed in body armour and carrying

weapons. But more importantly, this was a huge mental challenge, because I am absolutely terrified of heights! The whole notion of jumping out of a perfectly safe helicopter only using a piece of rope seemed completely ridiculous in my mind.

So, in many ways, I had to overcome my own fears, my fear of heights in particular, in order to qualify in this skill and take up my appointment as leader of the assault team.

But I did manage to do this and that is me in the photograph, hanging on the rope underneath the helicopter. What I took away from the experience of learning to fast-rope was that it is actually natural, in fact, it's 100% normal for us all to feel this sensation of fear when we're faced with a new challenge, or if we're going through a period of intense and significant changes. But if we can accept that often the best growth and learning opportunities actually arise from these types of situations where we are pushed outside of our comfort zones and we're challenged to try something new.

And if at the same time we can reduce the boundaries and limitations that each and every one of us is guilty of placing limitations upon ourselves. You know, we think we are only capable

of a certain amount of achievement. But if we can push those boundaries aside and give ourselves permission to at least just have a go, have a crack at something new, we might be surprised by what we (and our teams) can actually achieve.

And concurrently, we need to reduce the pressure of success and failure. Have you noticed how much we actually learn from our failures, and how our failures tend to imbed very deeply and we remember the lessons from these experiences for a really long time? So, if we can shift our mindset to see the challenges as opportunities, then we will always learn something from the experience, even if it doesn't go to plan and isn't the success we had hoped for.

As a result of my experiences, I've created a process called the "Five For Fear Framework" that I find is useful when tackling fear. The five steps are:

1. Normalise the emotion of fear
2. Reduce self-limiting beliefs
3. Give ourselves permission to have a go
4. Remove the pressure of failure, and
5. View challenges as opportunities

As a military commander, it was crucial that I could continue operating in the face of fear. I used this five-step process to harness my fear throughout my army career but particularly on the battlefield. When I was under fire with incoming rounds, I needed to be able to sit with the fear, normalise and allow the fear to exist as a natural response. There were also times where I needed to momentarily put the fear emotion aside so that I could continue to perform, so that I could remain in a decision-making mindset and keep making decisions to stay alive. But even in that process of 'parking the fear' I would still be acknowledging that it exists, not trying to shut down the emotion of fear.

In the business world, I have also found that we need to face fear and manage our emotions whilst working under considerable pressure. I've worked with leaders across many industries, who have shared that they frequently experience fear while making decisions, being responsible for financial outcomes, solving a variety of problems or even while communicating their vision, plans and directions for tasks and projects to their team members.

Regardless of the source of the fear, I've found it's important to acknowledge the sensation and work through it using the 5 steps I've outlined to achieve optimal performance. The activities in your workbook for this module are also going to help you do just that, with practical tools to build your resilience, work through challenges, take the pressure off, and help create agility and tenacity in the face of fear.

Reflecting on the Video

Fear for Five[®]



1. What stands out for you from the video and 'Five for Fear' Framework?

2. Focusing on one key take-out, what would you like to stop/start/continue doing?
Stop: _____
Start: _____
Continue: _____
3. Consider sharing this with a buddy to help you keep accountable.
 Done
4. Bring this commitment into life - take action on something in your work/home/other aspect of your life.
 Done
5. Set a reminder to consider revisiting this challenge in a few week's time.
 Done

Task

1. Think of something in your life, be it work or personal, where fear is holding you back from achieving it.

Using the Five for Fear Framework break down the barriers to success:

2. Normalise the fear. Sit with the emotion and understand why you are feeling fear.

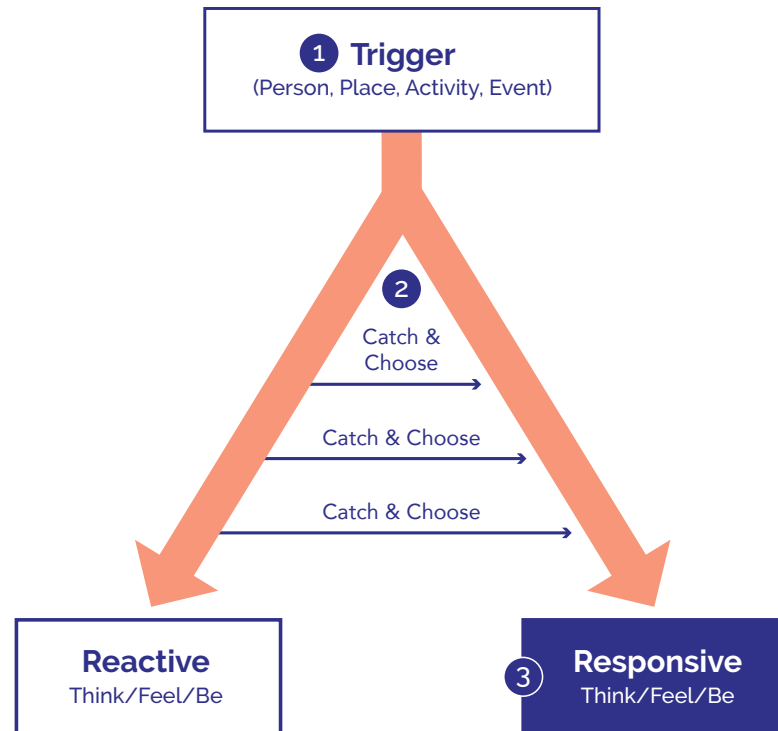
3. Check in to see if there are any self-limiting beliefs holding you back?

4. Give yourself permission to at least try. Commit to having a go. What could you start today?

5. Remove the pressure of failure. Think of what you might learn even if you don't succeed?

6. See the challenge through a positive filter. What opportunities could arise from trying?

React-Respond Framework[®]



React... or Respond

The trick is to have the awareness you are slipping into a way of thinking and feeling based on a belief system that is not serving you well.

Brief

When faced with a trigger you are faced with a choice. Often when triggered, we automatically (subconsciously) move toward negative choices. With awareness, we have the choice to move toward values and the kind of person you want to be.

How?

1. Catch yourself early and often when exposed to a trigger.
2. Recognise that you have the ability to choose to be responsive (considered, poised), or reactive (eg lashing out).
3. How do you choose to think/feel/be?

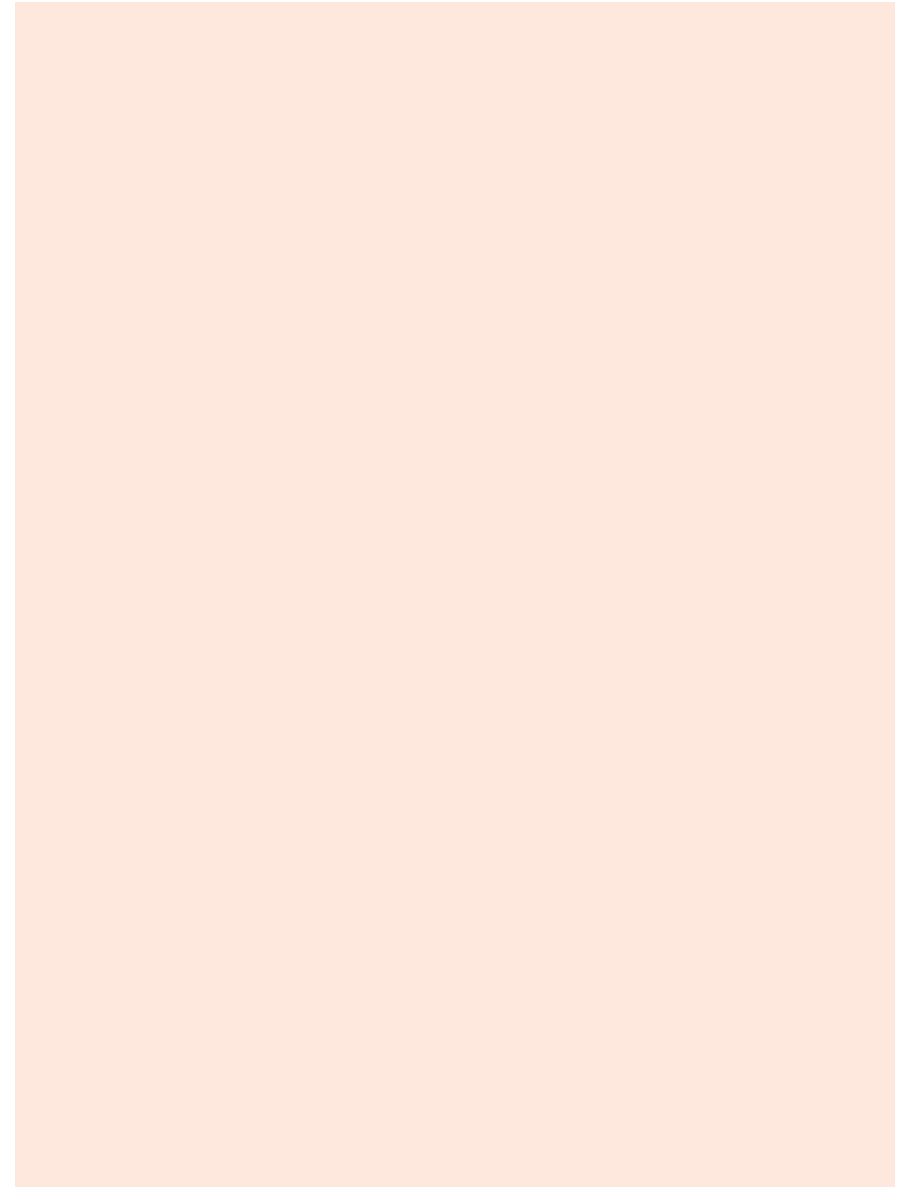
Task

Consider a recent react-respond situation where you were triggered and re-work it for a better outcome.

Write the process down (preferred) or run a mental exercise in your mind

1. Draw up React-Respond in the space below based on a situation you would like to explore. Think of a situation you've had recently where you wished you had reacted differently.
2. Write down the thoughts and any feelings (eg sad, mad, glad or happy) that went with it.
3. How might you have caught yourself, before reacting?
For example, taking a deep breath (or better, take two!), bringing yourself to the present and re-considering.
4. If you are now able to choose, how do you choose to think/feel/be?
5. Use the React-Respond Framework once in real life.
 Done
6. Use the React-Respond Framework 3 times.
 Done

Activity: React-Respond Framework



**“LEADING AND
OPERATING IN THE
FACE OF FEAR WAS A
VITAL SKILL I NEEDED
TO SURVIVE THE
LEBANON WAR”**

MATINA JEWELL
2020



How Would You Treat A Friend?

A simple thought exercise to encourage you to take it a little easier on yourself.

Brief

Kristen Neff is a psychology professor who specialises in self-compassion, and this task draws inspiration from our favourite exercise that she runs. It's a simple thought exercise to encourage you to take it a little easier on yourself.

According to Kristin Neff, below are the three elements of self-compassion:¹

1. Self-kindness vs. Self-judgment
2. Common Humanity vs. Isolation
3. Mindfulness vs. Over-identification

¹ <https://self-compassion.org/the-three-elements-of-self-compassion-2/>.

Task

1. Imagine a time when one of your close friends is really struggling and feeling bad about themselves. Now imagine that they've asked you for a chat about it right now. Jot down what you might say or more importantly, the tone in which your 'ideal self' would talk to your friend.

2. Now think about the typical times when you feel bad about yourself or were struggling. How was your self-talk...and tone?

3. Did you notice a difference?
If no... please take a moment to celebrate it with gratitude.
If so, please ask yourself 'why?'
What leads you to treat yourself and others differently?

4. Finally, consider how you think things might change for the better if you responded to yourself in the same way you typically respond to a close friend when you're suffering.

5. Lock-in to try self-compassion this week. Can you start right now?

Done



Top Tip

Take a break from whatever has you stuck. Get moving - exercise offers arguably the best mental boost possible. Or, if I can, I will sleep on it and leave it to my subconscious to solve!

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Bonus Exercise 1

Positive Thinking to Help Smash Your Goals

Pick one for each day of the week and mark it in your diary or to-do list to consciously focus on.

1. Avoid absolutes and exaggerations
2. Halt negative thoughts immediately
3. Look for the positive
4. Focus on what you learnt if you blow it
5. Do not hold yourself to standards you wouldn't expect of others
6. Replace criticism with encouragement
7. Lose the guilt
8. Acknowledge that all you are really responsible for... is yourself
9. Own your feelings
10. Be kind to yourself
11. Let it go
12. Accept compliments
13. Let painful memories and feelings go
14. Focus on what is possible

Good Read Recommendation



In his most excellent book , 'The Third Space', Dr Adam Fraser shows us how to use that moment of transition between a first activity and the next that follows it, to mentally 'show up' right for whatever comes next. Gaining control of the Third Space will empower you to consistently be your best for your work, your family, your friends, and yourself. ²

In his second book, 'Strive', Dr Fraser reveals why challenge, struggle and setbacks are the keys to living a profoundly satisfying life, that fosters authentic happiness.

² Adam and I met during a roadshow on the speaking circuit and with his wife Christine and two beautiful daughters, we have become great friends



Me! 😊

What I took away from the experience of learning to fast-rope was that it is actually natural, in fact, it's 100% normal for us all to feel this sensation of fear when we're faced with a new challenge, or if we're going through a period of intense and significant changes.

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Bonus Exercise 2

Cut Out the Shoulda/Woulda/ Coulda!

Brief

"Who among us isn't tired of the many 'shoulds'?", says Dorothy Firman Ed.D. LMHC, BCC.³

'Should' (and it's many other forms) are not good for the soul. They serve only to increase stress and place more pressure on us.

Task: Never Say Never... or 'Shoulda'

1. Commit to going a day without using the word should (and if you do, give yourself a negative consequence - just something innocuous but real, so your brain knows we are serious about this!).
 Done
2. Go a whole week without using the word should.
 Done

³ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/living-life-purpose/201101/the-choice-point>





Bonus Exercise 3

Facing Fear

Brief

Sometimes, we just need to confront the fear and anxiety head on.

For those that need the theory, here you go. (For those that do not, feel free to skip straight through to the activity.)

"To extinguish a fear-conditioned memory, one must be exposed to the fear-inducing stimulus in a safe environment, and this exposure needs to last long enough for the brain to form a new memory which conveys that the fear-conditioned stimulus is no longer dangerous in the present environment. Brain imaging findings suggest that extinction may involve a strengthening of the capacity of the PFC to inhibit amygdala-based fear responses (Phelps et al., 2004). Several approaches to treating anxiety disorders such as PTSD and phobias have been shown to be effective in promoting extinction.⁴

From Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges.

⁴ <https://time.com/4306492/boost-emotional-resilience/>

Additional Reading

The Progress Principle

Achieving and recognizing regular “small wins” helps people have rich, engaged, and productive work lives.

As you know, happy, engaged, and productive team members can achieve far more than unhappy team members.⁵

Professor Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer wrote in detail about how progress can boost performance in their 2011 book, “The Progress Principle.”

In their research, they asked 238 people (from 26 project teams in seven major organizations) to keep an anonymous diary, so that they could track their experiences daily. They received more than 12,000 separate diary entries, which they used to analyse people’s “inner work lives” - their perceptions, emotions, and motivation levels - and to explore how this affected their performance.

They found that when people consistently take steps forward - even small steps - on meaningful projects, they are more creative, productive, and engaged, and they have better relationships.

This, in turn, has a positive influence on their work performance.

The moral: Progress and momentum is important. Set mini goals and celebrate the small wins too, to keep the sense of momentum going.

⁵ <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/progress-theory.htm>

Task: Reflect on your Team Norms

Last week my team and I reached an important milestone that we had worked consistently to achieve over the past 18 months. So, we opened a particularly nice bottle of bubbles to quietly celebrate after work on Friday afternoon.

I have found that sometimes we can become so focused on goals that before we achieve our target, we have already set another goal. As a result, we do not find the time to acknowledge the achievement.

Over the journey we had discussed how to mark this milestone (in this case, securing a large project) and how we would honour each member’s contribution to the success.

I have found that by acknowledging milestones it gives us the opportunity to reflect on where we started, where we’ve been, where we are now and where we are heading. I encourage you to celebrate even the small steps (particularly in tough times), because it is from small beginnings that big outcomes are created.

1. Does your team celebrate milestones? Do you routinely celebrate ‘small wins’ for yourself - and your team? Which one was the most memorable for you? Take a moment to run a quick mental audit over the past day/week/month.

Done

2. Based on your response above, what are you going to do next?



“Growth is nourished
by encouragement”

Additional Reading

Compassion

Cultivate compassion. One of the most overlooked aspects of the resilience skill set is the ability to cultivate compassion – both self-compassion and compassion for others. According to research cited by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, compassion increases positive emotions, creates positive work relationships, and increases cooperation and collaboration. Compassion training programs such as the one offered by Stanford University’s Center for Compassion, Altruism and Research in Education (CCARE) have demonstrated that compassion cultivation practices increase happiness and well-being and decrease stress. Compassion and business effectiveness are not mutually exclusive. Rather, individual, team and organizational success rely on a compassionate work culture.⁶

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

Notes

