



online courses

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RESILIENCE IN ACTION

HUMOUR

'Air Force Weenies!'



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'Air Force Weenies!'



Watch the Video

⌚ 8 min 30 sec

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Video Transcript

I believe that one of the most important components of resilience is the power of humour. In moments of chaos, crisis, uncertainty or even trauma I've found that humour can cut through the tension and help us quickly get perspective. Humour can also be effective in allowing us to laugh at our own predicament and prevent us from being caught up in the emotional overwhelm. This allows us to get out of a state of shock and instead get us back into our prefrontal cortex of the brain, so we can actually start making rational decisions again.

Patch Adams - a real doctor made famous by the actor Robyn Williams in the film of the same name, knew about the importance of humour in the patient recovery. Combat veterans know it too. Humour is a coping mechanism. Studies have also found that humour can be laser-like effective to help reduce the threatening nature of a stressful situation, and increase our capacity to better tolerate the stress.

The power of humour was never more helpful than when I was serving at Patrol Base Khiam, during the 2006 Lebanon War. We were several days into the war and we had already sustained a number of near misses to our base from bombs fired by the Israeli fighter jets, attack helicopters, Merkava tanks and artillery, as well as near misses from the Hezbollah firing their Katusha rockets in close proximity to us.

I was actually up on the observation deck which was the rooftop of our base. This platform gave us a 360-degree view of the surrounding

regions on both the Lebanese and Israeli sides of the border. From here we had the best vantage point to monitor the border and report violations of the peace agreements.

Unfortunately though, this deck didn't have a roof or any form of overhead protection, which you could say was a bit of a design flaw during a war! Especially when we were doing 24hour operations, wearing body armour, taking cover from incoming rounds, and it was the middle of summer in Lebanon, so it's damn hot, reaching temperatures of 40 to 50 degrees celsius each day.

While on observation duty we would be rostered to spend a couple of hours at a time working from the platform, in direct sunlight with no shade and limited protection from exploding bombs. The only way to get from the observation deck to the bunker located two storeys below, was via an exposed spiral staircase that was on the outside of the building, facing Israel, where the majority of rounds endangering our lives were coming from.

I was up on the observation platform with my Canadian team mate Wolf when in a split second two Cobra attack helicopters from the Israeli Defence Force suddenly popped up

over the ridge line to the south of our position and fired missiles into Lebanon in quick succession.

The first thing we heard was the now familiar whirring scream of incoming rockets. The two missiles crisscrossed mid-air in front of our base and hurtled either side of the observation deck, causing us to instinctively dive for cover. Every single muscle in my body braced in anticipation of the explosion, and the atmosphere seemed to pause, like the lull before a storm.

One missile slammed into the school in El Khiam, a short distance away, and the second hit the road leading to our base, restricting access to our compound to now only one point of entrance. Both missiles were serious truce violations and danger close near misses to our UN compound.

Just prior to this attack I had made Wolf a fresh cup of coffee. He had barely taken the cup into his hand when the missiles hurtled past us at eye level. In a reflex reaction, we automatically ducked behind the parapet walls. In the process, Wolf spilt his coffee all over the very last of his clean uniforms, at this realisation he yelled, with his arms flailing in the general direction from which the bombs had just been delivered, 'Damn

Air Force weenies!', then turned to me with a cheeky grin, saying 'But how cool was it to see that?'

We only just got a quick glimpse of the helicopters as they dropped back down below the ridge line. The entire event happened in the blink of an eye. It was yet another surreal experience and further highlighted we were unarmed observers, in harm's way, and we were caught in the crossfire right in the thick of a war.

I was astonished by the speed and precision of the helicopters and was in a state of shock having been at the receiving end of such high calibre weapons and at such close range. It was all I could do to try and process the near-death experience that we had just survived. In that moment there were so many actions I could have taken, but it was like I was on pause and immobilised for a few seconds.

My emotions of helplessness and despair could have got the better of me. It would have been easy to allow myself to go down the rabbit hole, to entertain the negative thoughts such as "how many more near misses are we going to survive before we take that inevitable direct hit, before we are injured or killed?" But looking at Wolf, still cussing and covered in hot coffee, cursing "those bloody Air

Force weenies" was just that little bit of humour that sort of cut through the tension and anxiety, to bring me back to focus on the present, the right now.

So instead of lamenting the dire situation we were in or being crippled with fear, I remember having this sudden release of pressure. Breaking into hysterics and bursting out with laughter, giving Wolf a big high five that we were still alive. There was almost a swagger in our step. We survived. And we would live to see another day.

The emotional release from the humour allowed us to move through the fear and trepidation in that moment quickly, and to get back into a rational thinking, decision-making mindset, fast. Wolf's small, funny comment was enough to interrupt the tension and get our focus back on the task at hand.

So often during times of crisis and in life threatening environments, humour was the delightful gift that served us to manage almost inconceivable pressure. It's a powerful skill to use at the right time to break through emotional overwhelm and give a release of pressure, helping to transition from shock to clarity as fast as possible. Its only when we are clear and calm that we are of a mindset to lead, make

decisions or whatever the environment requires of you, at that moment.

As a leader you don't necessarily have to be the one to provide the humour yourself, but I've found it's important to ensure you enable and empower the comedians within your team to help boost the overall morale and remain positive on even the toughest days.

So now to your workbook, where you have the opportunity to explore and practice different ways of enhancing humour and play, in your life, including in the workplace. It's a reminder to value having fun. I also encourage you to find the time to check-out the bonus resources provided in this module, one of which refers to the work of Viktor Frankl. In particular I really love his quote that states "humour, more than anything else in the human makeup can afford an ability to rise above any situation."

And I think it's the power of humour to cut through emotions and stressful environments that helps give us greater resilience.

Reflecting on the Video

1. What are your key take-outs from the video?

2. Thinking about this, is there anything you would like to stop/start/continue in your work or life in general? that could help you have more fun?

Stop:

Start:

Continue:

3. Commit to these changes at:

Work:

Home:

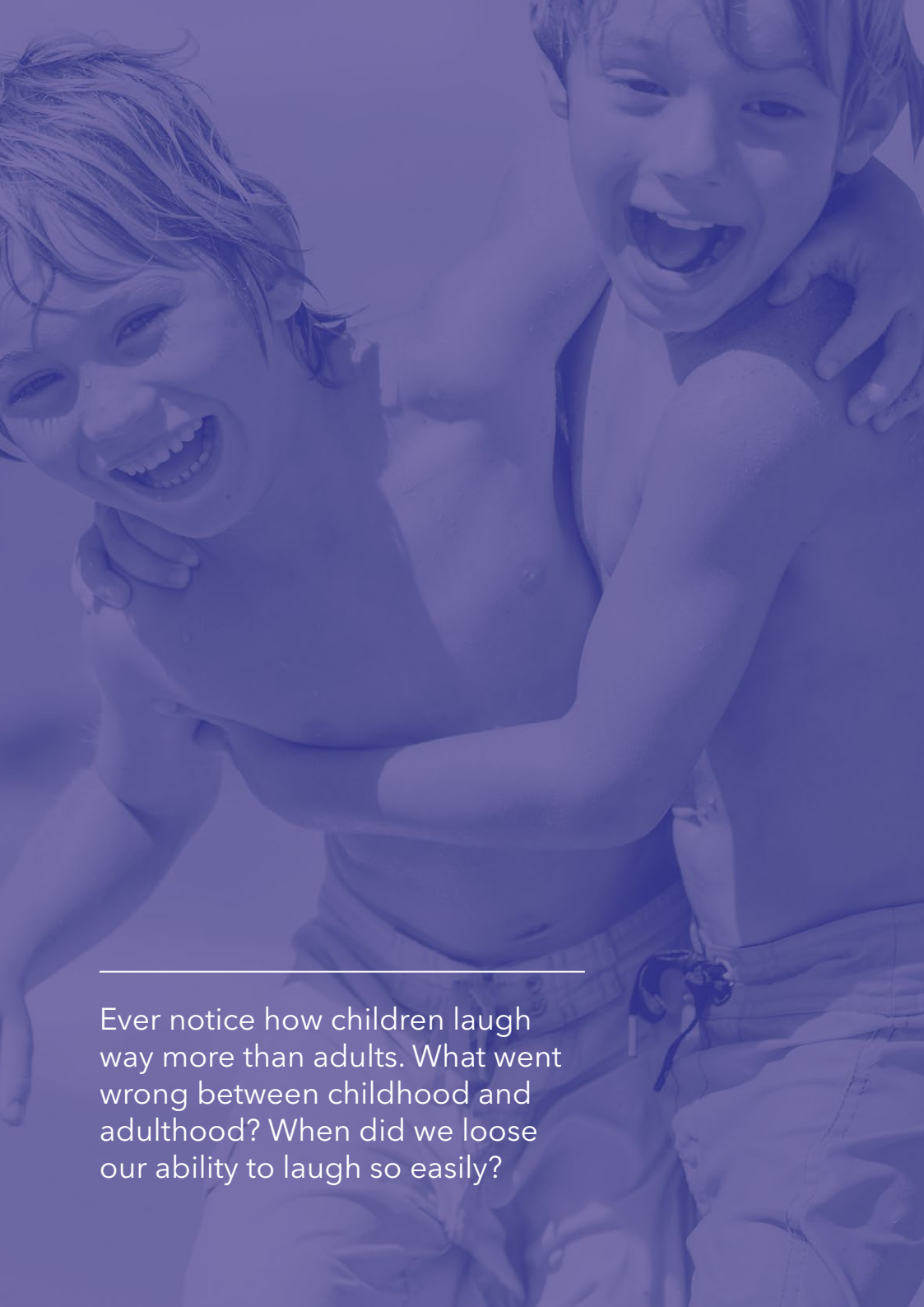
Other:

4. Consider sharing one or more of these commitments with an accountability buddy (or broadcast it to all your friends via your social media).

☐ Done

5. Take a positive action for one of your commitments.

☐ Done



Ever notice how children laugh way more than adults. What went wrong between childhood and adulthood? When did we lose our ability to laugh so easily?

Fun Factory

I feel that life's better when we are having fun.

Modern workplaces are typified by stress. Technology and access to the Internet mean that work is a constant presence. Resilient employees are able to manage stress effectively so it is not overwhelming and detrimental (Davis Laak, 2014). By actively engaging in self-care and nurturing themselves after a stressful incident, however minor, resilient employees avoid 'burnout'.¹

Brief

May I put a serious idea to you about a seemingly whimsical concept?

I feel that life's better when we are having fun.

We live in a VERY serious, stressful world.

I feel that we could all use a little more... fun. More enjoyment. More amusement. More light-hearted pleasure. More smiles. More laughter.

Do you need to give yourself permission to have more fun?

¹ <https://positivepsychology.com/resilience-in-the-workplace/>

Task: Have Fun!

1. Consider watching this short YouTube [here](#) and smile (it is less than 1 minute). It reminds me of working with the United Nations as a Peacekeeper, where the language from 23 different countries could, at times, be a challenge.

☐ Done

2. What did you do that was fun so far today? What are you going to do that is fun before the day is out?

3. Have fun.

☐ Done

4. What makes you laugh? 'Ha, ha' laugh-out-loud fun. Or what simple pleasures do you enjoy?

5. Pick one of your answers from the last question (and yes it has to be different to tasks 2 and 3) and do it!

☐ Done

6. Fun and enjoyment means different things to different people. Try putting yourself in someone else's shoes. What is fun to them?

Person #1:

Person #2:

Person #3:

7. Build a 'foundation of fun' by putting a recurring reminder in your diary or sticky notes on your monitor - to ask yourself every day, 'What did I do that was fun today?'

☐ Done

8. Double-down with a sentence starting with 'The fun thing I am grateful for...' in a personal journal entry.

☐ Done

9. Consider starting your group meeting or family dinner with a laughter activity eg a recent funny story or if you are feeling a little more daring, a silly challenge like the laughing sound an animal might make with the same first letter as your name. The point is, start with a bit of irreverant fun!

☐ Done

I get it. We are all busy. And way too important to have fun.

Consider this.

A surprising finding from recent research was that, quite pervasively it seems, more resilient employees do not take the work environment too seriously. They introduce an element of 'play' to the workplace, which further fosters positive emotions amongst employees.²

Of course, we have all known people who use humour as a form of avoidance, making jokes even when seriousness is called for. This is not what we are recommending. Nor do we recommend playing in risky territory in an increasingly politically correct world.

However, the ability to see humour - even 'black humour' in tragedy - can be an important component in resilience.

While it may sometimes appear incongruous, humour can be a creative way to confront and cope with what we fear or find painful.

Task

1. Conduct a straw-poll at the next team meeting (or family dinner). Ask about 'fun'?

Top-tip: Start each sentence with 'Would', 'Could' or 'Might' and watch the fun flow!

☐ Done

2. Appoint a 'fun champion' for the team. (Maybe not 'serious Bob', the team nay-sayer. Or... maybe it could be 'Bob'?). Maybe, rotate the 'fun champion' role through the team? Remember to put boundaries in place around what is/is not acceptable behaviour (eg compliance with the HR and IT policies).

☐ Done

3. Have your newly appointed 'Fun Champion' (i.e. to champion fun, and that it remains within acceptable boundaries!) organise for a social activity i.e.. a time to share war-stories, re-connect and blow-off steam... and have fun!

Thought-starters: Pizza lunch together, funny-story icebreaker at the next meeting/lunch, BBQ with families...

☐ Done

² <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/resilience/cognitive-and-emotional-flexibility/8A1DA713740F8E5D4EE0F891933058B9/core-reader>

**“IF EVERY 8-YEAR-OLD
IS TAUGHT MEDITATION,
WE WILL ELIMINATE
VIOLENCE FROM THE
WORLD WITHIN ONE
GENERATION.”**

DALAI LAMA

A simple human interaction is worth far more than material pleasures. A recent study showed that the emotions triggered when someone important in our lives smiles at us and we smile back changes our brain chemistry. It creates a short-term high that is better than eating chocolate, shopping, or receiving money.³

³ <http://www.thehappinessinstitute.com/forum/messages.aspx?topicId=62&replies=2>

Laughter is the best medicine

To stay well and happy we need a balance of work and play, and seriousness and fun in our lives.

Having a sense of humour has many physical and emotional health benefits.

Humour helps us to relax, cope with stressful situations better and look at challenges more creatively.

Regular laughter or humour puts us in a positive frame of mind and gradually makes us more positive thinkers.

Positive thinking and optimism are linked with better health outcomes.

Planning to include enjoyable activities in our lives will help us to stay happy and healthy.

The physical effects of laughing

Humour and Physical Health!

What the research shows:

- Muscles relax more quickly after watching funny cartoons than after looking at beautiful scenery.
- Laughter reduces some of the hormones associated with the stress response.
- Watching 30 - 60 minutes of comedy results in beneficial changes to the immune systems that are still present 12 hours later.
- Humour has been found to reduce pain in some patients.
- One minute of laughter is equal to 10 minutes on the rowing machine.

What happens when you laugh?

Fifteen facial muscles contract and there is electrical stimulation of the zygomatic major (cheek) muscles in particular. The epiglottis half-closing interrupts respiration so that intake of air becomes irregular and gasping. These behaviours are usually accompanied by noises that can range from sedate giggles to boisterous guffaws.³

Laughing is contagious!

Humans have a detector in the brain that is specifically devoted to laughter. It responds to laughter by triggering neural circuits that generate more laughter.⁴

Humour and emotional health

"Laughter is like an instant vacation" – Milton Berle, Comedian

How does humour assist emotional health:

- Seeing a smile, and returning it changes our brain chemistry and gives us a natural high. It gives us more pleasure than eating chocolate, shopping, being given money, or drinking coffee.
- Humour helps people cope more effectively with life stressors.
- Laughing promotes feelings of happiness and joy and under these conditions it is much easier to think creatively around a problem.
- Humour is an easy way to get in touch with your feelings and control them in difficult situations.
- Laughter brings people together and improves interpersonal relationships.
- Regular laughter puts people in a positive frame of mind and gradually makes them positive thinkers.
- Humour makes it easier to challenge negative thoughts.
- Positive thinking and optimism are linked with better health outcomes.
- Your sense of humour is one of the most powerful tools you have to make certain that your daily mood and emotional state support good health.⁴

⁴ <http://people.howstuffworks.com/laughter.htm>.

⁵ McGhee, 1999.

Task

1. Keep a smile log. Smile, and see how many people smile back. Just don't be creepy!
☐ Done
2. List the activities you have been involved in and really enjoyed doing during the last week. These might include watching a favourite TV show, playing/practising a musical instrument, hanging out with friends, going to the movies, playing sport, going to the beach/pool, etc.⁶

3. How many times did you do each activity in the last week?

⁶ https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/secondary-school-program/bw0060-sec-sch-prog-year-10-teacher-man-7.pdf?sfvrsn=ab80a6e9_4

Make Time for Yourself

Selfish or Selfless?

Healthy selfishness?

Do you have an inherited limiting belief that being selfish is a negative or bad thing?

Many of us hold onto a fear of being judged as selfish. So, we go about pleasing others and putting ourselves either second or last when dealing with our family, friends, partner or spouse.

Many healing guides talk about this still being selfish, masked with a self-perception of selflessness or martyrdom, which is just our way of indirectly getting what we want and need (be it validation or more).

Now, when we love ourselves wholeheartedly, honouring and valuing ourselves, our sense of self-respect and self-worth grows.

And from there, good things happen!

Brief

Self-care is exactly that... looking after yourself.

And what that looks like is different for everyone.

I have learnt that self-care is essential; that self-care is not selfish.

As human beings our bodies, hearts, and minds work best when we give ourselves what we need to be well, happy and strong.

The natural by-product of this dynamic is that we then also have much more to give to others and to life in general. But only when we have first given to ourselves.

Task: Invest in Yourself

My daily/weekly health and medical routine includes several sessions across yoga, chiropractic and more to support my chronic back condition and core strength.

I am also quite conscious and disciplined around my nutrition, regenerative sleep, daily meditation and all of the things that help restore my energy.

It is only when I prioritise these things in my life that I am 100% a better mother, partner, friend... and international keynote speaker.

1. List your non-negotiable self-care activities.

2. Pick one and do it today!

☐ Done

3. Put a routine in place, so essential self-care becomes a habit.

☐ Done

4. List some 'nice-to-do' self-care activities.

5. How could you make one of these happen?

☐ Done

6. Try out a relaxation, mindfulness, or meditation app. I love the [Calm App](#) (It tells me how many days-in-a-row I have meditated and what is my longest streak. So it becomes a healthy challenge with myself.)

☐ Done

Make Time for Others & Invest in Meaningful Relationships

I cannot overstate the importance of the link between connection and resilience.

Brief

In my Leadership in Action course, I dedicate an entire module to the importance of connection. It is one of my six key pillars of leadership.

I grew up in a small farm in a rural community. Fire, flood, pestilence, disease... whatever it was, members of the community would always pull together, to help each other.


And as my brother-in-law, whose role spans to Community Engagement for the State Emergency Service, says 'connected communities bounce back better from natural disasters. They pitch in, help each other. They recover quicker. They are more resilient.'

It is why I sometimes lament that so many of us do not know our neighbours - in the street, in the apartment complex.

And it is the same at work.

Task: Re-connect

1. Call or message 5 friends or colleagues that you have not spoken to in a while, start with one each day.
☐ Done
2. Next time you see your neighbour, take the time to say hello and find out a little about them.
☐ Done



Social support plays an important role in workplace resilience. Resilient employees nurture the work networks they have developed, consistently building trust with others.⁷

(Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough, 2007).

⁷ <https://positivepsychology.com/resilience-in-the-workplace/>



HUMOUR:

'AIR FORCE WEENIES!'

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Bonus Exercise 1

86,400 Seconds

Brief

There are 86,400 seconds in a day. I do not want to waste one of them!

What's this got to do with fun? Well it's pretty hard to have fun when you're racing around from chore to chore and task to task, chasing your tail all the way. Being able to manage your time and to balance your priorities as opposed to other people's, is a big part of this. Saying no... (particularly when you know you are a 'people pleaser') can be tough.

No one likes disappointing people.

Task

Define your priorities and commit to saying 'no' when needed - and being comfortable with that.

1. My 3 priorities today are:

2. If you have a hard time turning down requests, try saying, "no, I can't do that now." Don't hesitate – be direct. If an explanation is appropriate, keep it brief. Practice it out loud, supported by the appropriate gesture. Remember no is a sentence. 'No thank you but thanks for asking'.

☐ Done

3. I will be more positively assertive, to say 'no' when needed this week.

☐ Done



HUMOUR:

'AIR FORCE WEENIES!'

Bonus Exercise 2

Positive Assertiveness

As we discussed in the last exercise, sometimes it can be tough to find the time for fun and humour. But, the trouble is, often even if we actually find that time, the demands of our daily lives mean that it's hard to actually get ourselves into a space that will allow us to enjoy ourselves. That's why developing core skills, like assertiveness and communication, are so important. Because, believe it or not, it's improvements in these kinds of aspects of our lives that can pave the way for a far greater sense of happiness, enjoyment and fun down the track.

Being assertive is a core communication skill. Assertiveness can help you express yourself effectively and stand up for your point of view, while also respecting the rights and beliefs of others.

Being assertive can also help boost your self-esteem and earn others' respect while also helping with stress management.⁸

⁸ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/assertive/art-20044644>



Task: Communication for Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem

1. Assess your style.

Do you voice your opinions or remain silent? Do you say yes to additional work even when your plate is full? Are you quick to judge or blame? Do people seem to dread or fear talking to you? Understand your style before you begin making changes.

My Style

☐ Done

2. Use 'I' statements.

Using "I" statements lets others know what you are thinking or feeling without sounding accusatory. Try to keep your requests simple and specific. Try them with and without hand gestures. Facing front on/facing at a 45 degree angle.

Practise (preferably out loud - which could be funny depending on where you choose to run these through!):

"I disagree," rather than, "You're wrong".

If you have a request, could you try "I would really appreciate your help with..." rather than, "You need to do this."

☐ Done

3. Practice saying 'no'.

You have done this already, but I think it is so important, it is worth doing it again. Just say, "No, I can't do that now." Practise it three more times in a row. Well done!

☐ Done

Assertive vs Passive-Aggressive Behaviour

If you communicate in a passive-aggressive way, you may say yes when you want to say no. You may be sarcastic or complain about others behind their backs. Rather than confront an issue directly, you may show your anger and feelings through your actions or negative attitude. You may have developed a passive-aggressive style because you're uncomfortable being direct about your needs and feelings.

The drawback? Over time, passive-aggressive behaviour damages relationships and mutual respect.

The Benefits of Being Assertive

Effectively expressing your feelings when communicating with others can help you:

- Gain self-confidence and self-esteem
- Understand and recognise your feelings
- Earn respect from others
- Improve communication
- Create win-win situations
- Improve your decision-making skills
- Create honest relationships
- Gain more job satisfaction
- Avoid being a 'people pleaser'.

4. Rehearse what you want to say.

If it's challenging to say what you want or think, practice general scenarios you encounter. Say what you want to say out loud. It may help to write it out first, so you can practice from a script. Consider role-playing with a friend or colleague and ask for their feedback.

5. Be purposeful with your body language.

We communicate so much through body language, so its important that our gestures reinforce our words.

☐ Done

6. Keep emotions in check.

Conflict is hard for most people. Maybe you get angry or frustrated, or sometimes you feel like crying. Although these feelings are normal, they can get in the way of resolving conflict. If you feel too emotional going into a situation, wait a bit if possible. Then work on remaining calm. Breathe slowly. Keep your voice even and firm.

☐ Done

Practice positive assertive body language in front of a mirror or with a friend or colleague. Studies show that up to 87% of communication can be non-verbal. (I think it is more like 100% can be non-verbal, have you ever seen how babies get what they want!) Act confident, even if you are not feeling it. (Your mind will follow the cues your body sends.) Keep an upright posture, slightly lean forward. Make regular eye contact (but not too much – you will freak them out!). Maintain a neutral or positive facial expression. Maintain an open posture, which means avoiding crossing your arms and legs. And most importantly, consciously control your breathing. Sounds silly, I know. But it is biochemistry and neuroscience. In, out, slow it down. Pause, in, out. Great job.

Bonus Resource

Building Relationships

Study after study shows the importance of connection when it comes to wellbeing. We are social animals and having people there for you when the going gets tough is crucial when it comes to building your resilience.

I have experienced 'rock-bottom' and talk about it when I deliver my keynotes to audiences around the world, via Zoom and face to face. Family, friends and at times total strangers all played a part in my journey back to wellness. I might not be here but for their boundless support, love and care.

Here are some ideas for building relationships:

1. **Invest in your social skills.** None of us are born master communicators. Do some research. Experiment. Have fun!
2. **Be true to your word.** If you tell someone you are going to do something, bloody-well do it. People talk about trust. Allan Parker (OAM) believes that trust is about reliability and keeping agreements. Be reliable.
3. **Be straight.** Be positive. Simple.
4. **Match body language.** If your team members are leaning towards you and sitting with an open posture and you are leaning back, arms and legs crossed... well, its best to mirror them.
5. **Match voice tone.** If you are up for a challenge, experiment with matching their breathing, then slowing your breathing down. Watch them match you, automatically.
6. **Make time for people.** Your brain is wired for connection. So too your body.
7. **Reach out.** Say hello!
8. **Catch up in person.** Can't? Video chat allows for the all-important non-verbals, which is why I try for it every time with a new client.
9. **Recognise toxic relationships.** And act. You know what you must do.
10. **Resist the temptation to follow.** Do not compromise your values. Tread your own path.
11. **Find a mentor.** I cannot tell you how important mentors have been in my life. ⁹

⁹ Based on original work at <https://home.hellodriven.com/72-resilience-building-activities.html>

Top-tip: Got children? Get down at their level and, "Listen earnestly to anything [your children] want to tell you, no matter what. If you do not listen eagerly to the little stuff when they are little, they won't tell you the big stuff when they are big, because to them all of it has always been big stuff."

Catherine M. Wallace, 2001

Bonus Resource

Fun is the Key for Wellness

Tim Jack Adams is a good friend of mine and a world leading wellness pioneer.

Tim values fun. He is always quick to laugh, not only in a fun 'ha-ha' kind of way. The key, he says, to thriving sustainably is, 'The connection to self, and others through nature'. He purposely puts fun and 'enjoyment' - at the heart of everything he does. 'Fun' is one of the eight wellness areas that he believes must be in place for balance, to help thrive sustainably and stay mentally and emotionally fit.



Task: Watch Something Funny

1. Commit to watch something funny - A Netflix comedy stand-up, YouTube or wherever you go to smile... and relax! And take that smile into your day...

☐ Done

Notes