

(just about)

How to Bounce Back from Anything

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Introduction

Has life smacked you down?

Are you feeling like you'll never be able to get back up?

You've come to the right place.

Here you'll learn how to bounce back from everything from the death of a loved one to losing your job to stubbing your toe on the way out the door as you're late for work.

It's all about resilience.

“

re-sil-i-ence noun \ri-'zil-yən(t)s\ 1 : the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress. – Merriam Webster

”

Sometimes, life just squeezes the heck out of you until you can't recognize yourself anymore.

Resiliency is about learning how to get back to who you are after one of life's big squeezes.

Or small ones.

And the best thing?

You can be even *better* than you were before.

Not only can you bounce *back*, but you can bounce *forward*. Higher. Stronger.

Are you ready to get your bounce back?

Let's go.

The Five Components of Resilience

After studying the field of resiliency for almost fifteen years now and I've found that most of the research can be organized into five broad components:

- Acceptance
- Perspective
- Social Support
- Positive Actions
- Learning the lessons/Finding the gifts

We're going to look at each of these components in more depth in just a bit.

Prior to that, though, I want to share one important skill in your ability to bounce back that can't be overemphasized:

Flexibility.

As you read through the following pages, be open to new ideas and new ways of being in your life.

Researchers have found that resilient people have the ability to be flexible in response to the obstacles and adversity they face in their lives.

So, notice if you find yourself saying, "That won't work" or "I can't do that."

Then, take a step back and try to be a bit more flexible in your approach.

Follow the steps suggested at the end of each section about "Taking action."

The more flexible and adaptable you are, the more bounce you have!

Why is the title of this book *How to Bounce Back from (Just About) Anything?*

This e-book will give you some useful, practical, productive ideas about how to bounce back in life.

But it is not a substitute for professional mental health counseling. If you are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or think you might be, it's important for you to **consult a therapist** or other mental health professional.

The information here, while helpful for the majority of adverse situations, does not address the depths of treatment most helpful for PTSD.

Acceptance

In this section:

- *Moving past denial*
- *Don't resist*

“

ac·cept verb [ak-sept] late 14c., "to take what is offered," from Old French *accepter* (14c.) or directly from Latin *acceptare* "take or receive willingly" ”

Look at that definition again.

“To take or receive willingly.”

Can you believe **acceptance** is one of the **most important parts of bouncing back** from the bad thing* that has happened in your life?

It is.

Why?

Because you can't do anything about the bad thing without **receiving it** for what it truly is – a real, tangible thing in your life.

Moving past denial

What's the opposite of acceptance?

Denial.

Denial isn't always bad. It's a very protective mechanism that shields you from pain while you are recovering from shock.

**From here on, all of the various forms of adversity will be referred to as "the bad thing."*

So sometimes you need it.

But only sometimes. And only for awhile.

After that while, you need to dip your toe into the pool of acceptance so you can make some progress toward bouncing back.

Have you ever known anyone who, upon losing a loved one, refuses to move anything in that person's room? It's as though if she just leaves things where they are, then somehow that person will come back to her.

We may shake our heads at this and say to each other, "She really needs to move on."

But it's the same with any bad thing that happens – it's very easy to slip into wishful thinking that the bad thing will go away or reverse itself or magically seem as if it just didn't happen at all.

"I just won't look at that notice from the bank right now. It says 'foreclosure' but they must have made a mistake. They'll figure it out."

"She says she wants to break up with me, but I'm sure she's just having a bad day. It will be better tomorrow."

"My doctor says my cholesterol is too high and I could have a stroke. Can you believe that? What a quack. Pass those French fries, will you?"

Sound familiar?

Now, how are you going to bounce back from any of these bad things if you don't acknowledge what's *really* going on?

It's time to sit yourself down and look at the naked truth of your situation.

Yes, it may hurt or at least be uncomfortable. But ***learning to tolerate the initial discomfort*** is an important first step in learning how to bounce back.

Don't resist

First, a story:



Many years ago, my partner, Ruth, and I sat in an exam room with her oncologist, Dr. Patel. Ruth was describing her doubts and anxiety about the side effects of the chemotherapy she was taking for her metastatic cancer. Was she doing the right thing by taking the chemo?

Dr. Patel, seated below her on a short, rolling stool, listened carefully, his hands folded in his lap, his eyes never leaving Ruth's. Finally, he tilted his head slightly to the side and said something we never forgot.

"Ruth, don't resist."

He continued, "Don't resist the chemotherapy, allow it to enter your body and let the healing drops do their work. ***Resisting will just get in the way of the healing.***"

Ruth and I looked at each other. Don't resist? We had been told by others that we needed to "fight" her cancer and "attack" the tumors.

And now we were being told to not resist it or the treatment?

Incredibly, it made sense.

And changed both of our lives.

We saw how we had tied ourselves in knots resisting her cancer diagnosis, wondering why she had it, and fretting ourselves raw about both the cancer and what the future held.

We let it all go. We decided to ***go with the journey*** that cancer had set us on rather than ***against*** it.

I watched as Ruth, who had struggled with severe anxiety throughout her life, suddenly realized that she didn't *have* to struggle with it anymore. She was still anxious on occasion, but she became much bolder in her life, trying on new experiences that would have previously frightened her and loving every minute of them.

Although not an anxious person by nature, Ruth's illness had my emotional thermostat ratcheted up a few notches.

When I began to practice not resisting her cancer and the path we were on, I began to notice something important:

Everything really was small stuff.

The everyday frustrations that I tried so hard to control so I could feel better were just not worth the energy I was putting into resisting them.

Ruth and I, ensconced in her journey with metastatic breast cancer, were freer and lived more peacefully and joyously than we ever had in our lives.

The prognosis for Ruth's life was nine to eighteen months post-diagnosis. She lived four rich, meaningful years with cancer spread throughout her body, each day a measure of grace. And it was triggered by two simple words.

Don't resist. ”

Notice how, in this story, Ruth's cancer didn't go away and not resisting didn't prevent her from dying. But in many important ways, ***it saved her life.*** And mine.

Ruth's sense of peace and intense joy in each moment was so great that, as she neared the end of her life, she said that she would not have changed her experience with cancer for anything. Including being able to live longer.

And, although my grief was profound and long-lasting, I knew that I just needed to go with it rather than fight against it. It was hard, but I was able to make a very slow bounce back by not resisting my feelings, no matter how painful they were.

Here's another example for you:

Have you ever played with a Chinese Finger Puzzle? It's a small, accordion-like tube made out of interwoven strands of paper.



You put your index fingers in each end of the tube and then the puzzle begins. How to get your fingers back out.

If you're like most people, you do the natural thing and pull your fingers away from each other. Although this works for most things, it doesn't here.

The tube tightens on your fingers.

So you pull harder.

The puzzle grabs your fingers even tighter.

"This is ridiculous," you think to yourself, "This is just bits of paper, how come I can't get out of this?"

After struggling for awhile, the person who gave you the puzzle smiles, approaches you, and ***pushes your fingers toward each other.***

The trap relaxes and you are able to remove your fingers now that you have moved *with* the puzzle instead of *against* it.

Have you ever noticed that life is like that for you? The harder you pull away from it or struggle to get out of the bad thing, the tighter it grabs you?

Not resisting the bad thing in your life is a practice – it's not something that happens overnight.

Taking action toward . . . Acceptance Moving past denial

1. Gain clarity.

Ask yourself:

- On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the most, how much do I really believe a bad thing has happened or is happening?
- What will the end result be if I don't do anything about this situation?
- If I think everything will work out okay, how exactly is that going to happen?
- Do other people act like I do when this bad thing has happened to them?

It can be hard to clearly see what the truth of your bad thing is. You may want to ask a trusted friend to sit down and answer the questions above with you. Usually, people who are outside of our mess can see more objectively than we can.

2. Learn to tolerate emotional discomfort or pain.

This is actually a very big topic and we'll talk more about it in the next section, but for now, just be open to the idea that ***painful emotions aren't the end of the world.***

We spend a lot of time and energy trying to avoid them, but the truth is this: If you've had a bad thing happen to you, ***it's going to hurt.***

But you've been through hurt before and survived. You will again.

3. Give yourself a break.

Sometimes when people come out of denial, they feel silly or embarrassed or ashamed that they were in denial at all.

Remember that denial is a natural, protective mechanism so there's no need to feel bad that your body and mind sought refuge for awhile.

Give yourself a break and continue moving forward.

Don't resist

1. Notice what you resist.

It could be something small like being stuck in traffic.

Are your hands gripped tight around the steering wheel?

Are you cursing and muttering under your breath about your predicament?

If so, you are fighting something that just *is* and that you have no control over.

Perhaps it's something big, like losing your job.

Are you cursing and muttering out loud, ruminating about why this has happened to you?

Are you holding on to anger about being let go?

It's taking up a lot of energy, isn't it?

This first step of ***noticing*** your habit of resistance is very important. Look for it in the way you are thinking and when your body feels particularly tense.

2. Don't resist.

Non-resistance is a practice so realize that it's an ongoing matter of remembering to let go rather than hang on. It's going with the current of the river rather than trying to walk against it.

The Mathematics of Surrender

It's not about giving up,
not about defeat.
If you insist on an equation,
embrace your limited impact on
outcome,
subtract old beliefs that you should
be able to fix it,
add willingness to let others meet
their fate.

Divide this by two, as in yin and yang,
right and wrong,
good and bad.
Let it multiply until
all things are equal.

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You're in traffic, you're late, and you're frustrated.

Take a deep breath.

Release the death grip you have on the steering wheel.

Remember that you have been late before and lightning hasn't struck. Let go of fighting to change circumstances you can't control.

You've lost your job and you're angry. It's okay to allow yourself a time to grieve your loss.

But the anger and frustration you feel are just like trying to walk upstream against a raging river – you're not making any headway and you are expending a lot of energy fighting to stay in your same place.

Don't resist. Let yourself be carried with the current. It's very possible that new opportunities lay just around the bend in front of you. But if you struggle to stay where you are, you won't see them.

3. Notice the difference.

Once you have stopped fighting and resisting, take a look around. How does your body feel? How do other frustrations in your life appear now? Do they seem smaller?

What does the thing you were fighting look like now? Has your perspective changed?

4. Give thanks.

Feel and express gratitude for the freedom of non-resistance.

Write a note in your journal about the change within you and your thankfulness for it.

Tell a friend or family member.

Whisper “thank you” to your higher being.

Next . . . Perspective

Perspective

In this section:

- *How to draw on your past to bounce back today*
- *Seeing the bad thing in a different way*
- *This, too, shall pass*

“

The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be only the beginning. ~Ivy Baker Priest

”

How to draw on your past to bounce back today

I sat with my friend, Laurie, and listened to her talk things out. A person she was very close to had died suddenly and Laurie was sharing with me how it felt for her.

“It just happened so fast, I’m still reeling. It’s not so much the grief that’s hard for me – ***I’ve been through grief before and know I’ll get through it this time, too*** – it’s just the shock and suddenness of it all.”

While my heart hurt for Laurie’s loss and the extra weight of the shock of it, I was glad to hear how she used perspective to bolster herself during this really tough time.

Laurie knew from ***past experience*** that she would be able to bounce back from this round of adversity.

A client of mine, Chelsea, came in for therapy because she was uncertain about whether she should stay with her husband or not.

She told me that it was hard for her to leave her previous long-term relationship even though it had become toxic and unhealthy. She didn’t want to do the same thing in her marriage.

When I asked her what was hard about her previous relationship, she said, “It was my first long-term relationship and I thought he was my everything. I didn’t think I’d be able to get over it if we broke up.

“Now I know that, even though it was very painful, I made it through. So, I know that if my marriage needs to be dissolved because it’s not healthy, I won’t allow myself to stay for so long.

“My past experience has made me stronger and more able to advocate for what I really need in my life to be more true to myself.”

It’s very easy to get lost in the stress of the current bad thing in your life and forget that you have made it through difficulties in the past. It may not have been easy, but here you are reading this now so we both know you got through it somehow.

Try to remember this idea about past experiences the next time a bad thing pops up in your life.

Most people are naturally resilient and that includes you.

Take a breath to clear some space in your body and mind and think back to a time in the past that was hard for you.

Notice how you are still here to remember it and recall what you did to get through that past event.

Can you use those resiliency skills again?

Past experience allows us to take some of the negative power away from the present experience.

Seeing the bad thing in a different way

Sharon was excited as she walked toward her manager's office.

She was doing very well at her job, had brought in major accounts for the firm, and had only stellar performance reviews in her three years on the job. When her boss sent her an email that he wanted to meet with her, she knew it meant only one thing: a promotion.

Now, as she knocked on his door, she could hardly keep her elation from bubbling out of her throat and into the air.

"You wanted to see me?" she asked, with a smile.

"Yes, Sharon, please sit down," her boss said.

As she sat down on the comfortable leather chair across from him, Sharon's joy started to fade somewhat.

Her boss was not smiling.

In fact, he was fiddling with objects on his desk, not looking at her.

"Sharon," he began, then stopped. He looked up at the ceiling, ran his hand across the stubbly beard on his chin, and sighed.

"Aw, hell, Sharon," he said, all of his usual eloquence abandoning him, "I'm just going to say this outright, even though it about kills me. You are one of the best employees we have, but the company has been hit hard by this recession. We're going to have to lay you off."

Sharon stared at him, not sure of what she just heard. Her jaw slowly dropped.

"Bill . . . I was sure I was coming in here to get a promotion. And now . . . you're laying me off?"

Bill nodded slowly.

"We have no choice. Your last day will be this Friday."

Sharon felt numb yet somehow willed her legs to support her as she stood and walked out of the office.

What was she going to do now?

After Sharon found out she was being laid off instead of getting the expected promotion, she had a long time to think about it.

I asked her how she reacted and how on earth she had bounced back from such a shock.

“Shock is definitely the right word,” she said. “I had to give myself time to absorb what had happened. I went through a lot of emotions including depression and anxiety.”

She paused.

“But you know what, Bobbi? After awhile ***I chose to expand rather than contract.*** I decided that I had an opportunity in front of me and I took it. I did things I always wanted to do but couldn’t because of work.

“I took classes, I hiked, and I went to Burning Man for the first time.

“Now when I look at that time, I’m just filled with gratitude rather than anger or sadness.”

I know you may not have the financial cushion that Sharon had to go to Burning Man while she was unemployed.

Yet the important question remains:

Are there opportunities within the midst of your bad thing?

Gaining perspective is not only about remembering past experiences, but also to look at your current experience in new ways.

This, too, shall pass

My stepsister, Lori, has a teenage daughter with Asperger's Syndrome and we often exchange emails. Our online conversation is mostly about the highs and lows of raising her neuro-diverse daughter and she has shared with me many of the gifts that come along with having a special needs child.

Then, one day, this was the message in my inbox:

Today is a day in the trenches! It's a battle and I'm bawling in my coffee. This journey is joy and pain in every aspect of those words. My knees are bloody on this life path. My guilt over wanting my life (before it was chucked under the special needs bus) back is outweighing my good will today. A special needs child "needs" almost all of the time. There is also the alienation aspect of this life in the foreground today. It's very hard for me to relate to neuro-typical people. I hear people gripe and moan about "normal" problems and I want to cause them bodily harm! :) Some days are frustration!

While my heart went out to Lori and her day in the trenches, I was also really impressed with one particular aspect of her resilience (other than her great sense of humor):

Her ability to realize that **this is how it feels today**.

Today is a day in the trenches . . .

. . . outweighing my good will **today** . . .

. . . in the foreground **today** . . .

Some days are frustration . . .

Notice how she *didn't* say "Every day is in the trenches," "I don't have *any* good will," "Always in the foreground," or "Every day is frustration."

Lori didn't like the day she was having. At all.

Yet she was still able to see that it was **just this day**. Maybe tomorrow would be another day in the trenches, but she didn't go there.

She knew that this is how she felt **today** and tomorrow could be the same or it might be different.

Remember that emotions are transient. What you are feeling now may change tomorrow or within a few minutes.

Taking action toward . . . Perspective

1. Remember an experience from your past that has been difficult and tell or ask yourself:

- I made it through that past bad thing, even though it was painful, and I can make it through this, too, even though it is painful.
- Is there something I learned back then that will help me now?

2. Look at your current bad thing from different angles.

This current bad thing may have closed some doors for you, but have any new ones opened up?

If it's too hard to see your bad thing from a different angle, just **be open** to the idea that, down the road after some time has passed, there may be new opportunities that present themselves.

3. Remember that this, too, shall pass.

It's a trite old saying, but it's absolutely true.

And keep in mind that just because you feel a certain way today doesn't necessarily guarantee that you'll feel the same way tomorrow.

Remember that emotions just *are*. They're neither good nor bad.

You don't have to buy into them more than is necessary. If you feel angry, say to yourself,
"Hmm, I'm feeling angry."

It's not necessary or helpful to say, "I'm feeling angry and it's bad that I'm feeling this way and I must stop it right now. I'll do anything to stop feeling this way."

Just notice the emotion and let it be.

It will change soon enough. But don't give your emotions more power than is necessary.

Next . . . Social Support

Social Support

In this section:

- *Making sure you're help-able*
- *Accepting help*
- *The place where everyone knows your name*
- *Finding a mentor*
- *What kind of help do you need?*

It's hard to bounce back by yourself.

If you look into the research about resiliency, inevitably you'll find that social support and community are among the factors that help people learn to recover – **and even thrive** – through the worst of circumstances.

There are many aspects to the idea of social support but I'm just going to discuss five key components here. Utilizing any or all of these elements will help you bounce back more easily and in good company.

Making sure you're help-able

Do you encourage people to want to help you?

In their landmark study of resilient children, [Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith](#) found that one of the factors that helped the kids to succeed was their ability to elicit assistance from others, what the researchers called an "easy temperament" or **sociability**.

To assess whether you have good sociability, ask yourself:

- Am I empathic and caring?
- Do I communicate clearly and assertively?
- Am I compassionate? Do I help others?
- Do people seem to want to help me?

If your answers to these questions are yes, then you are a very sociable person.

If you answered ‘no’ to one or more – especially the last question – you might want to get some feedback and support through a therapist, coach, or mentor to help you increase your sociability.

The place where everyone knows your name

Studies on the resiliency of the elderly are showing that they not only need a social system, they also need and want to feel like they belong to a community.

The same is true for you and all of us at any age level. ***Much like the old sitcom Cheers, you really do need a place where everybody knows your name.*** Where you’re comfortable and feel like you are a part of the group.

This doesn’t have to be a large group, either. Maybe you have two or three friends that make up your community.

That’s okay. As long as you feel like you belong.

If you don’t have a sense of belonging, see about joining a group like a church, support group, book club, professional group, or an organization that helps others.

I go to the same restaurant two or three times per week and have for the last eight years.

I sit at the counter where I have my “counter buddies” and, of course, all of the staff know me there as well.

It’s one of the first places I want to be when a bad thing has happened to me.

Finding a mentor

Another thing the kids in the Werner and Smith study excelled at was finding someone to look up to and learn from. Sometimes it was an aunt or uncle, a teacher, a counselor, or even a policeman or other community member.

This is important for us as adults, too. We all need to have at least one person we can go to for advice, a person who will stick with you through the tough times.

It doesn’t necessarily have to be an older person. Maybe it’s just a close friend or your spiritual leader who happens to be ten years younger than you!

Whoever you feel is a solid and consistent presence in your life can be a great mentor and coach.

Even if you're introverted or prefer to be alone most of the time, make sure you have **one person** you can reach out to when needed.

Accepting help

Okay, so you're very sociable and have a good circle of friends.

Now, will you **actually accept their help**?

This is a pivotal question, especially for those of you who tend to be caretakers and are constantly giving. Or, as my friend and colleague, [Bruce Anderson](#), puts it, you are "breathing out" to others all the time and rarely take the opportunity to "breathe in" what others want to give you.

Just as you must literally breathe in to exist, you must also "breathe in" the support, empathy, and nurturing that others want to give you.

If it's hard to accept help remember these two things:

- Your friends and loved ones really **want** to help you right now. They've just been waiting for you to ask.
- ***It's not a sign of weakness to receive help and support.***

It's actually the opposite. People who are strong and resilient know that one of the big reasons they **are** strong and resilient is because they allow friends and family to support them when needed.

What kind of help do you need?

Now that you have people lined up to support you, make it easier for them by letting them know what kind of help you need.

Do you just need someone to blow off steam with?

Do you need help solving a problem?

Do you need for them to spend the night with you at the hospital as you sit by your dying loved one's bed?

Do you need meals brought in for the kids while you're working your second job to make ends meet?

Remember that your friends and family *want* to help, but they may not be able to read your mind to know what would be *most* helpful.

You may not know exactly what you need, either.

Sit down for a minute and visualize a friend who you know will be glad to help. Ask yourself what you really need from her in order for you to get through this bad thing.

Then ask her for it.

Bouncing back from tough times is hard. Doing it alone is harder. Make sure you have all the support you need.

You'll be glad you did.

Taking action toward . . . Social Support

1. Become more sociable.

Remember these ideas from above:

To assess whether you have good sociability, ask yourself:

- Am I empathic and caring?
- Do I communicate clearly and assertively?
- Am I compassionate? Do I help others?
- Do people seem to want to help me?

If the answer to any of these is "no," you may want to get some help from a counselor or mentor or close friend to have you work toward becoming a help-able person.

2. Be willing to accept help.

Understand and really **own** the idea that people want to help **you**.

Not you helping them this time.

They are going to help **you**.

If you find yourself having difficulty accepting help, ask yourself:

- What is hard for me about accepting help?
- What does it mean about me if I accept help?
- How do I view others when I help them? Do I think that they're weak or less than me?
- Is there a part of me that can grow through this practice of accepting help?

3. Find a place where you belong.

You need a community. If you don't have one already, think about joining a club, class, or group of people who have your same interests.

These folks can be really helpful in your life when a bad thing hits.

4. Find a mentor.

Who is the person in your life that you look up to, take advice from, and can go to when you're caught up in one of life's whirlwinds?

If no one comes to mind, think of someone you would like to fill that role. Make an effort to grow your relationship with that person.

5. Determine what kind of help you need and ask for it.

Your friends can't read your mind. What they think might be helpful may not be what you need when you're in the middle of your bad thing.

Be specific. Tell them exactly what you need.

They will be relieved to know and more than happy to provide it for you.

Next . . . Positive Actions

Positive Actions

In this section:

- Try “positivity”
- Being intentionally happy
- Active problem-solving
- Self-compassion

For the most part, we’ve been talking about bouncing back from bad things mostly by changes made within you.

Changing your thinking, changing your perspective, and making sure you have a support system.

Now I want to talk about being a little more active, about some things that you can do **before** a bad thing hits to improve your resilience as well as things you can do when you’re right in the middle of a bad time.

It’s all about positive action.

Try positivity

Do positive emotions increase life satisfaction?

The answer is yes and they do it by building resilience.

University of North Carolina professor [Barbara Fredrickson](#) has spent the past two decades looking into why we have positive emotions and what we do with them.

She even has her own term for her work: positivity.

To quote an [old commercial](#), “Why ask ‘why?’” when it comes to positive emotions? Shouldn’t we just enjoy them while they’re around?

Sure, but maybe we can find even more about how these emotions benefit us.

For example, we know that negative emotions evolved to keep us safe.



Fear, anger, sadness, and other negative emotions actually **narrow** the focus of our attention while at the same time **increasing** the rate of our cardiovascular systems.

Why? (There I go again.)

So our ancestors could make quick decisions about new information coming into their brains and mobilize their bodies for action.

Yes, it's that old **fight-or-flight** response mechanism.

When a predatory animal approached our ancestor, she needed to become very focused on the situation at hand and her body needed to amp up to either run or fight the animal.

It's a very adaptive response and one that helped the rest of us be here today. If our ancestor didn't feel fear or anger or anxiety when facing a dangerous animal, she was most likely dinner for that particular hunter.

So how did positive emotions evolve? Being happy is not going to keep me safe or spur me into action, right? Or will it?

As it turns out, Fredrickson's research shows that positive emotions are **very** adaptive and here's why:

Being happy or content or joyful not only **calms** our cardiovascular systems so we can relax, but those emotions **expand our mindsets and social openness**, among other things, which allows us to have **wider ranges of ideas** and more flexibility in our behaviors.

What does this all mean?

We are able to problem-solve more easily, increase social support, and increase physical health – essential resiliency skills - all by experiencing positive emotions.

As **Fredrickson says**, "Put simply, positive emotions expand people's mindsets in ways that little-by-little reshape who they are."

She has found that experiencing positive emotions creates an "upward spiral" of increasingly better life satisfaction and contentment as opposed to the "downward spiral" of dissatisfaction triggered by self-perpetuating negative emotions.

In fact, Fredrickson has even discovered a formula for us to live by.

It turns out that a **3:1 ratio of positive-to-negative emotions** not only helps us feel good, but actually can "undo" some of the effects of the negative emotions we feel.

So, how can you go about getting more positive feelings in your life? Here are some ideas:

1. Notice positive moments.

Researchers [Susan Folkman and Judith Moskowitz](#) from UC San Francisco suggest that you take "psychological time-outs" by noticing the beautiful smile of a person walking by you, reflecting on a compliment someone gave you, or pausing to enjoy a beautiful sunset.

Don't let those wonderful little moments pass you by without taking a moment to appreciate them.

2. Practice mindfulness meditation.

Sit quietly, with your eyes closed, even for a few minutes. Focus on your breath and, as you notice your mind being active with thoughts, just allow those thoughts to float away like bubbles.

And **don't judge either yourself or the thoughts passing through your mind.**

That's the key to mindfulness meditation - lack of self-judgment.

As you learn to be less judgmental toward yourself, you create more space for positive feelings about yourself and the world.

3. Practice acts of kindness.

Helping others makes them feel good and increases your positivity, too.

Notice how all of these things associated with positivity will help you bounce back from your current bad thing **and** can help prepare you for **greater resilience** in your future.

Positive emotions not only help you feel good, but will expand your ability to come up with solutions to your bad thing, will help you get social support, and will improve your physical health, to boot.

Being intentionally happy

Now, here is another set of information about positive emotions, how you can get more of them, and how they fit into your ability to bounce back.

What makes you happy?

Money?

The newest iPhone?

The good health of your family?

A promotion at work?

Some interesting work by University of California, Riverside researcher [Sonja Lyubomirsky](#) not only suggests where our happiness comes from, but shows how to get more of it.

Dr. Lyubomirsky proposes that there are three components to happiness:

- A genetically-based “happiness set point”
- Life circumstances
- Intentional activities and practices.

She has broken these three areas into percentages regarding how much they are responsible for your happiness.

Although the variability of the happiness set point is currently undergoing more research, Lyubomirsky cites studies that indicate the **set point** is responsible for 50% of your overall happiness.

Life circumstances – things like the aforementioned iPhone, family health, and work promotion – account for only 10% of your happiness.

That leaves **intentional activities** aimed toward positive emotion providing you with 40% of your happiness quotient.

Now, here are a couple of important things to know:

- Your happiness set point is genetic and therefore impervious to change. The theory is that no matter what happens – good or bad – you tend to eventually settle back into your inherited level of happiness.

So, there’s no use trying to make an impact on your happiness set point.

- You could try to improve your life circumstances by getting more stuff, striving for career goals, and finding the perfect partner.

But not only do life circumstances only account for a small percentage of your happiness, they are subject to a very human process: **hedonic adaptation**.

In a nutshell, this means that we very quickly adapt to new things in our lives, so our happiness about it is short-lived.

So that leaves us with intentional activities as the remaining piece of the happiness pie, a piece that creates 40% of our well-being.

Lyubomirsky believes it is this component that we have the most control over and that allows us to **take action** rather than merely **react** when it comes to creating happiness.

So what are these activities that promote positive emotions and well-being? Lyubomirsky suggests three well-researched practices:

1. Committing acts of kindness.

Surprise!

Sound familiar? We just heard about this in the information on positivity above!

Doing nice things for others tends to up your happiness quotient.

Curiously, Lyubomirsky found that doing several acts of kindness on the same day – rather than spreading them out through the week – generated the greatest jump in well-being.

2. Expressing gratitude and optimism.

Keeping a list of things you are grateful for really does help make you happier.

An intriguing note on this component is the discovery that making a list one time per week created a greater boost in happiness than making lists three or more times per week.

3. Processing happy and unhappy life experiences.

This is where it really gets interesting.

It turns out that talking or writing about your life experiences is helpful in only one of these conditions: the negative experiences.

Why?

Apparently, talking to a friend (social support, remember?) or writing about difficult times in your life helps you to create a story and structure around the event, an act which helps you make sense of it and adjust to the experience more easily.

Positive experiences, however, generate more happiness if they are thought about privately.

This allows you to savor and re-experience them without having to analyze them.

It's perfectly fine to talk with others about great things that happen to you as this will brighten your friend's day, too. But be sure to remember and relish those good events in your life in your private time, too.

Active problem-solving

Sometimes I worry that all of the perspective-shifting I suggest for you, while essential to being resilient, will blind you to one of the very obvious components of bouncing back:

Solving the problem.

Now, some bad things just *can't* be solved. The death of a loved one or a natural disaster, for example.

But there are many problems that can either be solved **or** you can solve the problem of how you're going to deal with the bad thing.

Now, there are many, many ways to approach problem-solving. You can find a boatload of useful strategies on [this page at Mind Tools](#).

However, let's just look at a basic, simple way for you to try first:

1. Identify what the problem truly is.

Is the problem that you got laid off from your job?

Or is it that you need to find a new job?

Or is it that you are having a hard time recovering emotionally from the layoff?

See the difference between these three questions? The first one isn't really a problem – it's a statement of fact. If you spent all of your time and energy fighting to solve it, you wouldn't get anywhere.

The second question is truly a problem: You need to find a new job.

But even though that's a problem, maybe you're not worried about finding a new job. Maybe the **true problem** you're dealing with is the emotional fallout from the act of being laid off.

Specifying the **exact** problem will help you solve it more easily.

2. List all of the solutions that have worked for you before.

Let's say you decide that finding a job is the true problem.

Has this happened to you in the past? What did you do then?

Did it work?

If so, do it again!

If not, move on to step three.

3. Brainstorm as many solutions as possible to the problem.

Go ahead and write down everything you can think of, no matter how silly.

So, your list might look like:

- Go to Career Center downtown and enroll in their services
- Look at Craigslist
- Ask Aunt Edna if she knows of any openings
- Howl at the full moon while naked
- Ask my former boss for a positive recommendation
- Attend networking event next Tuesday

The point is to get as many ideas out on the table as possible.

4. Review your list of solutions and prioritize them in terms of workability.

Okay, I guess howling at the moon while naked probably won't get you anywhere.

But maybe the others might actually work or at least be productive. Put them in order from most likely to help to least likely to help.

So, now you're list might look like this:

- a. Go to Career Center downtown and enroll in their services

- b. Attend networking event next Tuesday
- c. Look at Craigslist for job openings in my field
- d. Ask my former boss for a positive recommendation
- e. Ask Aunt Edna if she knows of any openings
- f. ~~Howl at the full moon while naked~~

5. Try each solution in order.

6. Has any of them worked?

Yes – Congratulations! You’re employed!

No- Return to step 3 and keep trying.

Again, this is a **very** basic problem-solving approach. You may want something more sophisticated or your problem may be thornier than the example.

Check out [Mind Tools](#) for more advanced ideas.

You may also want to consult a therapist or life coach to help you sort through your problem.

In any situation, though, don’t forget that you need to **take action** whether it’s solving the problem itself or dealing with the emotional impact of the problem.

Self-compassion

Love thyself as thy neighbor.

Did you catch that switcheroo in the sentence above?

Usually, it’s “love thy neighbor as thyself.”

But in our society, we tend to reverse that. We find it easier to be compassionate toward others than toward ourselves.

Being nice to others is a good thing, right? Yes, but it begs the question: Why can’t we be nicer to ourselves?

That Inner Critic

You know that chirping little critic you hear inside your head sometimes? Most of us have one. It's that voice that says,

"You'll never be good enough."

"Why even try? You know you can't do it."

"You're such a hypocrite (loser, slob, dimwit, etc.)"

Kristin Neff, author of *Self-Compassion* and a pioneer in the field of self-compassion research, says this voice probably developed as a means to keep us safe, a basic need that we all have.

Also, she posits that we may think we need this voice to keep us motivated. After all, won't we just be completely out of control if we didn't talk to ourselves this way?

You know the answer to that. We don't need that inner critic to keep us in line.

Neff's work has found that people who are self-compassionate – who are kind to themselves – are less depressed, more confident, and **able to bounce back from adversity more easily** than people who are not compassionate with themselves.

Listening to our inner critic is definitely **not** being self-compassionate. It's really the opposite – more a way to beat ourselves up.

So, ask yourself this question: Would I speak to my best friend like that?

I'd wager that you wouldn't. I think if you're friend was struggling with a problem in her life, that you'd be right there for her, telling her it will be okay and empathizing about how hard this must be for her.

Can you do this for yourself?

In order to increase your resiliency and develop a healthy sense of well-being, it's time you learned how to be compassionate toward yourself.

Neff suggests that there are three components of self-compassion.

1. Being kind to yourself

When you're in a tough situation and find your inner critic taking you for a rough three rounds, retreat to your corner and ask yourself, "What would I say to my friend in this situation?"

Say those same things to yourself.

Go ahead. It's okay.

"Wow, this is a really hard situation I'm in right now. It sucks, but I know I can make it through. Anyone would be having a hard time when faced with something like this."

Neff also advocates using a personal mantra for allowing yourself compassion. The one she uses is:

*This is a moment of suffering
Suffering is a part of life
May I be kind to myself
May I show myself the compassion I need.*

I have adopted this mantra as well except I have replaced the last line with:

May I accept myself completely as I am.

Use this one or develop your own words to form a self-compassion mantra.

Practice it frequently so when you're in the throes of a crisis, you can easily recite it to yourself.

Finally, Neff suggests that physically showing kindness to yourself can generate self-compassion.

When you are feeling a painful emotion, sit still for a bit and try to locate it in your body. Then put your hand on that place and recite your mantra.

Or, **put both hands over your heart** and repeat your mantra or speak to yourself as you would your friend.

This kind of **self-soothing** releases oxytocins in the body and helps you to feel comfort and respite from your struggles.

2. Common humanity

Many times when we are experiencing adversity, we feel like we're the only ones going through something like this. **This kind of thinking leaves us feeling isolated and alone.**

Instead, remember that most of what we feel and think and how we behave is a part of our common humanity. **Everyone** makes mistakes. **Everyone** gets embarrassed. **Everyone** struggles at times.

The next time you find yourself starting to feel isolated and alone because of emotional pain, **remember that you are a part of a greater, common humanity.**

You're not alone – you're in good company of many people who understand what you are experiencing.

3. Mindfulness

This mindfulness idea keeps popping up, doesn't it?

We saw it above in the ideas about positivity and now here it is again.

Maybe we ought to pay attention . . .

Neff says, "**To give ourselves compassion, we first have to recognize that we are suffering.** We can't heal what we can't feel." (*Self-compassion*, p. 80.)

We are used to turning away from our own pain, but self-compassion requires us to stop and recognize the emotional state we are in. That is when the healing begins.

Mindfulness allows us the space to see clearly what is going on rather than getting caught up in our personal drama.

As Neff says, "Mindfulness provides us with the opportunity to **respond** rather than simply **react**." (p. 90)

Of course, the best way to learn to be mindful is to take a few minutes of meditation each day.

And this doesn't have to be a sitting meditation. You can take a walk outside and keep your awareness to what you see and hear around you.

When you feel your thoughts straying, just **withhold judgment** and return to observing.

Kristin Neff has many free guided meditations on her website www.self-compassion.org.

Taking action toward . . . Positive Action

1. Increase your positive emotions.

To actively increase your positive emotions, try these ideas based on the research by Barbara Fredrickson:

- **Notice positive moments**

Being “in the moment” allows you to see what is happening around you that might lift your mood.

Maybe it’s the smile of a baby or the colors of the fall leaves or the smell of the newly-mown grass.

Be open to what is around you.

- **Mindfulness meditation**

This is a powerful practice that is included in both Frederickson’s work as well as Kristin Neff’s research on self-compassion.

Remember, whatever you do to become more mindful, the key is to ***not judge yourself or any of the thoughts you are having.***

Be okay with who and where you are.

Jon Kabat-Zinn is one of the premier researchers and practitioners of mindfulness meditation.

You can find a short, 10-minute guided meditation [here](#) or you can do a search for “Jon Kabat-Zinn mindfulness meditation” and you’ll find many resources.

And don’t forget about Kristin Neff’s free online meditations [here](#).

- **Acts of kindness**

Notice again that this action is listed in more than one place in the research.

You can be very intentional about your kindness by volunteering at a food bank, homeless shelter, or other organization in your community.

Also be open to ***random acts of kindness*** you can commit.

Opening the door for someone.

Smiling at a stranger.

Unloading the grocery cart for a young mom with a baby in her arms.

Being kind not only helps the person receiving, it makes you feel good, too.

2. Be intentionally happy.

We know that acts of kindness can help improve our emotions and happiness.

But remember these other tips from Sonja Lyubomirsky as well:

- **Be grateful**

At least one time per week, write down what you are grateful for in your life. If you have a hard time coming up with anything, ask a friend to help you brainstorm.

- **Analyze the negative, savor the positive**

Remember that talking with friends about negative events can actually be helpful because it allows you to get a clearer picture of the problem.

It's definitely okay to talk to friends about the good stuff, too, but research shows that we get more out of positive events if we think about them privately as well.

3. Take action through problem-solving.

Don't forget that you need to **take action** in order to get through bad things. See the ideas in the problem-solving section above to get started.

4. Be kind to yourself.

It's not only okay but you **need** to be kind to yourself at all times, especially when in the midst of a bad thing. Learning self-compassion will help you on a daily basis and help you learn to bounce back more quickly in life.

- Speak to yourself as you would to a friend who is going through a rough time
- Develop a self-compassion mantra
- Learn and use some self-soothing tools
- Remember that we're all in this together. We're human and make mistakes, celebrate successes, feel good and bad, and a whole host of other things. But we **all** do them.
- Use mindfulness meditation. See #2 above for more resources.

Next . . . Learning the lessons/Finding the gifts

Learning the lessons/Finding the gifts

In this section:

- Post-traumatic growth
- The pearl in the oyster

This last section deals with a topic that many people who have had bad things happen really don't want to hear about: finding the gifts and lessons that can accompany bad things.

While I'm not a believer in **every** cloud having a silver lining, I do believe that, given enough time and thought, many dark clouds eventually start to reveal the bright light behind them.

Post-traumatic growth

You've heard of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

It's that syndrome that can occur after any kind of trauma and is most often thought of in association with veterans in our armed forces who have seen combat.

Since PTSD can occur after any trauma, you may have experienced it a bit yourself. If you were in a car accident, you might have been fearful of driving for a time after the accident.

You may have had nightmares about the accident and felt anxious about life in general for awhile.

Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) is somewhat the opposite of PTSD. The idea, pioneered by researchers **Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun**, is that people can actually experience positive change after trauma.

Not that they **will for sure**, but it's possible.

Tedeschi and Calhoun are quick to point out that the idea is **not** that we can only experience growth through bad things happening, nor are they proposing that growth during or after trauma means there won't be any suffering.

But they have done many studies that show some people learn and grow in a positive direction because of trauma.

This growth tends to occur in five areas:

1. Sometimes people who must face major life crises develop a **sense that new opportunities have emerged from the struggle, opening up possibilities that were not present before.**
2. **Change in relationships with others.** Some people experience closer relationships with some specific people, and they can also experience an increased sense of connection to others who suffer.
3. **An increased sense of one's own strength** – *“if I lived through that, I can face anything”*.
4. **A greater appreciation for life in general.**
5. Some people experience a **deepening of their spiritual lives**, however, this deepening can also involve a significant change in one's belief system.

The pearl in the oyster

As you may know, sand sometimes works its way through the shell of an oyster and into its soft body. In order to protect itself from the irritation, the oyster begins layering the grain of sand with nacre, the substance that makes up part of the oyster's shell.

The result?

A pearl.

And so it is with life sometimes.

The very thing that irritates your soft insides – the bad thing – can actually create something of beauty.

I think the best way to illustrate this is through story. So here are a few true stories of people who have allowed pearls to be created in the midst of truly bad things.

Story #1 – Living the change

Several months ago, when I logged on to the Internet, my news channel home page confronted me with this headline in large font: “Killer of mom, 2 daughters gets death sentence.”

Ugh, I thought, how awful on so many levels.

As I read on, I was horrified to learn the [details of the case](#).

In 2007, two men broke into the Connecticut home of William and Jennifer Petit. They severely beat William, strangled Jennifer, and killed the couple's two daughters by tying them to their beds, then setting the house on fire. The girls died of asphyxiation. William somehow managed to escape and is the only survivor.

I began to wonder about William.

How has he been able to manage his loss and the memories of that awful night?

Even with my utter belief in the power of the human spirit and resiliency, I could not see how he could come back from this nor could my shocked mind find any gifts in this horrendous event.

O, me of little faith.

I ran an Internet search on William Petit.

Among the many articles about the murders, a link popped up that said "[Petit Family Foundation.](#)"

I clicked on the link, and as the site opened, I gasped.

The site, which emanates light and love, is centered on a slideshow of the Petit family before the tragedy.

My gasp, however, came from the quote next to the slideshow:

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world." – Mohandas Gandhi.

How could this be? How could William Petit have the presence of mind and heart to create this foundation of change from such an act of evil?

I read further on the website:

- *The **PETIT FAMILY FOUNDATION** website is designed to provide a complete portrait of who we are, what we do and why it is important to continue the memories of **JENNIFER HAWKE-PETIT, HAYLEY ELIZABETH PETIT** and **MICHAELA ROSE PETIT**. They were taken from us far too soon, but we are determined to honor their memories and to continue their many acts of kindness and activism.*
- *With your help we can promote opportunity for young women, continue the fight against chronic illness and extend a blanket of comfort for others affected by violence. A change for the better does not just happen. We need each and every one of you to help*

*fulfill our mission; you will all help to be the changes that **JENNIFER, HAYLEY,** and **MICHAELA** wanted to see in the world.*

- *The **PETIT FAMILY FOUNDATION** tries to do as many good actions as possible to counteract the evil that truly exists in the world today. We feel that we all must make a commitment to do what we can to make this world a better place.*

Incredibly, William Petit, his father, and other family members have taken this horrific incident in their lives and are making sure only good comes of it.

They are living the change that they want to see in the world.

William is a long way from being completely healed.

He told a reporter, “It’s a hole with jagged edges,” he said. “Over time the edges may smooth out a little bit, but the hole in your heart, the hole in your soul is always there.”

Although he may never experience the total healing for which his soul longs, William has made the conscious choice to bring light to the dark, healing the wounds of so many others around him.

Story #2 – There are gifts everywhere

In contrast to the catastrophic yet grace-filled experience of William Petit, my friend Susan had a personal calamity that was much less traumatic, but still a bad thing.

She was audited by the IRS.

Susan, a small business owner, was beside herself.

“Ugh! They want all of these receipts and canceled checks and invoices . . . it’s going to take me forever to round this stuff up and I meet with them next Tuesday!”

How was I going to put a positive spin on this?

Tentatively, I asked, “Susan, is there any chance there is **a gift** in this mess?”

I expected a sarcastic answer.

Instead she said emphatically, “Yes! ***I’ve learned that I can’t do it all by myself.*** I need help. I need someone to organize me and I need to use an accountant.

“I’ve been fooling myself that I could keep track of all of this by myself and now I am accepting that I can’t.

“I think that’s both a lesson and a gift.”

Story #3 – Tragedy, grief, love, and joy

A few years ago, I was re-connected with a childhood friend of mine.

Via Facebook, of course.

I found out that she had lost both her parents, a sister, and a close family friend in a horrific train crash in 1999.

As we talked, I began to see her story of resilience and Post-Traumatic Growth come to the fore.

Both awed and grateful for her story, I asked her to **write about it** on my **Bounce** blog. Here is an excerpt:

“ What I discovered, after I had spent some time on this path, is that sometimes, ***life hands you a new normal*** and expects you to deal with it.

Sometimes, you just have to keep moving.

At some point, I realized that my children needed their mother, and my husband needed his wife.

I needed to be needed again.

Slowly, I felt myself come back. I smiled more often. I could talk about my parents and sister without dissolving into tears.

I looked less into the past and more into the present. I vowed to teach my young sons all about the family they lost.

In my newfound feelings of resolve, I found hope.

I was not the same, but I was going to be okay.

All along, my sisters and I had **discovered blessings** that had come from the tragedy.

Our parents, who had recently celebrated 55 years of marriage, died as they had lived — together. Our faith assured us they were in Heaven.

Our sister who died was the only one of us five sisters who would leave no spouse or children behind.

Beloved friends and family who had lost touch over the years now contacted us because of our loss. People recounted inspiring stories of love and encouragement – my parents and my sister Wendy had touched so many!

I like to say that ***grief is a great and terrible teacher.***

Most of us live our lives as if nothing can touch us. When death comes to us in some way, we realize how foolish we were.

Suddenly we are faced with despair; ***the lessons are hard, but they help us grow.***

I would not wish this on anyone, ***but in some ways, I am glad to have gone through it.***

I cherish my life and loved ones as never before, and I feel more compassionate toward others.

I believe I am stronger, but at the same time, I am also a little more fearful. I now know that those things we think will ‘never happen to me’ can, and do happen.

I walked that path, and by the grace of God and the people around me, I made it through.

The grief that would destroy me has instead shaped me into a better person.

My family talks about life in terms of before and after the crash.

Two distinct periods separated by one horrible event.

It was an ugly time, and I really thought I might never recover.

But I did, and I’m here to say that despite its struggles, ***life is good.*** ”

Story #4 – Just wait.

And, finally, another story from my life with Ruth as written about [on my blog](#):



Several years ago, I sat with my partner, Ruth, as she recovered from her second round of aggressive chemo treatment. She had metastatic breast cancer and this was the last of several different kinds of treatment she had received over her four-year journey with the disease. This particular concoction made her very weak and ill.

I was reading *Science of Mind Magazine* and a passage jumped out at me. "Listen to this," I said to Ruth as she lay in bed:

*When we are ill, we may feel lost as to what to do or where to go. Waiting may have the feel of being passive, but think of the **caterpillar in the cocoon**, the seed in the ground, or a mother bird sitting on her egg. Waiting in our lostness is sometimes vital for the journey into wholeness.*



"Does that mean I'm going to become a butterfly?" Ruth asked excitedly.

"I think it does," I replied, squeezing her hand.

I knew what she meant. We had often talked about the reality that this cancer would eventually kill her. She was talking about being set as free as a butterfly when she died.

Which she did, two months later.

Suddenly, I was the one in the cocoon. I wasn't prepared for the intensity of my grief and I felt utterly lost and unsure of everything, including life itself.

It took almost three years before I crawled out of the cocoon, my fragile, weak wings dewy with both tears and anticipation.

And, finally, I started to fly.

I wasn't the same as I was before; I was very different and there were times I longed to crawl back into the cocoon.

But my new life was beautiful in a way that would not have occurred had I not allowed myself to cocoon and "wait in lostness".

The experience of grief filled me out and made me more of a whole person, able now to be with others in a healing way on their paths of grief.

Sometimes it's easy to misinterpret your need for cocooning as being passive, the feeling of lostness as being undesirable.

And yet, maybe those times are the very thing you need to be whole.

Be gentle with yourself when you find yourself lost and waiting.

Perhaps you need that time to become the beautiful butterfly you were always meant to be.



Taking action toward . . . Learning Lessons/Finding the Gifts

1. Be open to the idea that Post-Traumatic Growth can occur for you.

Look closely and see if growth occurred for you in these five areas from the Tedeschi and Calhoun research:

- **A sense that new opportunities have emerged from the struggle, opening up possibilities that were not present before.**
- **Change in relationships with others.**
- **An increased sense of one's own strength.**
- **A greater appreciation for life in general.**
- **A deepening of your spiritual life.**

2. Look for the lessons or gifts in your story.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Now that I've experienced this bad thing, what would I not do again?
- What would I do differently?

- Am I stronger? In what way?
- What did I learn from this bad thing?

3. Give thanks for the lessons you learned and gifts you received.

Next . . . Putting it all together

Putting it all together

Let's review some of the important points:

- People tend to be naturally resilient and you probably are, too
- Still, increasing your resiliency skills can help you bounce back more easily when you get squeezed by bad things that happen in life
- There are five helpful components of resiliency that you can keep in your resiliency toolbox:
 - Acceptance
 - Perspective
 - Social Support
 - Positive Actions
 - Learning the lessons/Finding the gifts

Here are the action steps for each component all in one handy place:

Acceptance

Moving past denial:

- 1. Gain clarity** – try to see your current situation for what it **truly** is, not what you **hope** it is
- 2. Learn to tolerate emotional discomfort or pain** – remember that it's not the end of the world.
- 3. Give yourself a break** – don't judge yourself harshly if you were in denial for awhile. It's a protective mechanism we all use occasionally.

Don't resist:

- 1. Notice what you resist** – pay attention to your body and when you become tense. Or when your emotions lapse into anger, irritation, or frustration. It's likely that resistance is in play.
- 2. Don't resist** – let it go. Remember that going with the current is a lot easier than trying to walk against it.
- 3. Notice the difference** – doesn't it feel good to stop resisting?

4. Give thanks – feel and express gratitude for the freedom of non-resistance.

Perspective

1. Remember an experience from your past that has been difficult and tell or ask yourself:

- I made it through that past bad thing, even though it was painful, and I can make it through this, too, even though it is painful.
- Is there something I learned back then that will help me now?

2. Look at your current bad thing from different angles – is this bad thing actually opening up opportunities for you?

3. Remember that this, too, shall pass – all bad things eventually pass. Give yourself some time.

Social Support

1. Become more sociable – learn to be someone that other people *want* to help.

2. Be willing to accept help - receiving help and support doesn't mean you're weak.

3. Find a place where you belong – you need a place where everyone knows your name.

4. Find a mentor - it's helpful to have one person in your life that you can consult when bad things happen.

5. Determine what kind of help you need and ask for it - be as specific as possible when you ask your support system for help.

Positive Actions

1. Increase your positive emotions

- Notice positive moments
- Mindfulness meditation
- Acts of kindness

2. Be intentionally happy.

We know that acts of kindness can help improve our emotions and happiness.

But remember these other tips from Sonja Lyubomirsky as well:

- **Be grateful**

At least one time per week, write down what you are grateful for in your life. If you have a hard time coming up with anything, ask a friend to help you brainstorm.

- **Analyze the negative, savor the positive**

Remember that talking with friends about negative events can actually be helpful because it allows you to get a clearer picture of the problem.

It's definitely okay to talk to friends about the good stuff, too, but research shows that we get more out of positive events if we think about them privately as well.

3. Take action through problem-solving.

Don't forget that you need to **take action** in order to get through bad things. See the ideas in the problem-solving section above to get started.

4. Be kind to yourself.

It's not only okay but you **need** to be kind to yourself at all times, especially when in the midst of a bad thing. Learning self-compassion will help you on a daily basis and help you learn to bounce back more quickly in life.

- Speak to yourself as you would to a friend who is going through a rough time
- Develop a self-compassion mantra
- Learn and use some self-soothing tools
- Remember that we're all in this together. We're human and make mistakes, celebrate successes, feel good and bad, and a whole host of other things. But we **all** do them.
- Use mindfulness meditation. See #2 above for more resources.

Learning the lessons/Finding the gifts

1. Be open to the idea that Post-Traumatic Growth can occur for you – sometimes bad things can trigger our greatest periods of growth. Can this happen for you?

2. Look for the lessons or gifts in your story – what have you learned and/or what gift have you received because of this bad thing?

3. Give thanks for the lessons you learned and gifts you received – gratitude helps you feel better, reinforces the lesson/gift you've received, and keeps things in perspective.

An even smaller nutshell

The next time life smacks you down, remember:

- **Don't resist**
- **Look at it from a different angle**
- **Use your friends**
- **Be kind to yourself and others**
- **Find the pearl in the oyster**

I hope that you are not in the middle of a bad thing right now. But if you are, using some or all of these ideas will help you bounce back in a way that makes you stronger, more resilient, and able to face the future with confidence.

Happy bouncing!

P.S. Don't forget to take a look at the resources on the next few pages

P.P.S. Receive free updates on getting your bounce back by [subscribing to Bounce](#).

About Bounce

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

~ Leonard Cohen

Bounce is about developing the ability to say yes to whatever happens in life – good, bad, or indifferent. It's about being fully present, bringing the best of who we are to every situation. And it's about being able to accept ourselves completely, warts and all.

Everything you find at **Bounce** will help you develop your resiliency. By learning to say yes, you will be better able to bounce back from just about anything - from losing a loved one to stress at work to the dog throwing up on your shoes right before you're headed out the door.



I'm **Bobbi Emel** and I'm a psychotherapist with a private practice in Los Altos, Ca. I have over 20 years of experience in the field and have been working with the concept of resiliency since 1999.

In my personal life, I enjoy golfing, reading books that teach me something, and eating at my favorite restaurant where everyone knows my name.

Being a native Washingtonian, I've also been an avid (if not long-suffering) fan of the Seattle Mariners since 1977.

I'm looking forward to our shared time here at Bounce! The best place to start is at the **Bounce Blog**. You can also follow me on **Facebook** and **Twitter**.

If you live in California's Bay Area and are interested in individual therapy sessions, give me a call at 650-529-9059 or [email me](#).

Links in this e-book

- p. 9 Martha Clark Scala, www.mcscala.com
- p. 18 Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith,
www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140100026940
- p. 20 Bruce Anderson, www.communityactivators.com
- p. 23 Barbara Frederickson, www.unc.edu/peplab/barb_fredrickson_page.html
- p. 23 “Why ask why?” commercial, www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2CU37Y363s
- p. 24 Barbara Frederickson,
<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~akring/Garland%20et%20al%20CPR%202010.pdf>
- p. 25 Susan Folkman and Judith Moskowitz,
<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/20182642?uid=3739560&uid=2&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21100799797611>
- p. 26 Sonja Lyubomirsky, <http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~sonja/>
- p. 28, 30 Mind Tools, http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_TMC.htm
- p. 31 Kristin Neff, <http://www.self-compassion.org>
- p. 34 “in the moment”, <http://www.jodichapman.com/2012/04/29/shared-wisdom-the-magic-of-the-moment/>
- p. 34 Jon Kabat-Zinn meditation, <http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Jon-Kabat-Zinns-Meditation-Mindfulness-of-the-Body>
- p. 34 Kristin Neff’s meditation, <http://www.self-compassion.org>
- p. 37 Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, <http://ptgi.uncc.edu/>
- p. 39 Petit case, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40071693/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/#.T7FOa-v2aeY
- p. 39 Petit Family Foundation, <http://www.petitfamilyfoundation.org/>
- p. 41 Becky Phillips’ tragedy, <http://www.bobbiemel.com/blog/bid/47123/Resilience-Sometimes-life-hands-you-a-new-normal>
- p. 41 The Bounce Blog, <http://www.TheBounceBlog.com>

- p. 43 Just Wait, <http://www.bobbiemel.com/blog/bid/69340/Just-wait>
- p.50 The Bounce Blog, <http://www.TheBounceBlog.com>
- p. 50 Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/bobbiemel>
Twitter, @BobbiEmel

Resources

Books

Taming Your Gremlin: A Surprisingly Simple Method for Getting Out of Your Own Way
Rick Carson

The Mindful Way Through Depression: Freeing Yourself From Chronic Unhappiness
Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal, and Jon Kabat-Zinn

Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind
Kristin Neff

Positivity: Top-Notch Research Reveals the 3:1 Ratio That Will Change Your Life
Barbara Frederickson

The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want
Sonja Lyubomirsky

Handbook of Adult Resilience

John W. Reich, Alex J. Zautra, and John Stuart Hall

(Note: Much of the research referenced in *How to Bounce Back from (Just About) Anything* comes from this book. It's not a self-help book; rather, it's a compilation of scholarly articles on resilience. If you're a research nerd like me, you'll love it!)

The Art of Resilience: 100 Paths to Wisdom and Strength in an Uncertain World
Carol Orsborn

The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are
Brene Brown