

INTRODUCTION

I was first asked to talk about resilience with corporate audiences at the height of the Great Recession in 2008. With so much downsizing and economic upheaval during those years, it wasn't surprising that nearly every organization that invited me to speak requested a message on resilience. Still, I expected people's interest in this topic to eventually subside. But even now, I'm asked to talk about this subject more than any other. Looking back, is it any wonder?

Massive change and pressures continued unabated after that financial crisis. The proliferation of smartphones, artificial intelligence, and other technology resulted in more anxiety and less connection, faith, and trust in institutions. A global pandemic—along with the political, economic, racial, and social upheaval that followed—has stretched and stressed us all. And of course, beyond these collective stressors, each of us has our own personal journey, filled with hopes and dreams, disappointments and challenges that require resilience to navigate. Now take a moment to consider: What are your biggest challenges? Your hopes? Your worries? In what areas do you want to be more resilient? Whatever your answers, the goal of this book is to give you tools to navigate them successfully.

Resilience equips you to thrive, lead, and succeed in a world of change and uncertainty. Resilience makes you a better problem solver and confident decision-maker, not to mention a more adaptable,

relaxed, and insightful person. Your ability to be effective in the face of adversity, challenges, and change depends on it.

As I studied what makes people flourish, especially in the midst of challenges, I discovered that it often boils down to a difference in their thinking. The most successful and resilient people have a way of framing their problems so that they're empowered to solve or work around challenges. They also have an approach to success that embraces passion, hope, and optimism. These thinking patterns are not tangible, so others often overlook the pivotal points where these people could have given up or failed irreparably.

With this difference in mind, I began asking myself one question while coaching clients and myself through challenges over the years:

What if there was a set of simple rules that could coach you to find an answer to any challenge you're dealing with?

My goal is to share the answer I discovered and to equip you to face any challenge by coaching you—again and again—in the right direction.

As we journey through these pages, I will help you assess your level of resilience; teach you a practical, research-based framework to help you move past obstacles; and share the personal rules that most successful people embrace to bounce back and navigate the myriad challenges of life and work. I share stories from friends and clients, including a Grammy-winning member of one of the bestselling music groups of all time, a podcaster who set out to attract three hundred listeners a week and landed over a million in her first month, and a four-time Olympian who overcame the odds in sports and used her resilience skills to beat a highly fatal form of cancer. I also include stories from my own life, family, and business.

In this book, I'll show you exactly what you need to know and do in order to build and sustain a level of resilience that empowers you to survive—and even thrive—as you navigate the challenges of your life and work.

Resilience Training Came in the Nick of Time

I first studied resilience while studying applied positive psychology in graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Karen Reivich, one of my professors, had researched and written extensively on resilience, and soon I began to apply what I learned from her and other positive psychology researchers to my own life. My capstone project on how high-achieving people think later became the bestselling book *Successful Women Think Differently: 9 Habits to Make You Happier, Healthier, and More Resilient*. That's also when I began delivering keynotes and workshops on resilience for corporate and government clients, ministries, and events.

Not long after, I was invited to speak on resilience, both in the United States and abroad. Dr. Marty Seligman, my former professor and a world-renowned expert in positive psychology, invited me to become a facilitator in a new resilience program being developed by the University of Pennsylvania for the US Army as a part of their Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program. I accepted, excited that my upbringing in a military family, along with my positive psychology background and speaking experience, could be helpful.

My involvement in that program could not have come at a better time for me personally. My marriage of six years had just ended, and I had moved from Maryland to Georgia to start my life over and continue to grow my business. Though I had family scattered around the Atlanta metro area where I'd settled, I worked from home, coaching clients virtually and traveling for speaking engagements. Being part of a team that taught resilience was a welcome change, and even more importantly, the subject matter reinforced the skills and habits I especially needed in that season of my life. I did it for less than a year, but the exposure and experience reshaped my life and work.

Today, in addition to writing and speaking, I am a Master Certified Coach and founder of The Coaching and Positive Psychology (CaPP) Institute, a company that trains personal and executive coaches worldwide.¹ I have the privilege of serving as one of five mentors to more

than 55,000 Maxwell Leadership Certified Team members across the globe in over 100 countries, where my role is teaching coaching skills to team members. Over the past two decades, I've written thirteen other books and coached thousands of people. Enabling people to adapt to change and seize opportunities is at the heart of everything I do. And I'm not alone.

In fact, organizational psychology researchers advocate that businesses look beyond financial and human capital when seeking to solve issues around morale and adaptability. Investing in people's psychological capital—their reserves of resilience, hope, efficacy, and optimism—is one way to equip them to bounce back from setbacks and take advantage of new opportunities.² Without psychological capital, organizations cannot be agile enough to embrace change, adjust to growth and new technologies, or thrive in a dynamic and diverse environment. Preparing individuals to weather and thrive through challenges is so important, in fact, that I am an avid proponent of teaching resilience as a subject in every school and offering training in resilience within every organization.

Rules Are Meant to Be Chosen

After more than two decades of studying and teaching resilience, I've learned what distinguishes those who thrive in the face of the unexpected. Now I've boiled down the practical and research-based principles into a set of simple, easy-to-use rules. And if you use them regularly, both in the big challenges of life and the everyday stuff, you'll find yourself getting better, stronger, and wiser in every way. You'll have breakthroughs in your relationships, immediate shifts in your energy and motivation, and insights about how to move forward in the most meaningful ways.

Before I share the ten rules of resilience, I'll lay a foundation in the first chapter by helping you assess where you fall within the four levels of resilience and introducing you to the three pillars that support personal resilience—a combination of adaptive skills, protective

resources, and preventive choices. By intentionally strengthening each of these pillars, you'll discover that challenges are easier to navigate and positive outcomes are more frequent.

Each of the ten chapters that follow will introduce you to a practical, easy-to-remember rule that provides specific guidance on overcoming challenges. The more you practice the rules, the more they will become a part of your mindset and the faster you will find the wisest way forward, bounce back from setbacks and challenges, and seize new opportunities. Depending on the dilemma or challenge you face, you can decide which rule applies best in any given situation. The “bonus” rule you'll learn about in the final chapter will challenge you to offer what you've learned to others in a way that will enrich your life and theirs.

Along the way, I'll share inspiring, relatable stories from those who've found tremendous success in the face of improbable odds. These stories demonstrate the rules of resilience in action. You'll notice coaching prompts throughout each chapter that are designed to help you think differently and more productively. A Try This experiment at the end of each chapter is another coaching tool to help you try out new ideas and actions to determine what works best for you.

Let me explain what I mean when I use the term *coaching*. Coaching is helping someone move from where they are to where they really want to be, and to navigate the challenges and opportunities that appear along the way. One of the first things I teach my clients is that answering powerful questions can shift us in ways that give us the insight and strength to keep going. Pausing to do so is a form of resilience.

Coaching has been the most important tool I have used at pivotal points in my life to get unstuck and gain wisdom and clarity about next steps and how to take them. Both coaching and self-coaching are resilience tools. Self-coaching is the process of pausing intentionally, reflecting on the challenge you wish to navigate, and asking and honestly answering thought-provoking questions that can reveal the answers and actions that empower resilience. My goal in this book

is not only to serve as your coach, but to give you the tools to self-coach. The self-coaching questions throughout this book will lead you to wiser, deeper, and faster answers to any dilemma. Practicing the skill of self-coaching will help you draw on the rules of resilience to solve problems more quickly, seize opportunities confidently, and gain insights that strengthen your well-being, success, and happiness.

I believe wholeheartedly in these rules because I've lived them. I've coached others who've used them. I've studied why they work. When I get stuck now, it's because I've momentarily forgotten to embrace these principles. At points when I needed them most, these rules have pulled me through. And I know they can work for you, your team, and your family. I believe that if we all collectively practice them, we will inspire others to be more resilient, too, creating a more resilient world.

I'm excited and honored to walk alongside you on this journey. I invite you to return to these pages again and again, taking away just what you need for any challenge you face now and in the future. Let's get started!

Your friend and coach,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Valorie Burton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the end of the last name.

CREATE AND CULTIVATE A PERSONAL SYSTEM OF RESILIENCE

*Why you have more control over your resilience
than you might think*

KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Resilience is key to navigating challenges and maximizing opportunities.
 - ▶ Intentionally build your “personal resilience system” on three powerful pillars.
 - ▶ Evaluate your current resilience level.
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Whatever made you pick up this book, my guess is that you have already been resilient in many ways. And you understand that knowledge can mean the difference between success or failure, whether the challenge you face right now is in a relationship, your career, your health, or your finances. Over the years, clients have rarely come to me saying, “I want more resilience,” but that is ultimately the goal all of them have had in common.

For example, Danielle, a trailblazing businesswoman, got the unexpected call to interview with a former president of the United States for a position on his team and used our coaching to help her navigate that opportunity successfully. Robin, a savvy attorney who longed for marriage and motherhood, lost an IVF pregnancy at forty-six and wanted help reimagining her future.

James, an educator who overcame terrible abuse at the hands of his mother as a child, needed help—at work and with family—to learn to speak up, set boundaries, and be happy. And Jamal, who is amazing

at pretty much everything, longed to stop letting imposter syndrome and perfectionism get the best of him so he could finally gain the confidence to step out in faith and pursue his most authentic goals.

Like these clients, I bet you, too, have endured many situations in which you needed resilience, even if that's not the word you might have used to describe it. When we are resilient, we are tapping into rules that we can intentionally use again and again to navigate any challenge that comes along. These rules are rooted in three powerful pillars that form the foundation for your personal system of resilience. So that's where I want us to start, even before we dive into the rules. But first, let's consider the term *resilience*.

What Is Resilience?

Resilience is most often described as the ability to bounce back and successfully navigate challenges, adversity, and change. The American Psychological Association defines resilience as “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.”¹

That definition is accurate. In this book, though, I invite you to see your resilience more importantly as a *system* you create that

enables you to adapt to, withstand, and recover from stressors. A system is an organized framework or method—a set of rules, choices, or procedures that accomplish a specific goal.

ASK YOURSELF

What would greater resilience in your life enable you to do?

In this case, the goal is resilience, which is a necessary ingredient for success. The stronger your system of resilience, the more likely you are to accomplish a vision or overcome hardship and setbacks.

Notice that resilience not only puts you in the best situation to withstand stress, but it also positions you to seize opportunities. It is not just about overcoming difficulties or minimizing their impact, but

multiplying the good like compound interest. Success requires resilience, not only because the path to accomplishment is often filled with obstacles and unexpected challenges, but because the rules of resilience lay the groundwork that makes success easier to attain and sustain.

Three Supporting Pillars

If resilience is a system, how do you build a strong foundation to support it? You begin by taking personal ownership of your life and work by intentionally setting yourself up to deal with challenges and grasp opportunities when they come.

In 2015, a multidisciplinary group of scientists consolidated the existing research on factors that lead to resilience in children. The resulting report helped me identify the three elements, or pillars, that are key to overcoming obstacles and seizing opportunities at any age: adaptive skills, protective resources, and preventive measures.² Each rule in this book reflects one or more of these pillars. Just know that as you intentionally build and cultivate each pillar, your resilience will get stronger and stronger. By considering each of these pillars on its own, you can easily evaluate your resilience level. You can tell where you are strong and where you are weak, and make wise choices about what steps to take to increase your resilience. Seeing resilience as a system with three distinct pillars is a practical way for you to identify opportunities for growth and act in ways that produce real and positive change.

FIRST PILLAR: ADAPTIVE SKILLS

Adaptive skills are about how you think, react, and behave in response to challenges and opportunities. They determine the energy you bring to problem-solving as well as help formulate your strategy as you respond to adversity and opportunity. Adaptive skills are the inner resources that involve your mental, emotional, and spiritual states.

These skills are somewhat invisible and intangible because they are developed internally through your thoughts, motivations, and approach to life. They can be learned and honed through awareness and

practice. Consider the challenges for which you most need resilience in this season as you look at the factors that make up adaptive skills:

- responsibility and personal ownership
- thought awareness
- optimistic mindset and thinking style
- goal setting and planning
- locus of control
- strength leveraging
- positive emotion
- energy maintenance and management
- self-coaching
- flexibility
- self-compassion
- faith
- hope and optimism
- authenticity and humility

If you have dealt with a fair number of challenges, you've likely developed adaptive skills over time through necessity. If you have been shielded from or spared adversity in life and work, you may not have had the opportunity to learn or practice these adaptive skills. And even if you've faced some difficulties, new challenges that require levels of resilience you've never had to muster may still crop up.

As we look at the rules of resilience, we will delve further into what these skills entail, and why and how you can acquire and build them into your life and work to increase your resilience. You may already have an excellent grasp of some of these skills while you may need to hone others. You may not have even considered these as resilience skills, but I hope you'll gain an appreciation as to why they matter and how they can transform your ability to navigate challenges and reach your vision in any situation.

People's adaptive skills are not always apparent until you observe how they process and interpret the situations they are faced with. The most resilient people think differently—but their thoughts aren't always obvious.

SECOND PILLAR: PROTECTIVE RESOURCES

Protective resources tend to be more tangible and visible than adaptive skills. Typically, you can point to, name, and see these resources, which may include positive, supportive relationships; physical security; money; or access to services. Sometimes they are yours by virtue of the family, community, or even country you were born into. Not all protective resources come to us in this way, but many of them do. This is important because it helps us see how resilience can, in part, result from circumstances that are not of your own doing. But if you don't have them by the good fortune of happenstance, you can intentionally build these resources over time.

They are called protective resources because they can shield you from the damaging effects of stressors. When thinking of these resources, you may think of money first. But in the context of resilience, resources refer to anything tangible that protects you from the negative impacts of adversity, as well as anything that makes it easier to navigate challenges. These can include

- financial and work resources
- education and training
- experience
- environment
- health
- access to resources
- supportive relationships

Supportive relationships may be the most significant of the protective resources, so we will consider how to rally your relationships in Rule #5.

THIRD PILLAR: PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The third pillar, preventive measures, reduces and lessens the impact of adversity. Preventive measures are about thinking ahead and taking care of your future self. It is the skill of stepping into the shoes of your future self and asking, *What will I wish I had done?* Whatever you answer usually leads you to the best choice to make in the present.

These proactive choices, in other words, reduce your risk for adversity. This is the wisdom of foresight and discipline that often comes with experience. You carry forward new approaches to life and work that emerge as you triumph over stressors, empowering you to avoid or minimize similar challenges in the future.

For example, your future self might thank you tomorrow because you are well-rested for a big day after making the decision to go to bed early and get a good and full night's sleep. Or years from now you may be grateful to yourself because you started consistently investing for your future early on. Some challenges are beyond our control, but putting yourself in the best position to withstand potential challenges is what preventive measures are all about. It's wisdom in action.

A fascinating example of the power of preventive measures comes from the field of medicine. The 2019 influenza vaccine offered protection against two A-strain flu viruses and two B-strain viruses. It was what is called a quadrivalent vaccine because it targeted the four most common strains of flu. One of those B strains, Yamagata, has not been detected since March 2020. You probably recognize that as the month the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be not just an epidemic but a global pandemic. In an effort to minimize the spread of the disease, the use of masks, social distancing, and increased handwashing became the norm. These changes in behavior, while aimed at containing COVID, also rendered the Yamagata strain of the flu extinct. By 2024, vaccine scientists at the Food and Drug Administration declared that protection against the Yamagata strain was no longer needed and asked vaccine manufacturers to drop it from production, making the flu vaccine a trivalent flu vaccine, targeting just three strains.³ Not only that, but the preventive measures against COVID-19 led flu deaths to plummet. During a particularly virulent year in 2017–2018, more than 51,000 people in the United States died of influenza. The number of deaths dropped more than 50 percent in 2019–2020 and then by 90 percent during the 2021–2022 flu season. But once the pandemic ended and preventive measures tapered off, flu deaths crept back up again.⁴

In essence, simple preventive measures significantly reduced the occurrence of the challenge, and therefore dramatically lowered the number of deaths—even eliminating one strain of the flu entirely. Now imagine how preventive measures could work in your own life to reduce the risk of preventable adversities and challenges.

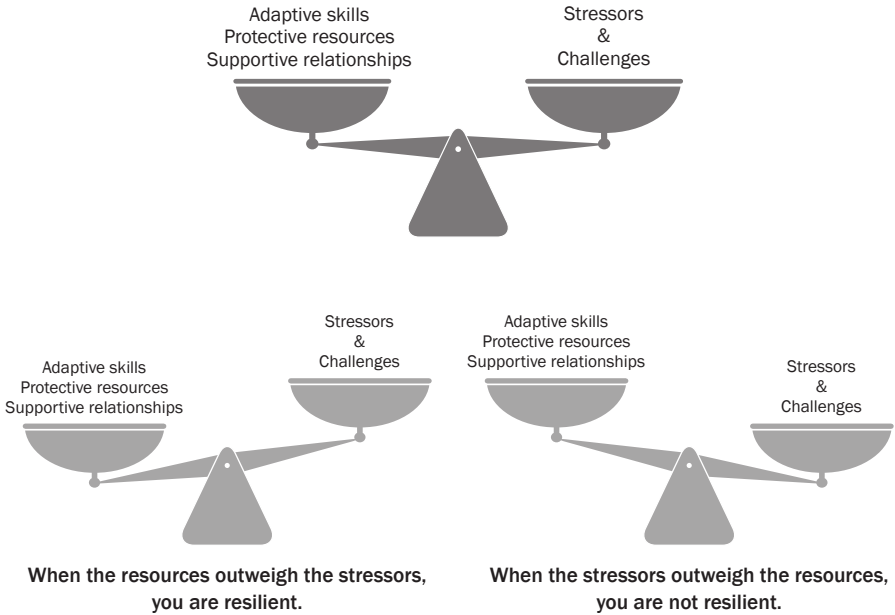
Although we cannot predict or control which stressors will come our way, preventive measures can minimize and even eliminate the likelihood of certain challenges. We can be intentional about putting ourselves in the best position to overcome those challenges when they arise. The most successful people are adept at clearing their path of unnecessary stressors and adversities. You can make choices and build your life and work in such a way that you set yourself up for success.

Tipping the Scales

Of course, we can never entirely eliminate challenges and adversity. They're part of the human experience. And stress, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. Much like germs and bacteria build a baby's immune system, some amount of stress strengthens your resilience system, giving you the opportunity to step out of your comfort zone, grow, build your mental muscles, and even inspire you to improve and perform better. Stress also increases alertness and memory, and it helps you focus your energy to get things done. It is prolonged and overwhelming stress that is harmful. Chronic, heavy stress is what you want to avoid—negative drama in ongoing relationships, continual financial strain, unrelenting health challenges, years of struggling in a career or business, and any threats to your well-being.

This is where adaptive skills, protective resources, and preventive measures, amassed over time, can begin to create a new reality with more joy and peace, and less stress and adversity. When your resources outweigh the stressors you face, the resilience scale tips toward positive outcomes. But when stressors outweigh your adaptive skills and resources, the opposite occurs.⁵

This scale illustrates the concept that resilience is a system we create that positions us to weather storms and to seize opportunities.



If you intentionally learn adaptive skills like thought awareness, nurture protective resources such as supportive relationships, and prepare for future challenges by taking preventive measures, you will build a personal system of resilience. In fact, you may discover that success often finds its way to you even when you aren't looking.

Psychologists can often predict who will be more resilient in certain situations just by observing these three factors. For example, having even one stable, helpful, and committed relationship is critical, not just to build resilience in children, but also to support resilience in adults.⁶ Think back on a significant challenge you overcame. It is likely that someone influenced your ability to conquer the challenge, whether through their encouragement, helpful actions, or information they shared. Maybe it was their consistent belief in you or their

example, which modeled for you how to move through the challenge effectively. While children, by virtue of their vulnerability, may have a greater need for supportive relationships, adults rely heavily on the support systems around them too. The more aware you are of this truth, the more purposeful you can be about welcoming positive relationships into your life while building and tapping into them. You'll become more intentional about seeking wise counsel, coaching, and advice, and using that wisdom to protect, build, and enhance your life, as well as to identify potential blind spots that could derail your plans.

Here's an example of what I mean. When my father was fifty-four, he sought out a new primary care physician after moving from Colorado to northern Virginia. During a routine physical, his new doctor noticed that my dad's heartbeat was irregular. It wasn't the first time he had been told this. During annual checkups throughout his military career, my dad had been told he had this condition, but no one ever suggested further testing. My father was otherwise quite healthy, and his doctors didn't seem concerned. Occasionally, a medical professional would point out that some people just have irregular heartbeats or murmurs.

But this doctor's response was different. He was curious and wanted to understand why the heartbeat was irregular. He told my dad, "I just want us to find out the reason behind it to make sure there is nothing we need to be concerned about."

The physician ordered an angiogram, medical imaging used to visualize the arteries, veins, and heart chambers. Typically, the test is used to detect blockages in the arteries caused by the buildup of cholesterol, fat, and other substances. I went with my father to the hospital for the procedure, and I'll never forget the cardiologist's words after they wheeled him to a private room after the angiogram.

"Well, I have good news and bad news," the cardiologist began. Dad and I looked at the doctor wide-eyed and then at each other, anxiously bracing for the bad news. "The good news is that your arteries are in perfect condition! No blockages whatsoever," he explained. We

smiled tentatively, relieved by that news but perplexed by what the bad news might be if his arteries were so healthy.

“The bad news is that one of your arteries is going to the wrong place,” the cardiologist said. “You have a rare birth defect. Most people born with this condition die by six months, but certainly by the age of ten.”

We couldn’t believe what we were hearing. The physician continued. “All the doctors are buzzing around the floor talking about your case. We’ve not seen anyone live this long with your condition. You need open heart surgery as soon as possible to correct it.”

We were stunned. “You could walk up and down the streets of Manhattan all day and not find another person with this problem,” the doctor went on. My dad looked contemplative, but also had a grin on his face, as he processed what the cardiologist had just said.

I later learned the grin was a sign of gratitude. “I’m blessed to even be alive,” he told me. While he’d had the condition his entire life, no one had ever sent him for further testing. The concern and support of his new primary care physician may have prolonged my father’s life by ten to fifteen years, according to the cardiologist. That primary care physician was a protective resource in my father’s life, providing critical information. It also made him stronger and healthier. Once he recovered, he told me he could feel that his body was getting much more oxygen. His energy and stamina increased noticeably during workouts.

But in addition to this protective resource, my dad also benefited from preventive measures he’d put in place long ago. Before the cardiologist left the room, Dad asked him, “Why do you think I beat the odds and lived just fine all these years? I’ve never even suspected I had a heart defect. I played sports growing up. I retired after twenty-four years in the Air Force with no physical problems.”

The cardiologist explained that my dad had likely thrived *because* of those factors. “Your healthy lifestyle is probably what saved you,” the doctor told him. “Otherwise, you might have had a heart attack at a young age, and no one ever would have known about the heart defect. They would have just said it was a fluke.”

In other words, the preventive measures of strong health—exercise, no smoking, healthy weight—may have tipped the resilience scale in my father’s favor. My dad also drew on strong adaptive skills—an optimistic outlook, faith, a good sense of humor, and other healthy coping skills. Research shows that positive emotions and a belief in a power greater than yourself are predictors of resilience and longevity.⁷

Of course, my father didn’t spend his life strengthening these three pillars because he knew that a positive outlook, good health, and a conscientious physician could prevent him from having a heart attack due to an undiagnosed heart defect. Nonetheless, controlling the factors he could ultimately helped him weather an unexpected silent storm. He built a system of resilience that for years withstood a major physical stressor.

What Is Your Level of Resilience?

How do you know if you are resilient in a particular area? Resilience can truly be measured only when you see how you manage a stressor under pressure. While it’s easy to categorize people and groups as being either resilient or not, it’s also helpful to think of levels of resilience. Consider these four levels as you evaluate your own resilience. Think of an area right now where you need more resilience. Perhaps it is in your career or business, a relationship or health situation. Then look at the illustration below.

Resilience can truly be measured only when you see how you manage a stressor under pressure.

1—Thriving

2—Functioning (surviving, but not thriving)

3—Malfunctioning (struggling)

4—Nonfunctioning (broken, permanently failing)

Anything above the line represents some degree of resilience, ranging from functioning or surviving to actually thriving. When you face a challenge and are functioning, that simply means that you are surviving or recovering from the setback and maintaining your level of well-being, productivity, or effectiveness. Thriving means you are doing even better than before, perhaps showing little evidence of the stressor's impact on your well-being, productivity, or effectiveness. At the highest level of thriving, the setback may have in some way positively impacted you, opened a new and advantageous door of opportunity, or accelerated your growth, well-being, and success.

Anything below the line represents being “unresilient.” And yes, I know that's technically not a word, but it is the most direct way to describe a lack of resilience, so let's make it one. *Unresilient* is the opposite of resilient—a term that is simple and clear. It describes someone who is unable to successfully adapt to challenging life experiences and lacks a personal system that enables them to withstand, adapt, and recover from stressors.

When you are unresilient, the stressor has taken a heavy toll. You may be struggling to adapt, proactively take responsibility, or grow in ways that help you be resilient. At the lowest level, you may utterly fail in a situation and be unable to bounce back. The situation appears irreparable. This is the friendship that never mends or the marriage that lands in divorce court. It's the financial situation that leads to bankruptcy or the career that goes up in smoke. It is the person who gives up and languishes, never realizing their own potential.

The good news is this: No matter how you rate your level of resilience today, you can make it stronger.

Too often, when we doubt our ability to make it through a challenge, we don't push back enough. When a seemingly rhetorical question arises, we don't answer it. But success—whether in relationships, business, health, or finances—is impossible without the ability to navigate the inevitable obstacles and challenges that arise. And overcoming doubts means answering the questions that trigger our

biggest fears and suspicions that we can't do it, can't make it, or somehow don't have what it takes.

Remember that the things worth doing are often *hard*. That's because changing is hard. Stepping out of our comfort zone is hard. Dealing with the unexpected and with disappointment is hard. Disappointment can drain us of the will to hope for something better. Even changes we want can be hard. And while sometimes we have to deal with big, devastating challenges, nearly every day we deal with the small but persistent ones: the need to be at our best at work and at home, to manage our eating and spending habits, and to deal with difficult people, traffic, and the world at large without becoming overstressed or overwhelmed. These challenges accumulate over time and test our ability to push through the hard things.

Simply by reading this book, however, you are taking an important first step. The rules of resilience offer an approach to handling your challenges and opportunities so that you are in the best position to conquer whatever comes your way. These rules will also help you build a strong foundation that gives you the best chance to thrive personally and professionally.

Coach Yourself

- ▶ If you are completely honest right now, what is your current resilience level in each of these areas? (Remember, 1 = thriving, 2 = functioning/surviving, 3 = malfunctioning, and 4 = non-functioning.)

____ relationships

____ finances

____ work/business

____ health

____ spiritual life

____ additional areas

- ▶ Identify a specific challenge in your life today that you would like to approach with greater resilience.
- ▶ In the challenge that most needs your resilience right now, what do you want your resilience level to be? (Note: You have permission to simply aspire to make it through your challenge intact!)
- ▶ Consider for a moment the three pillars of resilience: adaptive skills, protective resources, and preventive measures.

For each pillar, notice which attributes you already possess.

Which pillar is strongest for you?

Which pillar is weakest, and therefore offers you the biggest opportunity to strengthen your resilience?

Try This _____

- Review the three pillars and identify a step you can take to strengthen your weakest pillar.
- Decide when you'll take the step, how you'll move forward, and who can help you stay accountable.
- Consider your current level of resilience. What would it take to move up a level?

SAY IT WITH ME:

“Resilience enables me to overcome obstacles and optimize opportunities.”

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

How a small dose of pessimism will help you build a personal foundation of resilience that empowers you to thrive through your challenges

KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Don't just think positively, think accurately.
 - ▶ Accept that changes and challenges are part of life.
 - ▶ Look for ways to strengthen your pillars so you're ready for unexpected opportunities.
-

From my home in Annapolis, Maryland, I drove south on I-95 in my sienna red BMW Z3 convertible with the top down. Devastated that my marriage was on the brink of divorce, I was driving to Anderson, South Carolina, to return to my safe place, my mother's home. I needed time and space to think. I'd turned thirty-six just a couple of months earlier, and while my career as an author, coach, and speaker was unfolding as I'd hoped, my personal life was falling apart. The story I'd imagined for my life included being happily married and raising children, but that was not my reality. Quite the opposite. I was *unhappily* married with *no* children. It's not exactly the way I had expected my life to unfold.

If it were up to you and me, we wouldn't need resilience. Success would be an easy destination, and we would achieve it free of annoying obstacles like disappointment, difficult people, and everyday challenges. Better yet, we would never experience negative events, the loss of people and things we love, or unfulfilled dreams. Instead, success

would unfold just as we imagine it. And the road map to our dream job, dream body, dream bank account, and dream relationship would be a short, straight line between points A and B. But we all know that's not how it works. That's why you and I are meeting on the pages of this book.

Getting to the good stuff almost always means enduring some not-so-good stuff—stuff you'd rather not have to deal with and circumstances you wish didn't exist. And if you want to not just survive it but even to thrive in spite of it, you need some rules to live by. Easy to remember. Immediate in impact. And timeless. These rules are about ensuring your well-being and success as you face both opportunities and challenges.

“Expect the unexpected” is the foundational rule of resilience because it is inevitable that challenges will arise. The first rule of resilience is to anticipate these challenges and prepare to (1) prevent them in the first place, (2) cushion the blow the stressor brings, and (3) recover from the stressor as completely and efficiently as possible. This first rule of resilience is a commitment to remembering that change and challenges are a constant. Therefore, it is wise to prepare for them, knowing they will interrupt your best-laid plans.

A famous failure from the world of aviation illuminates the power of the first rule of resilience. In 1949, the United States Air Force sought to understand the possibilities and limits of new aviation technology. Dr. John Stapp, a US Air Force officer, flight surgeon, and biophysicist, oversaw much of the research, including experimentation using a rocket sled that could reach supersonic speeds. Often he made himself the test pilot on these G-force experiments because of the risk involved. Before one of the tests, Captain Edward Murphy asked an assistant to wire four electronic gauges to shoulder straps that Stapp would wear for an experiment designed to measure the impact of supersonic flight speeds and crashes on the human body. The assistant did as he was told, but when the test concluded, the sensors provided zero data. Every single one had failed.

Perplexed by the problem, Captain Murphy quickly discovered

that all four gauges had been wired backward when they were built. Frustrated because it wasn't the first time something had gone ridiculously wrong on the project, and disgusted by the lack of attention to detail, Captain Murphy was said to have uttered pessimistically, "If there's any way these guys can do it wrong, they will."¹

Shortly after, Dr. Stapp was interviewed by a reporter who wanted to know how the Air Force had avoided injuries and fatalities with such a dangerous set of experiments. Stapp explained that they anticipated many possible failures and worst-case scenarios, and then prepared for them before anyone could get hurt. He explained to the reporter that his team operated under "Murphy's Law, if anything can go wrong, it will." Today, we often hear Murphy's Law described with an expanded caveat, "If anything can go wrong, it will, and at the worst possible moment."

This maxim may sound pessimistic, and that's because it is. Research shows that this type of pessimism is exactly the sort of outlook that empowers success, especially in the face of improbable odds. When you expect obstacles, you have a more realistic assessment of what it will take to actually meet your goal. The most successful people use pessimism to evaluate and plan effectively but then tap into optimism, knowing that positive action and perseverance will lead to favorable results. In fact, this combination of positive yet accurate thinking is the basis of this first rule of resilience: "Expect the unexpected."

Maybe Murphy's Law sounds a little over the top. Is it really true that if anything can go wrong, it will? I mean, sometimes nothing goes wrong. But I have found that even on my best-planned road trip, I am likely to encounter a traffic jam, rainstorm, or need for more pit stops than I expected. Your life's journey is akin to a road trip. It is wise to approach life with the assumption that something likely will not go as planned and that the best policy is to be prepared—or at least unsurprised when the unforeseen happens. Expecting everything to go as planned is a setup for disappointment.

If you've ever had your plans disrupted by events you didn't anticipate, you know the frustration of unexpected or unwelcome hurdles.

Expecting everything to go as planned is a setup for disappointment.

Sometimes, though, it's not even the unexpected that throws us off course. If we are honest, sometimes the hurdles we must clear are predictable, but we still weren't ready for them. The expectation that obstacles should not or will not appear is one of the biggest threats to resilience. This is because if you don't expect complications, you won't prepare for or try to prevent them from happening in the first place.

If you expect the unexpected, you prepare as though it is inevitable. You put yourself in the best position to weather a storm, bounce back quickly, and even fail forward when possible, coming out ahead of where you would have been if the detour had not been necessary.

To be clear, resilience isn't needed just for negative events and stressors; it's needed for the positive ones too. When you get a promotion or start a new business, it may be exciting, but it's also a major change that can create stress and the risk of mistakes or failure. The same is true when you get married, have a child, or move across the world to pursue a lifelong dream. One of the most notorious examples of needing resilience after a positive life event is landing a windfall of cash. Of those who win the lottery, approximately one-third file for bankruptcy within three to five years.² In comparison, only about 12 percent of people have filed for bankruptcy at some point in their lives.³ Sudden fortune requires resilience to navigate, as it can be a major change that requires good decision-making, planning, self-control, and perhaps mentors who can support wise choices to preserve newfound wealth over time. It requires a system that supports success.

What Do You Want to Be Ready For?

If I could open a door of opportunity for you right now, what would you be stepping into? Whether it's a promotion or business venture, the relationship you hope for, or anything else you dream of,

resilience means being ready to seize the chance when it presents itself. Sometimes you may be offered a sudden positive opportunity that requires the resilience to pivot on a dime because there is no time for preparation—you need to already be ready.

An amazing example of someone who was prepared for an unexpected, incredible opportunity is Tenitra Michelle Williams, who seamlessly stepped into the chart-topping musical group Destiny's Child in 2000 after the sudden and infamous exit of two of its original members. Michelle and I met a few years ago as we connected around our work of writing and speaking about mental health and personal growth, and we became friends. She's also a graduate of The CaPP Institute, earning her designation from us as a Certified Personal and Executive Coach while simultaneously rehearsing and performing in a Broadway musical! Talk about focus—she has it. The first time we sat down for lunch, I immediately sensed her intelligence, humility, and authentic confidence. Her sense of humor and transparency are evident whenever she shares her struggles and faith-filled triumphs in an effort to inspire others.

The lead-up to her unexpected rise in the spotlight started in the late nineties. After two years at Illinois State University, she decided to pause her studies for the chance tour as a backup singer with Grammy-winning R&B star Monica.

“We toured and went to Japan with TLC,” she remembers. The tour was a big deal, but Michelle took it in stride. A duet from Monica's second album had spent a record-breaking thirteen weeks at number one on the Billboard charts.⁴ It was a dynamic experience for a nineteen-year-old criminal justice major who did a little singing on the side.

When the tour ended, Michelle expected to go back to school, grateful for what she assumed had been “a nice little opportunity.” But deep down, she discerned that she should perhaps stay open to one more gig. She wasn't planning on a music career, but she was confident of her singing abilities and had enjoyed the experience of touring.

“At the time, I was aiming to be an amazing prosecuting attorney or a forensic psychologist,” she says. “Music was a hobby for me because I just didn’t see myself doing music at that level. I knew I was talented, but my mom was pro-education, pro-401(k), pro-health and dental, and pro-paycheck every two weeks! Why would you choose a career where you might be paid today and then not get paid again?” she adds, explaining her mom’s career advice. It made sense, and she planned to follow that advice—but first, maybe she’d land just one more fun backup opportunity if she had the chance.

“I said, ‘Mom, if you let me do one more gig, I’m going to get you that Chrysler 300M,’” she recalls of their conversation, laughing at her strategy to get her mom’s approval. “She loved those cars back then.”

Rather than the background engagement she hoped for, she got a call from an acquaintance who suggested Michelle talk to Tina Knowles, Beyoncé’s mother, as a possible replacement for a Destiny’s Child member who was leaving the group. Michelle says she spoke to Ms. Knowles over the phone and then flew to audition for the group. She sang one of her favorite hymns, “Blessed Assurance,” for them. It was an authentic and bold choice of an audition song for a group whose first number one hit—“Bills, Bills, Bills”—had recently topped the Billboard Hot 100, but it was a choice true to her gospel roots. The rest is history.

Destiny’s Child founding members Beyoncé Knowles and Kelly Rowland loved it and invited Michelle to join the group in early 2000. It was a strategic and high-profile change to a four-member group whose bestselling second album had been released only months earlier. Two other group members had just exited after much-publicized turmoil.

Everything in Michelle’s life changed immediately. She pivoted from backup singer and college student to member of one of the best-known groups of the era. She had to rely on her preparation since childhood, which she says gave her maturity beyond her years. In addition to singing as long as she could remember, Michelle had

also directed the adult choir at church from the age of twelve, choosing the songs and accompanying Scriptures, learning all three parts, and teaching each section of the choir their part. She knew music. And of course, she had been a part of a major international tour as a backup singer.

“They knew they didn’t have time to train anybody. There were video shoots already scheduled. There were tours in place. It wasn’t a group that was in development. They had already sold millions of records,” she explains of the unusual opportunity. She was ready, and the group took off in an even bigger way with chart-toppers like “Survivor” and “Independent Women Part 1,” the theme song from the film *Charle’s Angels*, cementing their iconic place in music. Destiny’s Child became one of the bestselling American female groups of all time, second only to TLC. The success of the group opened the door for Michelle’s award-winning solo career as a gospel artist and a prolific acting career spanning more than two decades, primarily on Broadway in *Aida*, *Chicago*, and *Once on This Island*, and in the traveling national tour of *The Color Purple*. She also originated the role of Viola Van Horn in the comedy *Death Becomes Her*.

The thing about unexpected opportunities is that sometimes they come with a new set of challenges. The exciting opportunity that changed everything for Michelle also came with unexpected stressors and criticism. “Sometimes it’s best not to know everything. It’s best to just know you’ve got what it takes,” she says of her early days with Destiny’s Child. She did her best to stay focused on that thought as she found her footing in the group and with fans who were skeptical of the change.

“The other members already had fans who loved them, and then here I come in, like, ‘Hi! I’m their replacement!’ These folks don’t know me at all. I was a surprise [to the fans]. I was a surprise to the other two that left. It was like, ‘What? Who’s this?’” she recalls.

As exciting as her whirlwind new career was, Michelle was filled with insecurities early on. She had to find a way to deal with them, or this opportunity might have slipped through her fingers. Incidentally,

she wasn't the only new replacement. The other singer, however, left after five months with the group. Destiny's Child, who'd had four members for years, decided to become a trio with Michelle as the sole new member. She says it took time to feel accepted, and she had to come to terms with that. At times, it was hard to feel confident when she walked into a room with Kelly and Beyoncé because she knew not everyone would embrace her. Ultimately the two women who'd chosen her gave her the confidence she needed as she worked through her feelings. "B and Kelly were like, 'We want you in this group! Let's go!'"

Together they were on a mission, she said. Shifting her focus to the sisterhood they formed and the vision they shared helped. "We were focused on success, not just a cute little song. No, we wanted to be one of the greatest groups of all time."

When we consider Michelle Williams's need for resilience in the face of an unexpected, exciting opportunity, it's clear that her story reflects all three pillars of resilience as she followed the foundational rule, "Expect the unexpected." She used adaptive skills such as authenticity while auditioning in a way that reflected her strengths and beliefs. She didn't try to be who she thought they wanted. She chose to show up as herself. Once in the group, she was aware of her thoughts and noticed what she was saying to herself about the criticism, which wasn't helpful. So she intentionally focused on embracing the support of her fellow members, Kelly Rowland and Beyoncé, rather than listening to the initial mixed reactions that followed her becoming a part of the group. She used humility and authenticity to empathize with fans who already had their favorites in Destiny's Child, recognizing it wasn't personal. She accepted that it would take time for the group's fans to embrace her. And eventually they did. Her protective resources—including a close and supportive relationship with her mom and years of musical and leadership experience with her church choir—provided a secure launching pad that helped her seize the opportunity and make the most of it, parlaying it into a

long-term, fulfilling career. That's a high level of career resilience—not just surviving a challenge, but thriving in it.

Whatever challenge you face, whether an unexpected, unwelcome dilemma or an unexpected, welcome surprise, you can establish or enhance these three pillars to build your own personal system of resilience. Here are some practical ways to prepare for the unexpected:

- **Shift your expectations.** When you don't expect things to always unfold as you planned, it is easier to adapt when the unexpected arrives. Expect good things to happen, but be realistic about the possibility of the unexpected and decide in advance that no matter what happens, you can and will adapt, relying on creativity, relationships, and the resources you cultivate.
- **Pause, then plan.** When life throws you off course, you may feel a bit dizzy at first. Give yourself the space and time to process change and get your bearings. Take a breath, assess the situation, then start planning for how you can adjust, rally your resources, and meet the challenge in front of you.
- **Think ahead.** Always think about ways you can build your life so that it is more resilient in the face of challenges. From strong relationships and emergency savings to taking care of your health and equipping yourself with skills that give you career options, build a strong support system of resources that will cushion you from the unexpected challenges life can bring.
- **Manage your thoughts.** One of the most important resilience skills is thought awareness. Notice what you're saying to yourself about your challenge and whether your thoughts are moving you forward or getting you stuck. Be intentional about choosing thoughts that align with your vision and help you move in a positive direction.

Coach Yourself

- ▶ When you think of the first rule of resilience, “Expect the unexpected,” in which areas of your life do you most want to increase your resilience and why?
- ▶ In what area(s) might you be unprepared for the unexpected? Consider your relationships, work, finances, and health.
- ▶ If you were to expect the unexpected, what might you do differently to prepare for or reduce the likelihood of the unexpected actually happening?
- ▶ As you consider your vision for your work or personal life, what one step could you take now to be ready for an opportunity that might unexpectedly come up?

Try This

- Set a goal for the area of resilience you want to strengthen first.
- Determine one to three steps you could take to prepare for or reduce the impact of challenges in that area.
- Identify an unexpected opportunity you would love to come your way.
- Imagine how you would handle and maximize that opportunity if that door opened.

SAY IT WITH ME:

*“I expect the unexpected
and equip myself to handle it.”*