Episode 5: 5 simple ways to improve your resilience

Hi Guys!

Welcome to Episode 5 of *The Resilient Type* podcast! Today I'll be sharing 5 simple ways to improve your resilience.

I chatted about resilience in the last episode and shared a tool that can help you identify your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to resilience. It's called *The Resilience Quiz* and if you haven't taken it yet, I suggest you give it a go before you listen to this episode. You can find *The Resilience Quiz* in the resource library at empoweredmillennialgirl.com, so pause this episode and go sign up to get access now. I can wait!

In this episode, I'll briefly explain what resilience is, why it's important to understand your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to resilience, and then share 5 simple ways to improve your resilience that align with your specific weaknesses. (See, told you the quiz would come in handy!) By the end of this episode you'll understand what resilience is, why it's important to understand your strengths and weaknesses, and how to start improving your resilience today!

Before we get started, let me know if you're tuning in! Take a screenshot and share it on Instagram! And don't forget to tag me @empoweredmillennialgirl so I can send you some love!

With the outbreak of Coronavirus, it'd be fair to assume that the majority of people's resilience would be well and truly tested right now. In May 2019, everydayhealth.com, along with wellness researchers at the Ohio State University conducted a national survey called *The State of Resilience.* 3,583 people aged 13 to 73 took the survey.

The results showed that most Americans misjudged their resilience. 83% percent of those questioned thought they had "high levels of mental and emotional resilience", but when tested, only 57% scored as "resilient"! We can only imagine what the figures would be like if the survey was done post-coronavirus.

But what actually makes someone resilient?

What is resilience?

Well, the University of Pennsylvania identified 7 key factors of resilience:

1. Emotion regulation – how well you regulate and express your feelings in a socially acceptable way.

2. Impulse control – how well you control your impulses.

3. Causal analysis – how well you uncover the facts that led to a certain situation.

4. Realistic optimism – how much you believe you'll eventually succeed (with effort and action).

5. Self-efficacy – how much you believe in your capacity to succeed.

6. Empathy – how well you understand and share others' feelings.

7. Reaching out – how good you are at asking for support.

Seems like a lot to consider, right? Well, that's why it's important to understand our strengths and weaknesses when it comes to resilience.

Why it's important to understand your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to resilience

Because resilience is such a multifaceted concept, it's only natural that you'd be stronger in some of these 7 areas more than others. The good news? Because resilience is a skill, it is something you can work on and improve. Knowing your weaknesses can help you identify the specific areas you need to work on, so you can tailor your resilience training accordingly.

I remember when I was at school, I would spend more time studying English and History because I was good at them, but that didn't help me when it came to my Maths exam! Don't be like me in this scenario. Identify your weaknesses and spend more time improving your resilience in those areas!

If you haven't taken *The Resilience Quiz* yet, go do that so that you're clear on what your specific strengths and weaknesses are. It'll only take about 10-15 minutes to complete. The direct link for the resource library is also in this episode description.

Ready? OK. Now that you're aware of your strengths and weaknesses, I'm going to share 5 simple ways you can improve your resilience, based on the factors I mentioned previously.

5 simple ways to improve your resilience

1. Make time for self-care daily

Do you struggle with emotion regulation? If so, you may need to make time for more self-care.

Think about the last time you lost your temper. Maybe you had a bad day at work, came home to find your darling fur baby got into the toilet rolls again and it completely tipped you over the edge. Or maybe you got some bad news while you were out and about and took it out on a retail worker. Are any scenarios coming to mind?

When we're stressed, emotion regulation can be a challenge. Even if we're normally level-headed, it's easy to raise our voices or become snappy when we're run down. Unfortunately, some stress is a part of life, but that's why it's so important to practice regular self-care so we're better able to handle stress when it happens.

There are 5 aspects of self that I'd like you to consider. These include:

• Physical – An activity related to maintaining or improving your body, e.g. sleep, working out or cooking a good meal.

• Mental – An activity that stimulates your intellect or creativity, e.g. doing a hobby, solving a puzzle or reading a book.

• Emotional – An activity that makes you aware of/nurture your feelings, e.g. having a social media detox or journaling.

• Social – An activity where you engage with others, e.g. catching up with friends or playing with your dog.

• Spiritual – An activity that helps you recognise/build a relationship with a higher power, e.g. prayer, meditation or spending time in nature.

Ideally, you'd be accessing all of these aspects of self each day, but I know we all lead busy lives, so it's probably more achievable to spend at least 10 minutes a day on one of these aspects of self. So, for example, you might go to church on Sunday (spiritual), journal on Monday (emotional), read on Tuesday (mental), go to bed early on Wednesday (physical), have a social media free day on Thursday (emotional), catch up with friends on Friday (social), and go for a long walk on Saturday (physical). If you make time for a different aspect of self each day, you'll have considered all aspects of yourself in your self-care routine during the week.

In my free resource library, I have a self-care workbook that can help you create a self-care routine that works around your schedule. If you're interested in finding out more, go sign up at empoweredmillennialgirl.com.

See, improving your emotion regulation doesn't have to be difficult!

2. Plan for your triggers

If one of your weaknesses is impulse control, planning for your triggers can help. What do I mean by planning for your triggers? Knowing what your triggers are and having a plan in place to follow when you're "triggered".

Personally, impulse control is one of my strengths, but I can recognise that I start feeling stressed when I have lots of competing demands, and stress can make impulse control more difficult.

Let's use that as an example. Picture a solo receptionist behind the counter, phone ringing, 30 unread emails and 3 customers standing in front of her! Got the sweats yet?

The plan I have in place when this happens – because this will happen – is to take a deep breath, relax my shoulders and prioritise my tasks. So my first task would be to answer the phone, put the person on hold, ask a colleague to help (if possible), assist the customers in front of me, go back to the person on hold, and then finally deal with emails when I have no other more pressing priorities.

Obviously, this is a simple example, but being prepared both physically and mentally will help a lot when it comes to impulse control. Try applying this to improve your resilience if impulse control is one of your weaknesses.

Sidenote: Last year, I was struggling with stress management, so if you find that stress is impacting your health and you want to develop a personalised relaxation kit that you can turn to when you're feeling stressed, you can grab a copy of the 'Stress Less Workbook' in my free resource library at empoweredmillennialgirl.com.

3. Use the 5 Whys Framework

Resilient people take the time to analyse a situation and can understand why they're feeling the way they do. If your weakness lies in causal analysis, you may need to work on your problem-solving skills. The 5 Whys Framework is a simple way to improve this.

How? Well, it's a pretty simple. If you have problem that won't go away, you can be sure there's a deeper issue that you're missing. When a problem comes up, you can get to the root of the problem by literally asking "Why?" 5 times.

Think of how toddlers continuously ask "Why?" when you explain something to them:

"Stay away from that!"
"Why?"
"Because plugs are dangerous!"
"Why?"
"Because it's connected to the electricity."
"Why?"
"Because it makes our TV work!"

A scenario like this can be frustrating for you, but an excellent learning experience for little Timmy!

How can *you* apply the 5 Whys Framework? Well, say for example you tend to have more bad days than good days at work, but you aren't sure why. If you ask "Why?" the first time, you might just pass it off as a red light that made you late. But ask "Why?" again and you might realise that you're scared of getting into trouble at work. Ask "Why?" again and you might realise you fear losing your job. Ask "Why?" again and you might realise you're concerned about finding another job in this market. And ask "Why?" for the fifth time and you might realise you're concerned about losing your home and that your finances are worrying you!

We like to stay stuck in confusion because it means we don't have to take action. We don't want to take action because we don't want to risk failure. But if you want to improve your causal analysis/problem-solving skills, and ultimately, improve your resilience, the 5 Whys Framework is a simple strategy that you can implement at any time!

4. Consider your achievements

Truth be told, I'm not naturally a glass half full kind of person. It's very easy to focus on what's gone wrong or what could've been done better, rather than what I've achieved. Maybe you're the same.

For those of you who find that self-efficacy is one of your weaknesses, then I want you to listen to this very carefully, and I encourage you to take action.

If you're lacking confidence and self-belief, you're probably stuck in "critical" mode – worrying about what people think, expecting failure, and beating yourself up for not being perfect. It's no wonder that if you're listening to all these negative thoughts on repeat 24/7, you're going to start believing them!

What you're probably ignoring are all the wins you've had! I remember when I was teaching, I made myself an *Appreciation Box* filled with nice notes, cards and a couple of little mementos from students. When I was feeling really disheartened and stressed, that's what I would look through when I needed to stay motivated.

My friend, Gaby who runs a podcast called *Talk Twenties* had this ingenious idea called *The Big Page of Little Wins* which I think is probably more practical! But basically, what you do is use a double page spread in your diary or notebook and write down each win (no matter how small or big) and include the date that it happened. So, for example, if you're working towards a business goal, you might record the key milestones you achieved, a relevant compliment someone gave you, or something difficult you overcame at the time. Including the date is also important so you can see your progress throughout the year.

When you keep forging ahead and neglecting the little wins, you're robbing yourself of an opportunity for gratitude and appreciation, and you're going to get burnt out and disheartened. Spending time considering your achievements is so important if you want to stay motivated and build your resilience. Give this a go! I'm sure it'll help you!

5. Read literary fiction with diverse characters

Maybe this sounds like a stretch, but stick with me! I promise there's some thought behind this strategy.

Can you guess which aspect of resilience this strategy relates to? Empathy.

A social psychologist at The New School in New York led a series of studies that found reading literary fiction was shown to improve participants' empathy. This could be because fiction tends to follow complex characters, and as we follow the character's journey, we become emotionally involved in their lives.

Earlier in the year, I was lucky enough to attend an author talk with Margaret Atwood. (Any *Handmaid's Tale* fans here?) At the end of the interview, the audience had a chance to ask their own questions, and an English teacher asked, "What would you say to boys who don't see themselves in the characters in your work?" And quite rightly, Margaret Atwood replied, "Well, fiction would be pretty boring if the characters were exactly like us!"

The characters we read about should give us insight into different experiences, a different way of thinking, and a different way of life. Even if we don't have the opportunity to expose ourselves to diversity in real life, we can explore it through fiction, and there are so many diverse characters out there! If improving your empathy is a priority, reading literary fiction with diverse characters is such an easy way to do this!

To summarise everything we've covered in this episode:

• Resilience is built through emotion regulation, impulse control, causal analysis, realistic optimism, self-efficacy, empathy and reaching out.

• It's important to understand which of these factors you're stronger and weaker in so you can identify the specific areas you need to work on, and focus your practice accordingly to become more resilient.

• To improve your resilience, 5 simple things you can do include making time for daily self-care, planning for your triggers, using the 5 Whys Framework, considering your achievements on a regular basis, and reading literary fiction with diverse characters.

Not all of these tips may apply to you, but applying those that align with the weaknesses in your resilience and continuing to practice them will make a huge difference down the track.

That's it from me today! I hope you've found this episode helpful. Talk to you again soon!

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