

## Manage Your Resilience Meter: Your Guide to Positivity, Productivity and Well-Being

- Marcia Hughes



Managing resilience in today's challenging world of high expectations and significant discord is tough. Change and challenge happen whether it comes from elections, a new organizational program being unveiled, a complete reshuffle due to a merger or parents moving into a care facility. Too often the challenges become just too much and frequently trigger inflexibility, feelings of overwhelm and loss of

composure.



You can build your capabilities so challenging times don't take you out. Watch your resilience meter grow to full potential! Emotional Intelligence (EI) skills are fundamental to managing these stress points and maintaining health and well-being. Six EI skills are pivotal to building your reservoir of emotional reserves: emotional self-awareness, self-regard, impulse control, stress tolerance, optimism, and flexibility. A

healthy use of these skills will build your positivity and create the leverage to promote success at the workplace and personally.

Resilience is of growing interest as researchers demonstrate its influence on physical and mental health, well-being, the aging process and overall quality of life. Additionally there is growing recognition of the benefits to teams and workplace productivity with a resilient workforce. There is also a connection with the willingness to take on risks and to explore creative options. If we feel more positive about ourselves and life, we have the energy to experiment.

You have many strategies available to help expand your resilience. This article will provide tips and strategies as well as review some of the key recognitions about resilience and its connection with positivity. The root for the word "resilience" is "resile," which means "to bounce or spring back." Thus a key part of the definition of resilience is to bounce back. The definition has expanded to include the ability to contain challenges

and to develop reserves that can be tapped into when one is faced with environmental pressures and demands. When we speak of resilience, we are referring to the ability to keep things in perspective so that many potential challenges are simply taken in stride. When a large challenge surfaces, there is likely to be stress, but the reserve strength built with resilience allows us to contain the issue rather than going down a negative and downward spiral that starts feeding itself.

Assets and resources within us, our lives and our environment facilitate the capacity for adapting and bouncing back when there is adversity. Our resilience is likely to ebb and flow not only across our lifetime but even across the day or week if there is a lot going on. Yet, the more habits we have developed to build and maintain our positivity, the less we will give in to negative emotions and the more we will intentionally seek positive emotions that will enhance our capacities.

Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, author of *Positivity*, Crown Publishing, (2009) and *Love 2.0*, Hudson St. Press, (2013), has provided a great deal to help us understand the field of positivity, which is closely related to resilience. Should you be working as a coach or team facilitator it's likely you'll use the two concepts interchangeably. As a lead scientist in the field of positivity, Fredrickson demonstrates through her research and that of colleagues that living with a high level of positivity has measurably positive results.

### **Benefits of Positivity / Resilience**

1. Psychological benefits include being more optimistic, more open minded and more willing to check out possibilities. First, being positive feels good! Being open minded is critical to noticing and considering multiple options to a challenge. It means that money, resources, or possibilities aren't left on the table because our vision is too narrow to see them. Negativity constricts our thinking and our vision. It's costly!
2. Mental benefits include expanding awareness and mindfulness. It opens our thinking capacity to new possibilities. With positivity we can be better at savoring what works instead of being focused on what doesn't. Right away you can see the difference in your stress levels and the toll taken when you are focusing on the positive compared to the negative.



3. Social benefits pay out at the individual, team and workplace levels. With positivity we have more resilience. Emotions are contagious, thus sharing positive emotions and actions creates an upward spiral of expanding relationships, which then creates reserves for getting through hard times and conflict together. Resilience is indispensable if collaboration is truly going to occur. There is also interesting research showing that when we approach people with an emphasis on positive engagement racial bias is reduced or disappears. *Positivity*, p. 67-68. That has amazing potential!
4. Physical benefits include a higher quality of life and a longer one. As Barbara Fredrickson writes “positivity is now linked to solid and objective biological markers of health. For instance, people’s positivity predicts lower levels of stress-related hormones and higher levels of growth related and bond related hormones. Positivity also sends out more dopamine and opioids, enhances immune system functioning and diminishes inflammatory responses to stress. With positivity you are literally steeped in a different biochemical stew.” *Positivity*, pp. 93-94. Thus positivity results in lower blood pressure, less pain, fewer colds and better sleep. Rest assured for this and the many other health benefits she cites, she backs her assertions up with research citations. There is even research showing the power of hugs, wonderful, feel-good, authentically caring touch. Now we knew that, didn’t we!

Three studies reported in a 2006 article on resilience and positivity later in life found that daily positive emotions serve to moderate stress reactivity and mediate stress recovery. They found that differences in psychological resilience accounted for meaningful variation in daily emotional responses to stress. Higher resilience predicted that negative emotions wouldn’t be as impactful, particularly on days characterized by heightened stress. Additionally they found that the experience of positive emotions functions to assist high-resilient individuals in their ability to recover effectively from daily stress. “Psychological resilience, positive emotions, and successful adaptation to stress in later life.” By Ong, Anthony D.; Bergeman, C. S.; Bisconti, Toni L.; Wallace, Kimberly A. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 91(4), Oct 2006, 730-749.



### Tips and Strategies

Use your emotional intelligence to grow your positivity and be more resilient. This is an internal strength so the key skills to grow, which are found in the EQi 2.0 are: self-regard, emotional self-awareness, stress tolerance, flexibility, impulse control and optimism. The key team competencies focused on in the TESI are Positive Mood and Stress Tolerance.

You can expand your individual resilience by:

- Redefining productivity from working on emails to getting with someone
- Prioritize meditation, fun and family
- Recognize that you are a part of something bigger than yourself
- Embrace your bigger YES!
- Develop your 2% Solution as I describe in my book, Life's 2% Solution.

Team resilience can be expanded by:

- Recognize that positivity and trust go hand in hand because positivity supports deepening relationships. Develop positivity deliberately.
- Social connections are at the heart of team success so take time for building connections – and emphasize it even more if you have a virtual team. Do something fun together, have a pot luck lunch, and start meetings with going around the team and asking everyone to comment on something particularly interesting or important to them.
- Our sense of connection drives our willingness to be helpful. This is the heart of collaboration. Create connections, have team members work in small groups and then take time to reflect on the experience. Build awareness of the interpersonal connections as well as of the objective details of the project.