

Building Resilience: One Step at a Time

Becoming Anti-Fragile

Being resilient means that when you encounter difficulty, disaster, or trauma you bounce back to where you were before. *Unfortunately*, many people have a tough time bouncing back, and some never recover. How do people move from being emotionally wounded by their circumstances to being resilient in the face of their circumstances?

Being resilient is good, but what if you could not only bounce back but could grow stronger through the difficulties you encounter in life? This is what it means to be *antifragile*. Being antifragile means that facing loss or setback makes you **stronger**.

When you are *antifragile*, you will move forward in part by redirecting the event's negative energy and channeling it into growth and strength. This is similar to the idea of “post-traumatic growth,” a topic we provided information on over the last year. You can find some of that info at www.wellnessMN.org. Look for anything related to “PTG” or post-traumatic growth.

There are many examples of people who exhibit PTG and demonstrate antifragility. Examples include Sir Ernest Shackleton, the famous polar explorer, Senator Bob Dole and President George H.W. Bush, both of whom experienced trauma during WW2 and leveraged those experiences for the greater good.

Other examples include Naomi Uemura, who skied to the North Pole and back alone, without any outside assistance or resupply. Joe Gore was crushed in a car accident at age 25 and endured more than 20 surgeries in 25 years, yet he is happy, productive, and active outdoors. Finally, Viktor Frankl was a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps who lost his entire family in the camps yet came out an advocate for forgiveness and healing.

One good example of someone who was antifragile is the story of Harlan Sanders, a restaurant owner from a small town in Kentucky. Harlan's life seemed to be going well until state highway authorities moved the highway junction in front of his restaurant to another site. As a result, the number of visitors to his restaurant plummeted, and he had to sell his restaurant when he was 66.

After the failure of his restaurant, he didn't have much—but he did have one thing: his fried-chicken recipe. So Harlan decided to make the most of it by selling his fried chicken to restaurants.

This was the start of what became the world-famous Kentucky Fried Chicken model. He experienced a big setback at a late stage in His life. He was nearly broke. Yet he didn't let his losses and his being broke break him. Harlan Sanders didn't just bounce back to where he was before; he ended up *stronger* than before.

How do we build resilience and move toward being antifragile? *A positive perspective is critical, as is having positive people in your tribe. Focusing on the future possibilities and opportunities instead of dwelling on past hurts or losses. Also useful is investing in your faith and family relationships which can provide strength and clarity. And, of course, changing your narrative from negative to positive, from “I lost,” to “I can.”*