

Building Resilience: One Step at a Time

Perspective is Essential

Trials and difficulties can be significant disrupters to a person's equilibrium, sense of self, even physical and emotional wellbeing. Yet others seem to weather trials, difficulties, and even traumatic experiences with little disruption and relative ease. They often gain strength in the process.

The person's perspective seems vital in determining how they will respond. Of course, we cannot control all that happens to us, but we have the ability and opportunity to control how we view events and to manage what happens to us.

Leonhard Euler is one of the greatest mathematicians of all time. Euler was prolific in mathematics, contributing more than 850 publications! Interestingly, Euler lost sight in one eye at age 20; by age 60, he was completely blind. Despite being completely blind, the last seventeen years of his life were his *most* productive years!

How could that be? Euler had a **positive perspective** on dealing with adversity. When faced with adversity, he *was determined to keep going and be prepared for future difficulties*. For example, Euler's response to losing sight in one eye was to frame that adversity as an opportunity. He stated, "*Now I will have less distraction.*"

Forty years later, when told a cataract in his good eye meant he would become completely blind, Euler again determined to keep moving forward and to prepare. He began to practice writing with his fading eye closed to perfect his technique before the onset of darkness. Within weeks he was blind.

Euler is determined to take control of the situation instead of letting the situation control him. So when the problem was getting worse, he prepared himself. The result was that Euler produced *more*, not *less* when he was completely blind.

Euler's colleagues suggested that the onset of blindness appeared to **expand the horizons of his imagination**. He let his imagination explore new territories, no longer limited by what he saw. In this way, he was more than just resilient; he was antifragile. Rather than see the problems in his situation as setbacks, he used adversity to make himself *more vital* than before.

Adversity is inevitable in our lives, but how we deal with it makes it into something that strengthens us. The choice is up to us. We could choose to make excuses or think negatively about our circumstances. Or we could choose to be *determined* and *prepared* like Euler to thrive despite adversity. Positivity takes a bit of practice, but it can become your reality and response with practice.

Your spiritual self is one area to consider in building your positive frame of reference. How we manage our beliefs and spiritual health can have a tremendous impact on our wellbeing. For example, research indicates that remaining engaged and active with a network of spiritual friends can add years to one's life and improve overall health and emotional markers.

Check out the resources at www.wellnessMN.org, and look for more information on being antifragile in another One-pager!