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The Resiliency Advantage

Master Change, Thrive Under Pressure, and Bounce Back from Setbacks

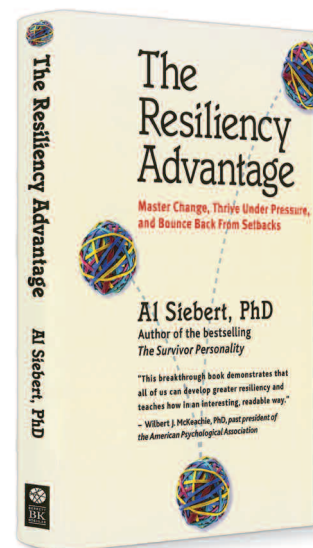
THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Resiliency — the ability to adapt to life's changes and crises — is key to a healthy, productive life. Based on his deep knowledge of the new science of resiliency, Dr. Al Siebert explains how and why some people are more resilient than others and how resiliency can be learned at any age. Siebert details a unique five-level program for becoming more resilient. *The Resiliency Advantage* helps readers banish negative, self-defeating thoughts and break free from the roles of “victim” and “good child” while improving problem-solving skills, maintaining humor and optimism during rough times, and becoming both self-reliant and socially responsible.

These are challenging times. We are in a turbulent era. One in which too much change is happening too fast for many people. *The Resiliency Advantage* gives you a head start over those who don't want to learn skills for handling constant change and difficult developments. Siebert shows you how to sustain strong, healthy energy in non-stop change, bounce back quickly from setbacks and gain strength from adversities.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to sustain health, energy and positive feelings during the worst of times.
- How to improve your analytical, creative and practical problem-solving skills.
- How to strengthen your self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept.
- How to develop the specific attributes and skills found in highly resilient people.
- How to sharpen your talent for serendipity — the ability to convert accidents and misfortune into lucky accidents and good fortune.



by Al Siebert, Ph.D.

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE RESILIENCY ADVANTAGE

by Al Siebert, Ph.D.

The author: Dr. Al Siebert (1934-2009) was founder and director of The Resiliency Center. He was internationally recognized for his research into the inner nature of highly resilient survivors. He was an ex-paratrooper with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Michigan.

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For additional information on the author, go to www.summary.com or visit www.resiliencycenter.com

Thriving in Today's World

Resiliency means being able to bounce back from life developments that may feel totally overwhelming at first. When resilient people have their lives disrupted they handle their feelings in healthy ways. They allow themselves to feel grief, anger, loss and confusion when hurt and distressed, but they don't let it become a permanent feeling state. An unexpected outcome is that they not only heal, they often bounce back stronger than before.

This is why resilient people usually handle major difficulties easier than others. They expect to rebuild their disrupted lives in a new way that works for them, and the struggle to overcome adversity develops new strengths in them.

Learning to Be Resilient

The art of resiliency gives you a powerful advantage in today's world. Your learning will be most useful if you put together your own plan for developing your way of being resilient and don't restrict yourself only to what you read in this book. In the school of life, the responsibility is on the learner, not the teacher. ●

Bouncing Back from Setbacks

Gert Lamfrom and Neal Boyle were college sweethearts. After they married, Neal began working in Gert's parents' small hat-manufacturing business. He learned the business well and eventually took over as its president.

In 1970, Neal died suddenly of a heart attack. Gert's grief was magnified by seeing that no one but her husband knew how to run the business and her parents were too old to come back. All their assets were in the business. If it collapsed, she didn't know what she could do to support herself, her parents and her son in college.

Gert decided she would do her best not to let their small business collapse. She asked her son Tim, a senior in college, to come home and help her save the company from bankruptcy. With debts mounting and workers to pay, they worked long days and on weekends to fill and ship orders.

The business stabilized and they decided to expand by making sportswear. Gert was ruthless in making certain every item was perfect before it shipped. The company, Columbia Sportswear, developed strong brand awareness in 1984 when it launched an advertising campaign that featured Gert as a stern taskmaster with incredibly high standards. The ads featured "Mother Boyle" peering over her glasses, admonishing son Tim to ruthlessly test the durability of Columbia Sportswear garments.

Under Gert's leadership, Columbia Sportswear did more than bounce back from near collapse. Over the years it grew from being a small hat-manufacturing company to become one of the world's largest producers of sportswear, outdoor clothing and ski wear.

Who Is Responsible?

In the past, most private- and public-sector employees were hired and retained because they were easily controlled. Their upbringing oversocialized them into acquiescing to people in authority. The unwritten agreement was that if they cooperated, did as told and didn't cause problems when feeling upset with management, they would have a lifetime job with fringe benefits and a good retirement package. The arrangement worked reasonably well for most employees while it lasted, but that world doesn't exist anymore. It is now common to hear about excellent employees losing their jobs because of organizational downsizing.



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When your life is disrupted by decisions or actions made by others, an essential question to ask yourself is, “Who is responsible for how well my life goes?” How resilient you are depends on your answer.

Resilient people don’t wait for others to rescue them; they work through their feelings, set goals, work to reach their goals and often emerge from the resiliency process with a better life than before. Later, they say they are glad that their difficult situation happened. ●

LEVEL ONE RESILIENCY

Optimize Your Health: A Practical Action Plan

The widespread belief about jobs having harmful stress is an artificial “consensus reality.” Articles, books and workshops about stress, while well-intentioned, sustain an illusion that something called “stress” is constantly assaulting and harming us. What most people call stress is really an internal, physical feeling of anxiety or strain that they don’t like. This is not just semantics. Stress is the external pressure, strain is the internal effect.

Make a list of six or seven things that you feel irritated, upset or distressed about. Ask and answer questions such as:

- What pressures am I feeling?
- How is my work and my life different than it was a year ago?
- What is difficult for me now and what difficulties am I expecting?
- What feels distressing to me?

Take your time and be thorough. Write descriptive phrases.

The next step is to talk or write about how you feel about the items you listed. During difficult times, an important resiliency step is being able to express your feelings in healthy ways. You can’t make feelings go away, but you can move through them.

Now list your positive experiences. List activities that revitalize and invigorate you. Ask yourself these questions:

- What do I have fun doing? What do I get enthusiastic about?
- What would I like to do that I keep putting off?
- Who do I enjoy sharing good experiences with?
- When do I sleep best at night?
- What positive aspects of my life am I ignoring?

Decide to Cope Well with Challenges

After you’ve made your lists about what drains you and what revitalizes you, you are at a choice point. Are you going to take action or not take action to reduce your distressing, energy-draining experiences and increase pleasant, revitalizing experiences?

In the 1970s, some psychologists began to study the connection between internal, locus of control attitudes and fewer stress-related health problems. In 1975, University of Chicago Professor Salvatore Maddi began a 12-year study of 450 managers and executives at Illinois Bell Telephone, a subsidiary of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T).

The researchers found that the hardy executives and managers had three qualities:

- They made an emotional *commitment* to do their best to successfully handle the ongoing events and to help others.
- They believed they could influence the outcomes and actively worked to reach specific goals. This gave them a feeling of being in *control* of their job assignments and their part of the action.
- They felt energized and *challenged* to solve the problems and cope effectively with every difficulty.

Decrease Negative Experiences

Look at your list of negative experiences. Pick one item and create an action plan to feel less vulnerable and more in control. Ask yourself: If I can’t avoid it, change it or make it go away, what if I changed my response to it? What if I decided to stop letting it bother me?

You feel strained only by what you emotionally and physically attempt to deal with. Disengaging yourself from some things around you conserves your resiliency energy for more important challenges.

Ask for Support

Everything you think and feel has an effect on your physical health; the quality of your interactions with others has an effect on your physical health. You recover better when you tell your family, a friend or a support group what you are feeling. If you feel overwhelmed and lack energy for handling the pressures, consider seeking professional help. Take this suggestion seriously. Anyone who tries to act as though he or she never feels upset or distressed is more fragile than people who admit they need counseling.

Enjoy Strain Like a Good Workout

Notice that the Optimal Health Plan does not say to avoid pressure or strain. Without periods of strain we

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lose strength and deteriorate. An optimal plan has you alternating the strains of intense work with periods of detachment, rest and relaxation. ●

LEVEL TWO RESILIENCY

Skillfully Problem Solve

Pioneering research conducted by psychologist Richard Lazarus established that effective coping includes both emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. The connection between a problem-solving response and resiliency has been confirmed many times. Research conducted by Mary Steinhardt at a division of the Motorola corporation found that employees who use problem-focused coping in a constantly changing work environment are more resilient, have good relationships with others and enjoy better health. Steinhardt's study also confirmed that the least resilient people do not cope well with their unhappy feelings, believe their jobs are full of stress and have more illnesses.

Robert Sternberg and his colleagues have conducted worldwide research to understand the kinds of intelligence that determine success in life. Sternberg, in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association in 2003, described three identifiably different kinds of intelligence used by people in almost every culture:

Analytical intelligence: Logic, reason and abstract thinking used to solve familiar problems.

Creative intelligence: Used to invent unusual solutions in new and unfamiliar circumstances.

Practical intelligence: Applied to solving situational, real-life problems. People who are “street smart” are individuals who have practical intelligence, although they may use logical and creative thinking as well.

Analytical Problem Solving

First, develop an accurate understanding of the nature of the threat, challenge or difficulty. You accomplish this by asking questions such as: What is the problem? What are the facts? How serious is it? How urgent is it? How much time do I have? What additional information do I need? Is this a problem I can do anything about? Must I be the one who takes action?

Second, ask yourself, What do I want? What is my goal? What kind of outcome would satisfy me? Does my goal take into account everyone who would be affected?

Third, outline two or more possible ways to overcome the problem to achieve a positive outcome. Then

look at the risks and potential negative effects of each of your solutions.

Fourth, take action. It is normal to feel a bit anxious when you do or say something you have never done before.

Fifth, look at the effects of the action you have taken. Ask questions aimed at getting accurate feedback.

Sixth, learn from the feedback you get. Reappraise your understanding of the problem and the situation.

Seventh, modify your efforts.

Eighth, re-evaluate the outcome. Can you now leave the situation and move on to other things?

Ninth, ask yourself what you learned from this.

Creative Problem Solving

Creative solutions cannot be found using logical, analytical problem solving. Creative problem solving starts with feeling that an unusual, new solution is possible. Then you ask yourself many questions to free your imagination from the restrictions of normal thinking and assumptions. You have probably heard the phrase “thinking outside the box.” It takes uncensored questions to break out of the invisible walls of socially approved thinking to let your imagination soar free.

Practical Problem Solving

Many people without a college education are successful in life because they are very practical in how they handle the world they live in. Many people have an amazing practical intelligence with “things.” Farmers and ranchers are known for their ability to keep farm equipment running using bailing wire and duct tape. In many large office buildings, the chief of building operations — the person who knows how to keep everything running — is not a college graduate.

The key point to understand here is to think beyond any difficulty, problem or adversity to your desired outcome. Build your plan on new or different actions you will take. ●

LEVEL THREE RESILIENCY

Strengthen Your Three Inner Selves

Highly resilient people know they can count on themselves during rough times. They have inner strengths they know they can rely on. The differences stem from three core inner strengths essential to being resilient. These strengths begin to develop early in life.

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As children play and have many different experiences, they gain a feeling of competence about doing certain things. Their actions may be athletic, learning words or numbers, or skills with computers or a musical instrument. Their competence leads to feelings of *self-confidence* when they anticipate their ability to succeed at certain things in the future.

During childhood we develop emotional opinions about others and ourselves. How we feel about ourselves is called *self-esteem*. If other children at school called you bad names, maybe your mother or father told you to answer back, “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” When you did this you were learning to protect your feelings about yourself by rejecting bad opinions of you held by others.

As we get older, we develop ideas about ourselves that create our *self-concept*. Who we think we are shapes our identity.

How Your Three Selves Let You Be Effective Without a Job Description

In resiliency workshops, I usually ask how many people have a complete, up-to-date job description. Most people laugh; a few people may raise their hands. An ability to be guided by an inner sense of professionalism is essential in today’s workplace. Individuals with a self-concept of professionalism quickly find new ways to be useful, adapt rapidly, are self-motivated to learn new skills and so forth. ●

LEVEL FOUR RESILIENCY

Unleash Your Curiosity: Enjoy Learning in the School of Life

Curiosity is essential to resiliency. Why? For a simple reason: If you are going to interact effectively with a new situation, your brain must quickly acquire an accurate understanding of what is happening in your environment.

Curiosity can be viewed as a sort of “open-brainedness.” This open-brainedness does not distort new information with pre-existing assumptions or beliefs. Active curiosity lets you orient yourself to new developments.

People who have the best chance of handling new situations well are usually those with the best comprehension of what is occurring in the world around them. People with closed minds refuse to listen to information or feedback that they don’t want to hear. It is not unusual for newspapers and magazines to run stories

about how the executives of bankrupt corporations refused to listen to what their employees or customers tried to tell them.

Three Kinds of Learning

It’s useful to understand that you were born with the ability to learn in three different ways.

The first kind of learning is emphasized when students attend classes in school. What they learn is scheduled and controlled by teachers. A second kind of learning occurs from imitating effective people. The third way is self-motivated, self-managed learning; It is the learning that comes directly from your own experience. In the school of life, a skilled student can learn useful lessons from rough experiences.

Highly resilient people learn in all three ways. They learn in classes, learn from role models and learn useful lessons on their own.

A learning response is the antidote to feeling like a helpless, mistreated, abused, beaten-up victim. When life deals you a rough blow, you have two choices. One is to learn a valuable lesson; the other is to remain a wounded victim.

Experiences that feel like failures can break you down or be converted into growth experiences. Here is where the strengths of your three inner selves play a critical role in determining which way your life progresses. If your self-confidence, self-esteem and self-concept are weak, you interpret failure as a negative judgment about you and your incompetence.

Learning: The Key to Mastering Change

Introductory psychology textbooks define learning as “a change in behavior that results from experience.” This means that change and learning are inseparable; they define each other. The key to mastering change is to manage your learning. ●

The Power of Positive Expectations

Two leading researchers into optimism and pessimism, Charles Carver and Michael Scheier, explain that “optimists are people who expect good things to happen to them; pessimists are people who expect bad things to happen to them.” Believing that good events will happen in your future is different than hoping that your current difficulties will get better in the future.

Optimism and pessimism both tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies. If you expect a good outcome, your brain

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spots little events and momentary opportunities that can lead to that outcome. If you expect a bad outcome, your brain will have you thinking, feeling and acting in ways that lead to that predicted outcome.

Feelings of hope are tied to specific, immediate difficulties, while optimism and pessimism tend to be global expectations about things happening in the future.

Humans Have Attitudes!

In the 1920s, some executives encountering resistance to change in their employees turned to the new science of psychology for help. George Mead and other social psychologists began studying the nature of attitudes in employees.

Mead said that, in humans, an attitude is a predisposition to react with a fixed way of feeling and thinking. It is a form of prejudice that can be either positive or negative about almost anything. Research into the development, purposes and functions of attitudes led to the finding that attitudes reach deeply into a person's identity.

A Flaw in PMA Preachings

The term "positive attitude" is a widely used term in our popular culture, but is not a useful concept in psychology. Here's why.

A sales manager trying to stir a room full of sales people into enthusiastic action by exhorting them to have a positive mental attitude (PMA) is poorly informed about attitudes and how people develop them. Motivational speakers who urge people to acquire a PMA set many people up to experience failure, because repetition of positive thoughts alone seldom brings the promised success. Attitudes, as understood by psychologists, are not only mental. Most psychology textbooks define an attitude as having three components: cognitive, emotional and behavioral.

An attitude is an interwoven combination of mental, emotional and behavioral habits. An attitude is a person's habitual, reflexive way of thinking about, feeling toward and reacting to something. A person's attitude cannot be replaced by telling him or her to change what to think. But by choosing to practice thinking in a different way, a person can change an attitude.

A related challenge is that associated emotions and actions must also be changed, as well as the attitudes of groups important to the person. Some people may be open to consider changing their way of thinking, but it might cause them to lose important friendships and acceptance by others if they do.

Leave My Attitude Alone!

No one can talk another person into changing an attitude, no matter how hard one may try — as many sales managers, parents and spouses know full well. It takes a long time to develop an attitude, and it takes conscious, applied personal effort to undo or change an attitude — as with any habit.

So, when it comes to the matter of attitudes, think "habits." Then you'll have a realistic understanding of what it takes for a person to change an attitude. He or she must want the change to occur and, as with any personal habit, the practiced effort will take many weeks or months before the new way becomes established.

Learned Resiliency: Drawing on All Ways of Thinking

The starting point for resiliency often begins with asking questions such as, "How can I cope with this? What is still good in my life?" An amazing thing about your brain is that when you instruct it to look for something, it often finds it. If you define the situation too narrowly and think of it only as devastating to your life, then other aspects of your life that seem contrary to your mind-set won't reach you.

Joanne Hill lost 12 family members in four years. Joanne says, "There came the time when heartaches descended upon me like the locusts of biblical times. First I lost my husband, then my brother, followed by my dear stepfather, my mom, aunt, two uncles, step-mother, cousin, foster son and his partner, and finally, my son, who died of a heart attack. Multiple other family crises plagued us through those four years as well. My mother had Alzheimer's, cancer surgery and a broken hip. Everyone I loved seemed to need help."

Joanne says, "Concerned friends often asked me, 'How do you deal with all the grief, troubles and sorrow? How do you do it?' I delved into that question through journaling, meditation and prayer. I discovered that in every stormy time, I could find rainbows if I looked for them." ●

Integrating Your Paradoxical Abilities

Why do some people achieve much more career success than others? David McClelland, a psychology professor at Harvard University, spent many years searching for answers to this question.

McClelland found that successful people work to achieve personal goals; they are not motivated to achieve

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social indicators of success. Success, for them, is a feeling they enjoy when they reach their self-chosen goals. If a goal is imposed on you by others — teachers, family or bosses — you may receive praise and rewards for what you do, but will feel little personal success.

Through carefully controlled scientific research conducted on thousands of people in different cultures, McClelland found that he could predict a person's future from the way he or she daydreams about the future:

- They daydream about how they would feel reaching a certain goal. A girl learning to play soccer may daydream about playing on the U.S. Women's soccer team one day.
- They pick moderately challenging goals.
- They engage in both optimistic and pessimistic thinking about how easy and how difficult it will be to reach the goal. Plans include carefully monitoring their progress so they can make corrections if needed.
- They seek advice from experienced people before making a commitment to achieve the goal.

McClelland's research shows that high achievers do not charge ahead with unbridled optimism. People most likely to succeed at what they set out to do will spend time trying to anticipate everything that could go wrong. Before making a commitment to a goal, successful people try to predict the obstacles, difficulties, personal limitations, possible problems and barriers. They find out what they can learn from experts and experienced people. Then they devise ways to avoid the problems and difficulties or be prepared in advance, should they occur.

Bosses who declare they want to hear only positive thinking about a new project set their organizations up for big failure. This restrictive way of thinking, described as "groupthink" by psychologist Irving Janis, suppresses the kind of critical evaluation that can anticipate potential future problems. Salespeople who restrict themselves only to positive thoughts are more likely to fall into emotional pits of discouragement. In contrast, people most likely to succeed go through phases where they seem to be as negative as any person who is pessimistic all the time.

The key point to understand is that highly effective people can engage in optimistic or pessimistic thinking as they choose to.

A good analogy is the way that you use the hot and cold water faucets at a sink with one spout. When you want a drink of water, you can choose to turn on cold water and not allow any hot water into your glass. When you want to rinse a greasy pan, you can choose

to turn on hot water without mixing in cold water. If you want to wash your hands, you can turn on both faucets and blend hot and cold water together. Similarly, when you reach the advanced levels of mental development and emotional intelligence found in highly resilient people, you can exercise inspiring optimism, practical pessimism or a blend of both.

Abraham Maslow pointed out that highly self-actualized people go beyond acting in selfish and unselfish ways. He said they combine both selfishness and unselfishness into the same activity. Maslow's insight had a powerful effect on my thinking. I began to see many pairs of opposite traits combined in highly resilient people:

- Creative and analytical
- Serious and playful
- Sensitive and tough
- Self-appreciating and self-critical
- Impulsive and thorough
- Optimistic and pessimistic
- Outgoing and introspective.

Counterbalanced personality qualities indicate that you have developed advanced emotional intelligence. The more pairs of traits you have, the more you have the mental and emotional flexibility essential for resiliency.

When someone does not handle life's challenges well, it is often because this person always thinks, feels or acts in only one way and would never consider doing the opposite. ●

Allowing Everything to Work Well: The Synergy Talent

Some people have a desynergistic effect on others. When they are present, they drain energy from a group. You feel relieved when they're absent.

Some people have a synergistic effect wherever they are. When they are present, things work better for everyone. People who are highly resilient interact with others in synergistic ways.

During times of crisis and change, there are always a few solid people who are generous with their concern for others. Self-confident, resilient and compassionate, they provide reassurance and stability in chaotic situations.

A noticeable quality when you're a synergistic person is that you volunteer to help when there's trouble. You're a sort of "foul-weather friend." When things are working well, you may seem uninvolved, but when there's trouble, you show up, ready to lend a hand or take charge.

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I'm not saying that everyone is either synergistic or desynergistic. The majority of people are not at either extreme. Most people just drift along with whatever is happening. Things are neither better nor worse when they are present or when they are absent.

A sign that you have developed a synergistic nature is that you accomplish more with less effort. Your life flows along pleasantly and smoothly. People who are synergistic think not of time management, but of energy management. They get all the important things done and still have spare time to do what they enjoy. ●

LEVEL FIVE RESILIENCY

Strengthening Your Talent for Serendipity

Serendipity, according to 18th century writer and politician Horace Walpole, comes from using wisdom to convert an unexpected event, accident or mishap into good fortune. He said that three elements must be present for serendipity to occur.

First, something unexpected or accidental happens to you. Second, your perceptiveness, good sense and wisdom (sagacity) lead you to discover the third element — an unexpected benefit, gift or blessing in what happened.

Serendipity: Converting a Life-Disrupting Event into Good Luck

Serendipity is an advanced-level resiliency skill. Individuals with many basic resiliency strengths are often able to convert a life-disrupting experience into one of the best things that ever happened. This is more than bouncing back; while struggling to cope with a life-disrupting event, you find new strengths and may discover unexpected opportunities. You see that you can take your life or your career in a new direction that would not have opened up to you without the disruptive event. The adversity creates an opportunity for taking your life in a different and better direction than you expected.

An amazing thing about your brain is that when you instruct it to look for something, it often finds it. People who turn intrusive or unwanted events into accidental opportunities do so because they deliberately scan for those opportunities.

Many people confuse serendipity with good luck and synchronicity. Serendipity is not a lucky accident. An example of accidental luck would be to purchase a dete-

riorated old house and, when you begin to restore it, you discover an old painting hidden up in the attic that is worth more than what you paid for the house.

Synchronicity refers to extraordinary, meaningful coincidences where one feels that something more than chance is involved. Research by quantum physicists is opening many people to understand that we are all immersed in a connected sea of energies in which all things have a sympathetic connection. ●

Our Transformational Breakthrough

Each of us lives in a constantly changing environment. We can make our lives difficult by denying, resisting or fighting against the ongoing process of change or we can adapt and flow with changes; it's our choice. By accepting that unceasing change permeates our lives and that many kinds of energy constantly swirl through and around us, we can free ourselves from being buffeted around like leaves in a storm.

An Old/New Way of Being

Highly complex, resilient, synergistic individuals are always curious, exploring, trying new ways of doing things and learning. They maintain mental and emotional stability by keeping themselves in a state of mild disequilibrium. They are open to take in, examine and process new inputs, ignore or let go of what is not of value or interest, and move on to the next experience. Thus it is that they become accustomed to quickly taking in and processing new things that are happening. They can react to an unexpected change by welcoming it and converting it into a desirable life event.

We are born able to learn how to handle nonstop, disruptive change easily and naturally, and constant change is necessary and desirable for us as humans. We are most resilient when we scan new circumstances with curiosity, not knowing in advance what we will do, but confident that we will interact in ways that lead to things working well. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Resiliency Advantage*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Adversity Paradox* by J. Barry Griswell and Bob Jennings.** This summary reveals the incredible benefit of enduring life's challenges.
2. ***You Already Know How to Be Great* by Alan Fine with Rebecca R. Merrill.** Fine reveals his proven approach to achieving breakthrough performance through a process called G.R.O.W. (Goal, Reality, Options, Way Forward).
3. ***High Altitude Leadership* by Chris Warner and Don Schmincke.** To thrive in today's business challenges and tomorrow's unpredictable risks, you need to become the type of leader whose career, team and company excels in the most extreme of environments.