

ABC's of Wisdom – R – Resilience

Have you ever wondered why one person, when faced with uncertainty and change, reacts so differently than another person? Resilience could explain it.

A simple definition of resilience is the ability to remain productive and positive when faced with stress, uncertainty and change. There is a slight difference between resilience and perseverance. Resilience is more mental and even emotional. While perseverance usually refers to continuing to take an action.

Erik Weihenmayer is the world's leading blind athlete and the only blind person in history to reach the Seven Summits, including Everest in 2001. In *the Adversity Advantage*, that he wrote along with Paul G. Stoltz, he says, "All worthy ascents begin with coming to grips with where you are, so you can move forward and up. . . Let adversity be the flame in which your strengths are forged." The tagline for his organization *No Barriers* is "What's within you is stronger than what's in your way." Eric has resilience.

Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist for female education, was shot in the head on October 9, 2012, while on a bus after taking an exam, Yousafzai was shot by a Taliban gunman in an assassination attempt in retaliation for her activism; the gunman fled the scene. Yousafzai remained unconscious and in critical condition, but her condition later improved enough for her to be transferred to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, UK. Even while in the hospital she said, "I believed in my strength. I believed I would get out of the hospital and run like a wolf, fly like an eagle." After her recovery she became a prominent activist for education and is the youngest

recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for her advocacy of education. Malala demonstrated resilience.

Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, was an alcoholic. In spite of the fact that he was on track for a brilliant Wall Street career, his life was in a downward spiral. In 1935 he met Dr. Bob and together they developed a plan that would eventually become AA. Today AA can be found in approximately 180 nations worldwide with membership estimated at over two million. There are more than 123,000 AA groups in the world. AA literature has been translated into over 100 languages. The famous 12 Steps were written in 1938. Wilson's resilience has saved an untold number of lives. Closer to home, you can find others with resilience overcoming life's disappointments, even tragedies. For ten of my twenty years as an educator, I worked with children who were blind. The year after I became her Braille teacher, Kim lost all of the little sight she had left. She was in the fourth grade and had experienced several eye surgeries in her short lifetime. At this point it became necessary for her to learn the Braille math code. Previously she was able to manage with enlargements. Now she was not. As I introduced the first math lesson, she struggled a little and I made comments like, "There is no rush" "You can take your time" and "Don't worry about catching on right away." To which she replied, "Don't worry. I can get this. I'm *young*." And she did. She now holds a Ph.D. from The University of Texas and works as a Health Equity Researcher for Mathematica Policy Research. Kim shows resilience in every area of her life and is an inspiration to others.

Wisdom is comprised of many traits and resilience is definitely one of them. However, resilience is made up of other traits like optimism and perseverance. Perhaps resilience

is acquired and not a trait we are born with. I believe, however, a child develops resilience by coping with life's challenges early on.

Our world is made better when people express their resilience in positive and beneficial ways.

“You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.” C.S. Lewis

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