

Resilience Through Numbers

It has been a slow and steady year full of changes for me. After a series of major emotional losses, I have emerged in a slow and steady pace trying to maintain my cool during times of crisis. Work has been especially fulfilling this year, although the financial climate is not for the weak of heart. I seemed to have transitioned to becoming research faculty during the worst period for fund-raising in a long time. I see leaner budgets, cuts across programs, more projects for less salary replacement. It will probably get worse. But for once in my life, I am getting over things much faster than before. I have learned how being legitimately angry, even for short periods is extremely constructive.

Besides having a very supportive social network, I have the privilege of working with an amazing group of people from all walks of life and I have never felt more inspired to solve problems. Failure has struck me many times, but I have never been afraid of it. Boredom is what I am always most afraid of, followed closely by the fear of squandering talent, not just mine but that of others. In recent years, I have learned that a healthy amount of narcissism can lead to resilience. Even thinking that I can actually help with something is rather narcissistic. Yet, the thought of wasting a mind that can contribute to this world in small or big ways is a terrifying one. Until I had students, I didn't know why narcissism was valuable. Removing insecurity and replacing it with confidence for others was transformational for me.

My students taught me that I had the ability to help them somehow discover what they like and want and they let me push their boundaries and experiment. In this process, I became comfortable with my own skills. For years I hated the "jack of all trades master of none" line because of my own insecurities. Now, I strive to be a master of none because I prefer working with other people. In reality, we all have

mastery over several areas. Learning to raise your hand and say “I can do this” with beaming confidence is incredible. Even more incredible is the ability to find the people who can do what you can’t do and at times, convince them that they can do this, whatever it is that is necessary. There is also the “I can’t do this” moment and it is best to be working with people who also know their limits. The more people you let into your world, the more likely you can find those who can and can’t at the right time.

Resilience is a word bouncing in my head for over a year now. It has become a meditation. For me, resilience has been about numbers. The number of people who have contributed to my well changes all the time. Some transference has persistence, while other exchanges are fleeting—perhaps a spark—but not a lasting imprint. Shifting into positive opportunities for transference is hard yet possible. Recognizing positive and constructive models is not a widely taught skill. If the mirror you hold up to yourself and others is broken, it is hard to see. Coming from a mixed bag of positive and negative role models, the path is not always clear because we tend to follow what our early emotional experiences find familiar, no matter how terrible these are. Therefore, resilience lies in numbers: how many people can you meet in a lifetime who can transform your emotional and intellectual world?