

# — CHAPTER 06 —

HAVING CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE

*resilience (grit) and  
posttraumatic growth*



The things in life that really hurt spare no one.

—DAN BAKER

## Program Objective and Outline

**This program is designed to enable each participant to take greater advantage of the opportunities presented in the 2nd half of life to live even more meaningful, fulfilling and joyful lives ... to flourish.**

This will be achieved through a series of chapters consisting of lecture, participant's personal reflection and group dialogue. To illustrate points we will use models, illustrations, stories, videos, quotes and various props.

## Chapter Objective

**By the close of this chapter, participants should better understand:**

The role setbacks play in our lives, the difference between "changes" and "transitions" and how to develop greater resilience or "grit" in the face of setbacks.



But even beyond this, in the field of positive psychology, it suggests an ability to not just bounce back, but to grow beyond the original position. What is known as “posttraumatic growth.” This requires what Angela Duckworth refers to as “grit.”

Perhaps the first step in better dealing with setbacks, is to form a somewhat different perspective on setbacks than most of us carry. We tend to view events as either favorable or unfavorable. Maybe in the short term this works, but longer term, we may not be very good at predicting the outcome of the things we view as setbacks. My guess is that each of us looks back at certain setbacks and can see how they have made our lives better. The high school sweetheart who broke up with you and you see at your 50th high school reunion, the lost job, the house you wanted to buy but failed to get...these often lead to far better places.

Setbacks serve a very real purpose in our lives. The times that really test us are just as much a part of life as the good times. In fact, we wouldn't know the good times without the bad times, just as we wouldn't know up without down, light without darkness. Good times and bad times are just part of the complex web of life. We

can't have the joy of reunion without the pain of farewell, the gift of forgiveness without the pain of remorse or anger.

There is no straight line in nature. Life for everyone and everything is a series of periods of stability followed by periods of instability. In nature a leaf falls, an egg cracks, a seed blossoms... there is no stopping this vacillation.

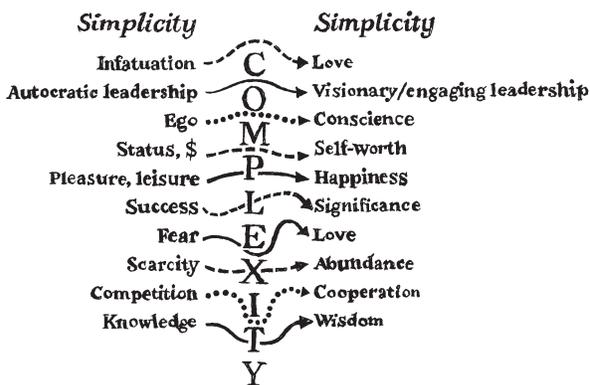
These periods of instability are full of opportunities to learn and grow. Setbacks often make us stronger, give us a deeper perspective, make us more self-confident, more resilient. Often the tragedy is not the setback, but the failure to capitalize on the opportunity it presents us. So, the question before us today is how do we move through these periods of instability, to move through the setbacks we all experience?





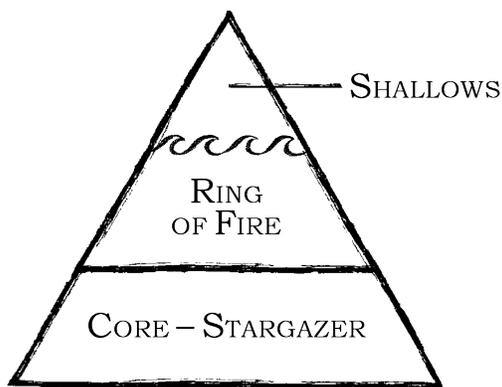
## The “Other Side”

*I wouldn't give a fig for simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for simplicity on the other (far) side of complexity*  
 - Oliver Wendell Holmes



There are dozens of models of transitions. I want to share three to show you how each of the models is almost identical in terms of the stages of transition. The first is from my book. There is a Chinese expression: “The way to simplicity is through complexity.” I think this quote is a shorter way of getting to Oliver Wendell Holmes quote: “I wouldn't give a fig for simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for simplicity on the other side of complexity.” The model I use in the book tries to capture the fact that often the things we value, before we go through complexity (read “setback”), are of significantly less value than the perspectives we gain, what we value, on the other side of complexity.

A second model is by Martha Beck from her book *Steering by Starlight*. Her contention is that we tend to live in the shallows until we go through what she calls the “Ring of Fire.” Successfully going through the ring of fire leads us to a deeper level where we live more consistent with our core and become what she calls a “Stargazer.”



Source: *Steering by Starlight: The Science and Magic of Finding Your Destiny*, Martha Beck







Obviously, what each of these models has in common is a period of challenge in between the two sides of before and after the challenge/setback. Let's stick with William Bridges' model and use his language of an ending, a neutral zone and a beginning. When things no longer work as they have before, we are required to experience an ending. Most of us will try to cling to the old order long after it has served its purpose. (*"Denial ain't just a river in Egypt and despair ain't just the tire in your trunk."*) We hate endings and will often resist a needed transition by denying the need to change. When we finally realize we must move on, we will try to jump to a beginning and avoid the neutral zone... and for good reason. The neutral zone is even more painful for most of us than an ending. The neutral zone is where everything is confused, the old doesn't work and we haven't really figured out the new yet. But moving to a beginning without going through the neutral zone is usually a failed strategy, for it is in the neutral zone that new perspectives, new insights, deeper understanding, deeper values are formed that serve us well in the new beginning. The neutral zone is full of disenchantment, disillusion, distress, distraction, discomfort, perhaps even disease... but it is also full of discovery.

It is where everything is turned on its head and we are challenged to make sense of it all. To really transition successfully we must endure the neutral zone. There is no direct path from an ending to a beginning. The discombobulation, perhaps the suffering, the confusion and loss are a necessary part of the journey.

Those who do the best in getting through the neutral zone have what is known as an "internal locus of control" versus an "external locus of control." Simply put, people who have an internal locus of control believe that their fate is determined by things they can control... working harder, learning new skills, making better decisions, stopping self-destructive behaviors. Someone who has an external locus of control perceives their fate is determined by outside forces. They believe what happens to them is due to forces beyond their control.



The key to thriving and not becoming a victim to a large degree is having “grit.” Angela Duckworth defines it as follows “the tendency to pursue long-term goals with passion and persistence.” Ms. Duckworth has a 10-question test called the “Grit Scale.” West Point cadets who score highest on the scale are likelier to make it through the grueling training. She has also tested Chicago public school students, salespeople at a time-share company and national spelling bee contestants. In each case, the grit scale was better at predicting success than conscientiousness (a close relative to grit, but also includes self-control, orderliness, punctuality and responsibility), IQ or talent. It seems the most dogged excel.

William H. McRaven who was a Navy SEAL and previous commander of all U.S. Special Operations, writes in his book *Make Your Bed* about being “sugar-cookied.” During SEAL training the officer in charge would find something wrong with one of the trainees’ bed, or his uniform, or his attitude and tell them to get “sugar-cookied.” This basically meant that they had to go into the surf in their uniform and then come out and roll in the sand until they were covered with sand. They would then have to spend the

rest of the day in that uniform. It was not a comfortable experience. Often being “sugar-cookied” was a random event with little reason behind the punishment. The exercise was not so much about punishment, but rather to provide this message: “We need to realize that life isn’t always fair and to accept this unfairness and move on.” Those that couldn’t handle being “sugar-cookied,” because it was unfair, were the ones that didn’t make it through the training to become SEALs.

Dan Baker’s book, *What Happy People Know*, ends with a story of a woman who walks into the doctor’s office. He is about to tell her she has cancer. He opens the conversation with “I am about to give you a diagnosis that will color the rest of your life.” Before the doctor even has the chance to give her the diagnosis, she replies “Then I will choose what color.” In dealing with the indignities of life we all face, we each have a choice as to how they color our lives, and that choice, in many ways, determines whether we flourish or languish.

I guess the message of this chapter is get used to being “sugar-cookied” and choose wisely how the setbacks you experience will “color” your life.



goes through crisis. Seek out others who have gone through similar transitions successfully and gain their insight.

**5. Dig no holes** ... at least no deep holes.

If you are smoking a pack of cigarettes a day, stop. If you are breaking major commitments to others, stop. Be sure your actions aren't making the situation worse.

**6. Continue to care for and connect with self.**

Often when challenged, we stop doing the very things which have kept us centered. If you have been exercising regularly, eating well, getting enough sleep, be sure to keep these routines as you head through a transition.

**7. Control the bleeding so one part of your life doesn't screw up the other parts.** Don't let a challenge at work disrupt your family life and vice versa.

**8. Find purpose in the crisis** ... the pony in the manure. It is often said that everything happens for a purpose. Not sure this is true. I think crap happens. It is our job, perhaps with God's help, to find the meaning and purpose in setbacks. Having purpose makes us more resilient. Viktor Frankl has an equation that is relevant to this. He suggests that **Despair = Suffering–Meaning**. Despair is reduced to the degree we find meaning in the

suffering. He goes on to suggest: "When we are no longer able to change our situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

**9. Consider how it could have been worse.**

Seems strange, right? This is from *Option B* by Sheryl Sandberg. Her point is that what you are looking for is a sense of gratitude, not a single jolt of happiness. When her husband died of heart failure while exercising on a treadmill, she eventually came to realize he could have died while he was driving their two children to school and she could have lost her whole family.

**10. Practice the 13 skills of flourishing.**

Each of the 13 skills leads to greater resilience in the face of setbacks.

**Questions for Reflection**

1. Can you see your own setbacks having followed the 3-stage transition of the models presented?
2. Look back at one of the setbacks in life you feel you have handled well. What permitted you to do so successfully?
3. How have setbacks shaped your life for the better? When have you experienced posttraumatic growth?



7. *“When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.”*

–HELEN KELLER

8. *“I’m glad I didn’t know, the way it all would end, the way it all would go. Our lives are better left to chance, I could have missed the pain, but I would have had to miss the dance.”*

–GARTH BROOKS, THE DANCE

9. *“Sometimes we’re the dog, sometimes the hydrant.”*

–SNOOPY

10. *“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”*

–ELISABETH KÜBLER-ROSS

11. *“Forget about the perfect life, There is a crack, a crack in everything, That’s how the light gets in.”*

–LARRY COHEN, ANTHEM

12. *“First there is the fall, and then we recover from the fall. Both are the mercy of God!”*

–LADY JULIAN OF NORWICH

13. *“Let me fall. The person I become will catch me.”*

–UNKNOWN

14. *“I have taken thousands of people across [the river] and to all of them my river has been nothing but a hindrance on their journey. They have traveled for money and business, to weddings and on pilgrimages; the river has been in their way and the ferryman was there to take them quickly across the obstacle. However, amongst the thousands there have been a few, four of five, to whom the river was not a obstacle. They have heard its voice and listened to it, and the river has become holy to them, as it has to me.”*

–HERMAN HESSE, SIDDHARTHA

15. *“Life is just a trip until you lose your luggage, your way and your map; then you are on a journey.”*

–DOUGLAS A. SMITH

16. *“When we are no longer able to change our situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”*

–VIKTOR E. FRANKL, MAN’S SEARCH FOR MEANING

17. *“I walked a mile with Pleasure;  
She chatted all the way;*

*But left me none the wiser  
For all she had to say.*

*I walked a mile with Sorrow;  
And ne’er a word said she;*

*But, oh! The things I learned from her,  
When Sorrow walked with me.””*

–ROBERT BROWNING HAMILTON

18. *“I am looking for blessings not in disguise.”*

–UNKNOWN

