

Mentoring
Works!



Resilience

**Ann Rolfe,
Founder: Mentoring Works**



Ann Rolfe

Introduction

Sooner or later, you are going to be asked to be a mentor. You may be mentoring already, but today we can't leave mentoring to chance, we can't be random, just hoping we do it well.

Drawn from 30 years experience working with executives, **Mentor Master Classes** help build the advanced skills and knowledge to build mastery in mentoring. Each month we'll bring you tips and techniques that will help even highly-experienced mentors become more effective. We'll deliver straight forward, self-paced learning.

This Master Class **Resilience** looks at:

1. What is resilience?
2. Dealing with challenges
3. How to build resilience

I'm Ann Rolfe and I have a background in adult learning, career counseling and professional development. I've been in business for 30 years and trained professionals in aviation, education, engineering, energy, health, law and science to be mentors. Mentoring Works runs specialised programs for Aboriginal people, graduates, people with disabilities, STEM and women. Our contribution to our client's success, was recognized in 2011, with the LearnX Asia Pacific Platinum Award for Best Coaching/Mentoring Training Program and in 2013 with the Juvenile Justice Excellence Award for Innovation. So I know you are going to gain a lot from your investment in Mentor Master Classes.



What Is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to bounce back after some sort of set-back – from the minor and relatively trivial things that happen day-to-day, to major, life-changing or traumatic events. Our ability to deal with and recover from life’s inevitable challenges impacts on our health and wellbeing, our work and enjoyment and quality of life.

Recently, we commemorated the 10th anniversary of one of the worst disasters in Australia, when around 400 fires with the energy equivalent of 1500 atomic bombs, hit 78 communities. 450,000 hectares including homes, farms, towns, forests and national parks burned. The Black Saturday bushfires were devastating.

On 7 February 2009, 173 people lost their lives, 7 more died of injuries later. 404 injured people survived. An estimated 1 million native birds and animals, pets and livestock were killed, and many were injured. More than 2000 homes, plus farms and equipment and were lost. 7000 people were left homeless, some with nothing but the clothes on their back. Most lost family members and friends.

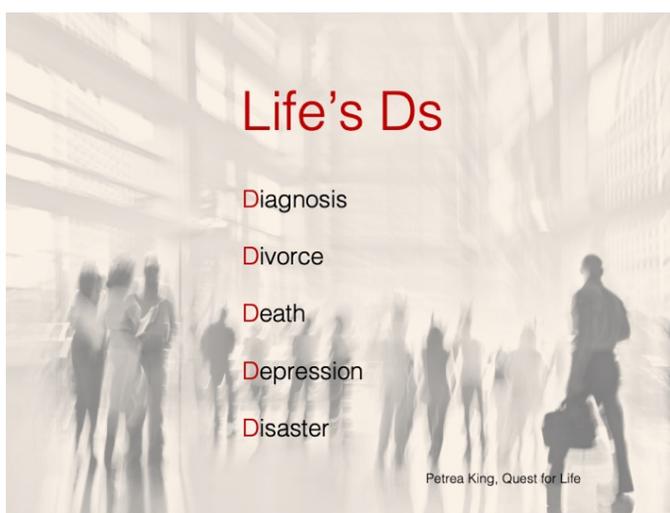
How do you recover from that? Well some people don’t; yet others do somehow reclaim their lives. Changed forever. Life will never be the same, but they go on.

There have been many stories in the media over the last few weeks demonstrating how people pulled together. Friends, family and strangers looked after each other. Help was provided, communities were rebuilt.

The tragedy and loss can never be forgotten, but in the aftermath, for many, life and love has been salvaged, and in some cases, flourished. It’s from people who survive such events that traumatologists and psychologists learn much that can help all of us build resilience.

I fervently hope that you and I never have and never will experience such a catastrophic trauma, but it's guaranteed that everyday life will bring to each of us a share of challenges to deal with.

Petrea King calls these "Life's Ds" Diagnosis a life-threatening illness or major injury, divorce, death of a loved one, depression and disaster. Every one of us have or will face one or more of these ourselves or with someone very close to us. And when we do, it affects every area of our life.



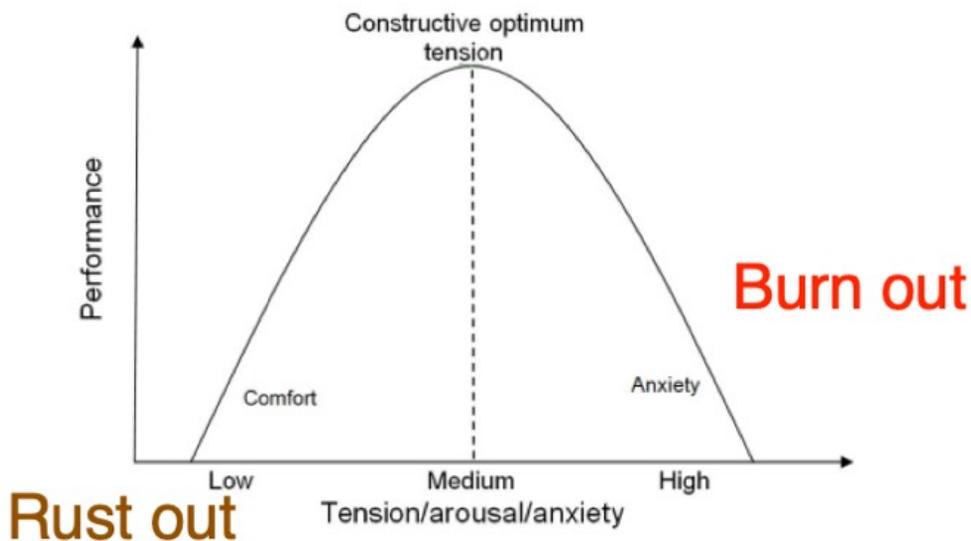
Then there's stress at work. As well as the personal toll it takes on people, workplace stress costs organisations and the economy, dearly.



We can't avoid challenges in life or at work, indeed we don't want to.

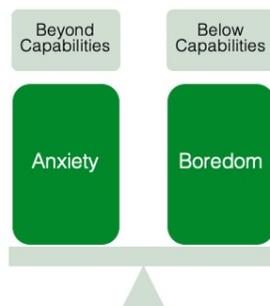
According to the Yerkes-Dodson Law for peak performance there is an optimal and constructive level of stress. Too much and we burn out; too little and we rust out!

Peak Performance - Yerkes-Dodson Law



In the workplace, we need to find the “Goldilocks” level that means tasks that are not beyond our capabilities, because that causes anxiety; but are not below our capabilities because that causes boredom.

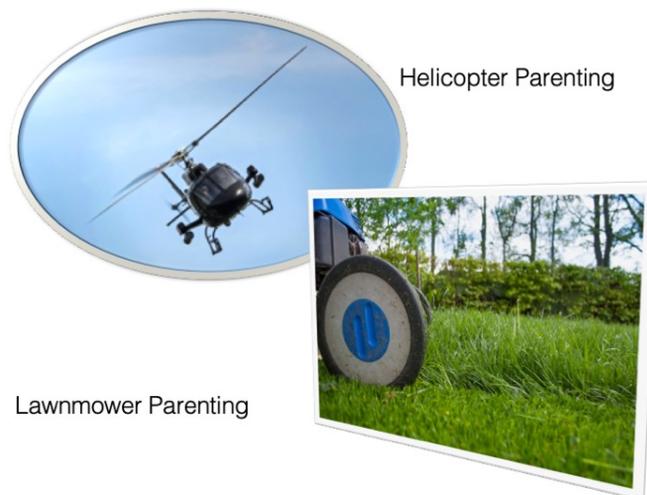
“Goldilocks” Tasks





Kids are born adventurers, but if they don't get that "Goldilocks" balance of risk and safety, they can't build resilience. There has been a disturbing trend in parenting that is seeing some young people in the workplace now, with low levels of resilience because they haven't had the benefit of the right level of challenges, disappointments and obstacles.

For some there's been a shift from Helicopter parenting – where parents hover over their kids, trying to see them safe to "Lawnmower" parenting – where parents actively smooth out all obstacles so kids never experience rough ground or challenges. This does not prepare them for the realities of life or work.



Wrapping kids in cotton wool doesn't protect them in the long-run. We can build our resilience "muscles" at any time but the earlier the better. Although, youthful adventure can go horribly wrong.



In 2018, an adventurous junior soccer team decided to explore a cave near their home a remote Thai town, Mai Sae. Monsoon rains came early, and the 12 boys aged 11-17 and their coach were trapped in a cavern they'd reached via 2 kilometres of twisting, narrow and now mostly submerged tunnels.

Against all odds, Thai Navy SEAL divers supported by international, expert cave divers saved them after 9 days.

Joint Australians of the Year Richard "Harry" Harris, an Australian anaesthetist and retired vet Craig Challen, both expert cave divers, were part of the rescue team. In a feat never before attempted, Harry anaesthetised each boy, to prevent panic as divers swam them out with face masks, wet suits and oxygen tanks. Craig Challen was in the first of several larger unflooded chambers along the way and checked each boy's vital signs and helped get them to the next underwater stage. In what some described as a miracle, all the boys and their coach were saved, though one Thai Navy SEAL died in the attempt.

Rescuers were all hailed as heroes and awarded bravery medals. Harris and Challen were made joint Australians of the Year.

Despite the misadventure of the Thai boys, Dr. Harris wants to use his platform to encourage kids to get outdoors and find their inner explorer.

"Maybe get a few grazed knees and stub their toes. Climb a tree, get off their screens and get outside".

There's a balance for kids between risk and safety and the same is true for adults.

In the workplace, there are times to speak up and be bold and times to hold your tongue. For example, do you call out racist, sexist, ignorant or cruel comments and behaviour?

What about decision-making? If you are too risk-averse, no decisions are made, or they become bogged down in analysis paralysis, but too much risk-taking can be dangerous and reckless.



It's not just a question of courage. It involves consideration of consequences. And experience allows us to develop risk tolerance.

What experiences have helped you build your risk tolerance?

Are there some situations where you are more risk-averse than others? (for example I am financially risk-averse. I figure at 65 I have less time and ability to recover from a mistake with investments).



Dealing With Challenges

What challenges in the workplace have you experienced in the last couple of years? Here are some examples:

- Change – mergers, new boss, new job, redundancies
- Bullying, racism, sexism, bias, discrimination
- Poor management
- Team-members who don't pull their weight
- Technology

Changes are not always bad, often they are good, but they can present a challenge as we adjust, particularly when we haven't chosen the change.

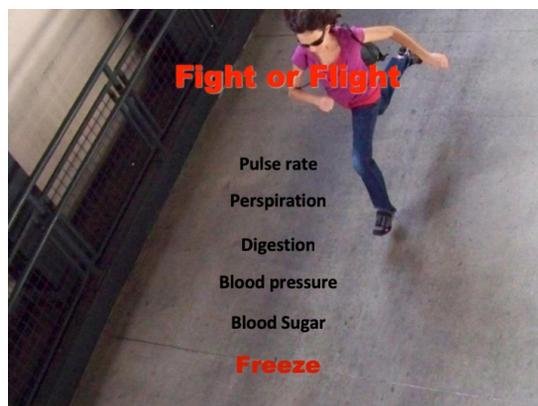
When we find ourselves in challenging circumstances we need:

Coping skills – ways to survive the immediate threat

Self-management skills – things we can do to prevent or reduce risk, and

Influencing skills – steps we take to shape a positive future

When we feel threatened, we instantly react. Whether a threat is real or imagined, physical or emotional, the brain triggers the Fight/Flight/Freeze response that affects every aspect of our body.





The brain works differently, we hear differently, see differently and process differently

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The brain works differently in fight/flight/freeze mode, we hear, see and process everything in the context of survival. That means we fight back, run away or, like a deer in the headlights, freeze unable to say or do anything.

We have all experienced threat that triggers the brain's defence systems at work and in life. Perhaps in a relatively small way, such as a hurtful comment or more harmful bullying, racism or sexism, bias or discrimination.

Sometimes we fight, sometimes we flee, sometimes we do nothing. Sometimes one of these is useful for coping in the moment and sometimes not.

Pause and reflect on fight/flight/freeze as a coping mechanism for workplace stress.

Coping skills allow us to react to a threat in the best way we can. You can't bounce back if you can't survive.

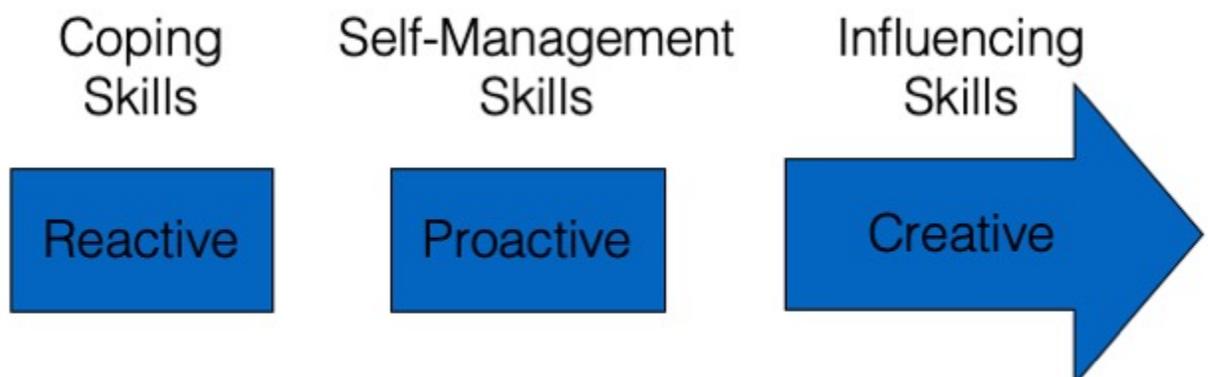
During the recent bushfire season (I'm using this as a real-life example, but it can be a metaphor for less life-threatening events, and you can apply this to workplace situations) there was quite confronting advertising telling us that we should decide when to leave our property, should it be threatened. People *die* when they leave it too late. They try to defend their home in the face of a catastrophic fire. They are operating in fight mode when they should flee. The way to **react** to a threatening situation that is impossible to control is to leave as fast as possible.

The bushfire advertising was designed to make us **proactive** plan ahead, decide early before we are caught in the moment. Yes, we can clear combustible materials from around our home, put out spot fires caused by embers ahead of the fire-front, but we must get out before it becomes impossible to do so and we must know when that is.

All emergency responders have safety protocols drummed into them. They train, they practice and we have to do the same.

After Black Saturday, survivors, emergency services and government worked together. Each used their influence to use lessons learned to **create** a safer environment.

Think about when you've seen reactive, proactive and creative responses in your workplace.



Given the high cost of workplace stress, it's no surprise that organisations are introducing proactive and creative strategies to improve workplaces.

Ways to Improve Mental Health in the Workplace

- Smarter work design eg building in flexibility in working roles and working hours
- Build better work cultures eg ensuring change is managed in an inclusive manner
- Build resilience eg providing resilience training, coaching and mentoring, and physical activity programs
- Early intervention eg providing stress management programs and access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Support recovery eg having flexible sick leave arrangements and providing return-to-work programs.
- Increase awareness eg providing mental health education and training

Dr Sam Harvey, Black Dog Institute and UNSW

How many of these do you have in place?



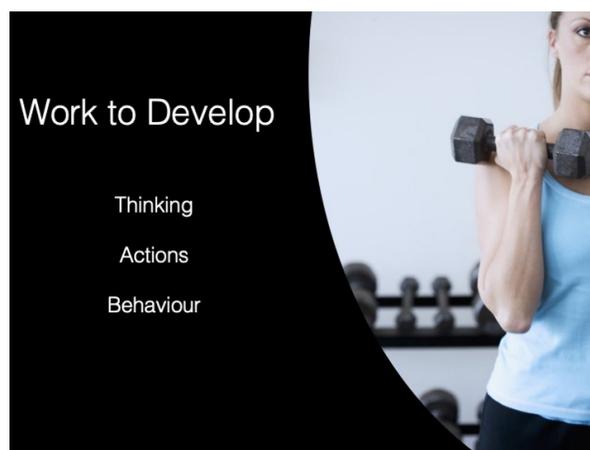
How to Build Resilience

Dr Sam Harvey, a psychiatrist with the Black Dog Institute says that: Building resilience is one way we can all reduce our stress at work and contribute to a more mentally healthy workplace.

Resilience isn't something you either have or you don't.

It's not a magical quality, it's not a trait.

It is a combination of thinking, actions and behaviours and just like building muscle strength, mental strength requires work to develop. There are ways you can build resilience through your thinking, actions and behaviour.

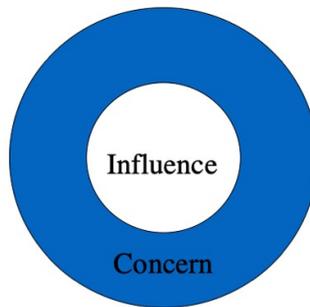


The Control Principle

Using this principle, you can save energy, prevent worry and reduce stress. In addition, it is excellent for time management.

Stephen Covey describes the circle of concern in his classic book: *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* represented in the diagram below.

The Control Principle



Covey, S. (1989) *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. The Business Library

The outer circle represents all the things that you are concerned about: an upcoming performance review, the level of your personal debt, how your child is doing at school, the difficult person you have to deal with at work.

The inner circle represents those things you have most influence over. The control principle says that there are many things that you *cannot* control. If you put all your attention, your energy and your effort in your circle of concern, you lower your resilience and increase your stress and it can become overwhelming. However, if you focus your attention, your energy and your effort on your circle of influence, where you have more control you will make a difference, become stronger, increase your influence.

It may be slow or it could happen fast, but know the difference between what you can control and what you can't. Focussing on what you can do will build resilience.

This is reflected in the words attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas:

*“Grant me the strength to change the things I can,
the equanimity to accept the things I can't and
the wisdom to know the difference”*

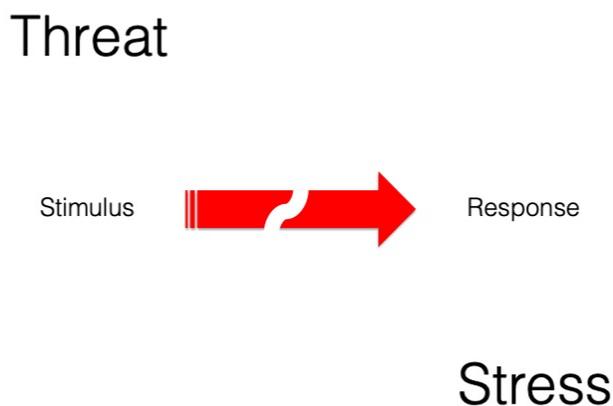
In any situation, you have most control over is what you say, what you do, what you think.

We need to work to build resilience muscles – the thinking, actions and behaviours that make us stronger.

Fight/flight/freeze is very much an instinctive stimulus-response reaction to threat.

Stress is the same - something in the environment triggers an automatic reaction, but by building resilience, we put a gap or a buffer between stimulus and response. We expand our circle of influence, we have more control.

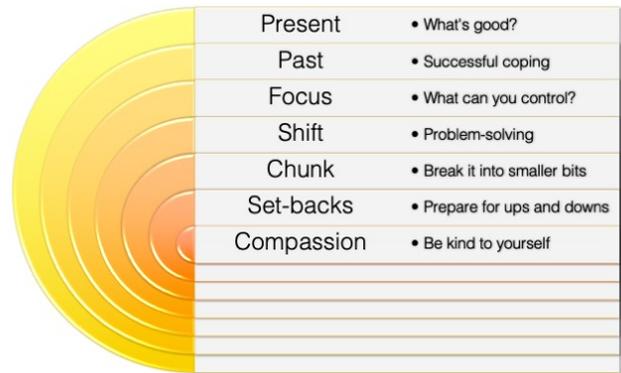
We can start with our thinking.



Resilience Thinking means choosing thoughts that serve us better, using in-the-moment, coping thinking strategies.

You need to be proactive, plan and practice these so that they become your default in times of challenge.

Resilience Thinking



When you are feeling overwhelm, can you be **present** and look for what is good? What's going well?

It often helps to look to the **past** and remind yourself of things you've coped with previously. Think of the skills and strengths that got you through.

Remembering the circle of concern and circle of influence, **focus** on what you can control, maybe taking slow, deep breaths (fight/flight, anxiety or panic can trigger rapid, shallow breathing).

Shift your thinking towards problem solving. What's the outcome you want? What's in the way? What can you do differently, to progress?

Chunk big problems into smaller pieces that are easier to manage.

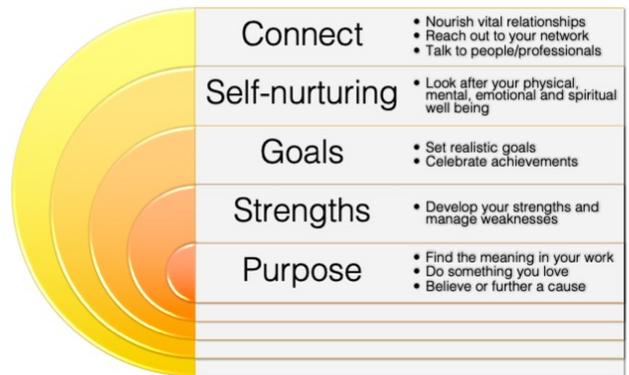
Sometimes we fall into all-or-nothing thinking. Our way is blocked so we're doomed to failure. Try to think of these blocks as **set-backs** not insurmountable obstacles. We all have ups and downs, life is seldom all smooth sailing.

Learn to be kind to yourself, have **compassion**. Are you your harshest critic? Check your self-talk, those things you say to yourself, the little insults, self-inflicted put-downs, the doubts, the imposter syndrome. You wouldn't be that unkind to someone else, so don't do it to yourself!

Which resilience thinking strategies have you used? Do you have others?

Is there one you want to put on your action plan?

Resilience Actions



Connect. We know that survivors have good social connections so nourish your vital relationships – make time for coffee, phone calls and other catch-ups. Don't constantly put socialising off because you're too busy.

Reach out to your network – when you're in trouble people say: "let me know if there's anything I can do." Do. Ask. Most people mean it when they offer help, but they don't know what you need. You may have to be explicit: "I just need to blow off steam, I need a shoulder to cry on, I need someone to listen and not give advice. Etc.

Talk to people – don't hold it all in or you're likely to explode, choose friends or colleagues you can trust and confide in. If there is no one you feel confident in or the matter is too serious, find a professional. Use your organisation's Employee Assistance Scheme or ask your GP for a referral. You don't have to go it alone.

Self-nurturing is proactive you do this to build resilience. I learned about self-nurturing from a rape counsellor, who watched so many of her good-hearted professional colleagues burn out. She had a whole suite of things that nurtured her physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well being.

Choose what works for you, be it meditation, yoga, running, art, massage, hobbies, whatever relaxes you, strengthens you and brings you pleasure or respite, then build it into your life, every day if you can but certainly every week. It's not an indulgence to look after yourself, it's a necessity.



Set realistic **goals** and celebrate achievements. At the end of every day review what you've accomplished. A simple to do list with items ticked off (I seldom get all mine done, but as long as it's the most important ones you've progressed you can take satisfaction from it).

Focus on **strengths**. Your best results will come from building on your strengths. Identify your natural talents with an instrument like the Clifton StrengthsFinder and develop them. Manage your weaknesses.

We all need a sense of **purpose**. Find the meaning in your work, how does it help others, make the world better, contribute to something you care about or align with your values?

If you're not doing something you love in your job, make sure you do in your own time as a volunteer, in a hobby or with the people you love.

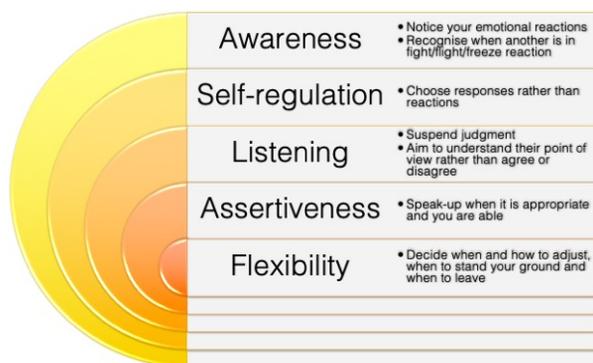
Is there a cause you believe in? Can you contribute to something you feel is worthwhile? Do you have a personal purpose for your life?

Which of these resilience actions have you used?

Is there one you want to put on your action plan?



Resilience Behaviours



Awareness is often called emotional intelligence, it involves noticing your own reactions, creating that gap between stimulus and response and **self-regulation**, choosing how you respond rather than automatically reacting. Emotional intelligence also takes account of other people's emotional reactions. If you can see that someone is in fight/flight/freeze, you know that emotion not rational thinking is driving their behaviour. Is there some way you can reduce the threat they feel?

Listening often lessens fight/flight/freeze reactions – your own and those of others. Suspend judgment, we tend to classify everything as right/wrong good/bad, but we don't have to jump to those conclusions. When we build resilience muscles we are strong enough to pause and choose to try and understand their point of view. We don't have to agree or disagree.

Assertiveness means speaking up, calmly standing up for your rights - not aggressively trampling over the rights of others – but stating what you want. It takes some skill and courage and practice. It's not always appropriate to assert your rights and you must make an intelligent choice.

This is where **flexibility** comes in. You decide when and how to adjust, perhaps accommodate someone else's needs. When to stand your ground, when to back down and when to leave.

Which of these resilience behaviours have you used?

Is there one you want to put on your action plan?

Somewhere in Africa, a lion wakes and knows if she wants to eat this day, she'll have to outrun a zebra.

Somewhere in Africa, a zebra wakes and knows if he wants to live this day, he may have to out run the fastest lion or maybe the slowest zebra.

The moral of the story is, we need resilience and we always do the best we can. When we know better we can do better. And I hope this master class has given you better knowledge to build your resilience.

Resilience

We always do the best we know how



Take a minute to review and reflect. What are your key take-aways and the actions that you'll take as a result?

Key Take-aways ...

Actions

Resources & References

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Available Now!

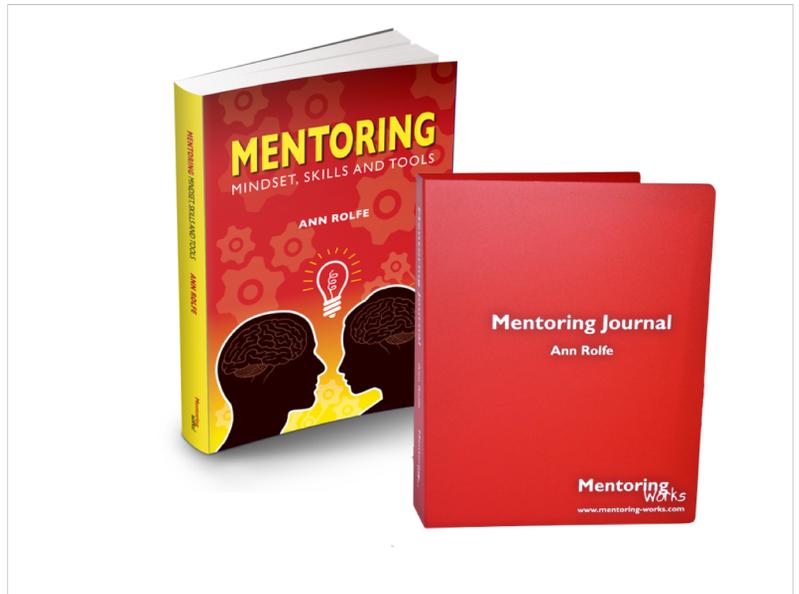


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