



Cultivating Resilience

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“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

Viktor E. Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning

Meet Molly and John Chester, a couple from California with an ambitious goal; to build an organic farm. John and Molly purchased Apricot Lane Farm- a rundown, neglected, desert-like farm 40 miles outside of LA. Molly and John’s belief is that everything has a purpose and wildlife, plants, and livestock can all work in harmony with nature. As depicted in their documentary “The Biggest Little Farm”, despite their best intentions, nature turned against them with countless setbacks in the form of droughts, pests, windstorms, and fires.

The Chesters had to adapt to many unexpected changes during their eight-year journey as new farmers. Many would have found this endeavor daunting and would have surrendered after the first year’s conflicts. Yet, they did not waver, and today the Chester family is raising cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and ducks and Apricot Lane Farm is a thriving organic piece of land containing over 200 varieties of fruits and vegetables. Despite the odds the Chester’s re-awakened the land and themselves.

There are many Chester-like stories out there that give us a glimpse into a learned skill we call resilience. George Mumford is a local example who learned this skill. In his youth, George was a star basketball athlete at the University of Massachusetts. Due to injuries he was no longer able to play. To ease his pain, he began to self-medicate causing an addiction to heroin and alcohol. He managed to recover through AA and meditation.

Now, author and world-renowned mindfulness teacher, George Mumford has helped world-class athletes, including Michael Jordan, Shaquille O'Neal and the late Kobe Bryant, exceed at their game through the practice of mindfulness meditation. He created something better than what he had and he too was re-awakened.

Resilience is the ability to recover from stress and bounce back from adversity. It is weathering through the storms that threaten to debilitate us and wear us down. We can develop and improve our resilience through effort and consistency.

Boosting our resilience has never been more critical than it is now in the face of the Covid19 pandemic and political and racial unrest. Resilience is essential to our health and well-being. Humans are an incredible force of nature and we see that through the Mumford and Chester stories and also through the healthcare providers and essential workers who continue to show up to work every day despite the circumstances.

Since March, 2020, there have been job losses, school closures, illnesses and deaths, along with increases in anxiety and depression as a result of this haunting virus. As reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorder increased considerably in the United States during April-June of 2020, compared with the same period in 2019."

Many of us may be experiencing low-grade depression as a result of the global pandemic and social isolation. Many of us may find ourselves seeking ways to maintain or regain our mental health during these taxing times. The ramifications of social isolation have taken its toll on all of us these last few months. We are social creatures by nature, not intended to live isolated on an island with our only confidant being a basketball named Wilson.

The silver lining is that resiliency is a learned quality and therefore we can train our mind to become resilient. We have to load up on the positive and arm ourselves with a mental health toolkit that includes resilience boosting techniques. When practiced regularly, the below techniques can help us become stronger, more compassionate, less anxious and depressed, more connected to others and less reactive to life's stressors.



1. Mindfulness Meditation

This technique can be defined as moment to moment awareness or to be fully present now in our thoughts and activities. Begin by simply paying attention to your breath on the inhale and exhale, placing your hand on your belly noticing the rise and fall.

2. Move

Add outdoor movement to your day. Move deliberately for 20-30 minutes a day. Visit [MIIA's website](#) to choose your favorite fitness video or www.ompractice.com/miia for an invigorating yoga class.

3. Eat a Healthy Diet

Buy in-season fruits and vegetables to always have on hand. Reach out to one of MIIA's Health Coaches to discuss your nutritional goals. [Click here](#) for more information.

4. Altruism Activities

Focus on how you can help others. This pulls us out of our own ruminating thoughts and helps us feel good about ourselves. Give the gift of love, bake cookies for a friend, grocery shop for an elderly neighbor.

5. Identify a Purpose in Life.

As Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*." Engage in activities that bring you joy and connect you to something greater than yourself.

6. Stay Connected to Others

We are hardwired to be in connection with others. Create social support systems and relationships that provide you with a sense of belonging.

7. Reach Out for Support

AllOne EAP: free, confidential counseling for legal, financial, relationship, personal mental health concerns and more; webinars, employee and supervisor trainings, call 1 800 451-1834.

Learn to Live: free, online assessments, workshops, coaching, and peer support around mental health concerns such as stress, depression, substance use, sleep and more. Enter code MIIA to access.

