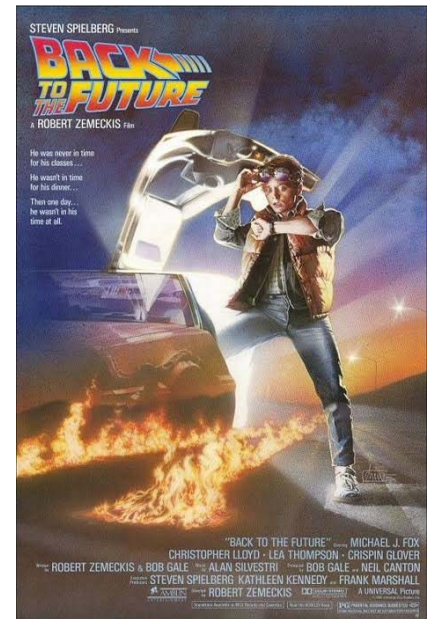


LESSONS IN RESILIENCE – BACK TO THE FUTURE

1985 gave us Michael J Fox in Back to The Future, replete with a time-travelling DeLorean car and hoverboards. Fast forward to 2020 and a deluge of pre-COVID Instagram pics indicates time travel is back in vogue. The [most recent Gallup data](#) (8th May 2020) shows that U.S. adults' thriving life evaluations have witnessed an unheard near 10-point decline. *This is almost double the decline (coming off a higher base) recorded in the Great Recession of 2008 and matches historic lows!!.*

The magnitude of the pandemic has eroded for many a sense of coherence that is necessary to respond effectively to the challenges

before us. Sense of coherence (SOC) allows you to perceive the world as something that is manageable, understandable and meaningful. SOC can be developed in part by understanding one's life experiences. To do so, we need to "travel" well between the past, present and the future. COVID-19 unfortunately has created significant disruption in our time travel abilities, as we have become wracked by anxiety and fear that pushes us into doom loops, losing our perspective. Here are 3 practical tools to regain your SOC:



Past: Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG).

PTG is a positive psychological change that occurs as the result of one's struggle with a highly challenging, stressful and traumatic event. We cannot change the past, but we can decide what meaning we attach to events and what we will learn from those events. I often hear people say that others have lot of baggage. Well what about ourselves, do we pack appropriately, discarding those items that won't serve us well as we travel through life? PTG is not about adorning rose-tinted glasses, but it acknowledges a very human reality, that we often are stronger for our trials and tribulations. It also means that we learn and mature at a faster rate when we embrace rather than suppress these experiences.

Practice: think about the key moments in your life, plotting them above (positive events) and below (negative events) the line in a [life-graph](#) exercise. Then reflect on the following PTG questions: In what ways have you found a different perspective on life with new opportunities? Identify the things you did to survive what happened that showed you strengths within yourself that you didn't know you had? Name what you are most grateful for, what you have and for those around you? Describe the ways in which your relationships with family and friends have been strengthened and deepened in intimacy?

Unless you are 007, you can't do this life-graph exercise every week, as it's macro-reflective in nature. But what you can do is conduct an annual life-graph review and list the top 5-10 events each year, and distil your deeper insights.

Present: Mindfulness.

Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally. The emphasis is on fullness, not mindlessness. We become more attuned to what is going on in the present moment. Have you ever got to the end of the day and wondered what you did? So often we operate in this autopilot mode that we lose our sense of awe and appreciation for all those incredible micro-moments directly in front of us.

By engaging regularly in [mindfulness](#) we build heightened metacognitive awareness, improved working memory, lower levels of anxiety and stress, better physical pain management.

Practice this very simple STOP mindfulness technique each day. **STOP** doing whatever you are doing, then **TAKE** a few deep breaths, **OBSERVE** what is going inside yourself emotionally and physically. Then reflect on how you are impacting people around you by your mood and actions. **PROCEED** – by choosing one simple thing you will change to improve either your own or others reality. Imagine if every day we became more mindful and improved by 0.1%, at the end of a year we would have remarkably increased our capacity by more than 36%!

Future: Goal setting.

Goals focus our limited energies and time allocation. Goals energise and sustain us, especially stretch goals, if we make them public. This is due to cognitive dissonance - we don't like a gap between our public persona and our real selves. Lastly, goals provide a sense of fulfilment when we achieve them, not to mention the flush of dopamine hormones.

One of the key stress management tools taught to Navy Seals is goal setting. When you engage your pre-frontal cortex (where reasoning and planning happens) via goal setting, it keeps the amygdala in check (emotional centre), that wants to move you to fight or flight. This had such a profound effect, that it in conjunction with three other techniques (visualisation, breathing and self-talk), it improved their completion success rate of the Navy Seals selection phase by a remarkable 33%!!

I once had a client that was fabulously wealthy, who was retiring and I was coaching him through the transition. He was incredibly goal driven and had clawed his way out of abject poverty. What became very apparent was that his rocket fuel was tainted, he had harnessed avoidance goals to propel himself to financial success. He was perpetually unhappy and

could not appreciate all that he had achieved. It dawned on me that not all goals are created equal in terms of outcomes. Look at where you predominantly place your emphasis when creating your goals, using the table below. Is it approach or avoidance goals? Where possible construct them as approach goals to propel yourself positively forward..

Approach goals	Avoidance goals
Want mindset - possibilities and opportunities.	Should mindset – threat/self-protection.
Elicits positive memories and triumphs. Play to win. Less procrastination and higher excitement.	Elicits negative experiences, play to not lose. If have greater number of avoidance goals - less satisfaction with progress on personal goals and life, decreased self-esteem, personal control and vitality and feeling less competent in relation to goal pursuits.
Useful for longer-term success, goal and task mastery.	Useful in the short-term: combatting immediate gratification moments e.g. don't eat that extra cake!
Example: I will move the company forward. I am going to gym to be strong, energetic and fit.	Example: I will avoid making the company fail. I am going to gym to avoid heart disease.

(Based on insights from [Andrew Elliot](#) and [Ken Sheldon](#), respected researcher in the approach - avoidance goals domain).

Whilst Churchill never actually said: *"History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it,"* it certainly is a great concluding insight for sustained mental health. We need to be able to both reframe and see our experiences in the 3rd person. In doing so, we become more objective and wise, less driven by fear and anxiety. This is indeed a time for coherent thought.

If you interested in a keynote speaker or would like to explore resilience training programmes please contact me on mark@synenergy.world I am a qualified Organisational Psychologist, with a Ph.D. in building resilience in individuals. I have trained people all over the world, from Neurosurgeons, to Portfolio Managers, Exco teams, Call Centre Operators and Administrative staff. Stay safe.