



Resilience Alphabet™



How to build
inner strength
and wellbeing
in 26 days

Introduction



This blog was started in the spring of 2020 when the world was facing a global pandemic. Building resilience, that is your inner strength and wellbeing, is important at any time but perhaps never more so when facing a crisis.

We are whole people and that means we need to pay attention to our health at many levels, the most obvious being physical, mental and emotional. We also need to pay attention to our social and spiritual wellbeing which will mean different things to different people. Enjoy the journey of strengthening your personal resilience.

The structure of each day



1. Each day will focus on a letter of the alphabet with a word for the day.
2. Each day there will be a picture. Underneath the picture, you will find an affirmation. An affirmation is something we might say to ourselves frequently to embed an idea.
3. Each day there will be some text about the word and how that word relates to personal resilience
4. Each day within the text there will be either something to THINK about, something to DO, or both.

Enjoy the Journey...

A is for adaptability



A flexible thinking style is a huge advantage when navigating uncharted or uncertain waters. We know that in terms of Emotional Intelligence, adaptability of thinking and being able to flex our emotional state helps us to manage stressful situations better. Some of us are naturally better at this than others. You will know yourself as someone who lets go of things really quickly... or as someone who hangs on to 'stuff' and ruminates over and over.

This is a learnable skill - so practise being adaptable and flexible in your thinking today.

“There's more than one way to do most things and more than one way to win.”

B is for balance



"I am choosing sustainability and wellbeing by balancing tasks with recovery time."

If I had been videoing you all week what would I have been watching and what might I conclude about the balance of your life? Perhaps I would have noticed behaviours driven by compassion, helplessness, joy, fear, frustration, humour, anger, love. Are there others you would add? If you think about it most of our outward behaviours are driven by our feelings or our values.

To get the balance right between what we want to deliver for others; and what we need to preserve in, and for, ourselves can be a challenge. So I encourage you to do at least one thing today - even if it is for a very short time - which will ensure you remain resilient for all you plan to do throughout the rest of the day, or which will re-energise depleted reserves so you can continue to make impact tomorrow.

C is for Choice



"I'm building my resilience by making good choices."

I'm curious about the choices you have made this week. Recently someone said to me on a Friday: "It's not a problem how late it comes through, I'll be logging in tomorrow anyway".

Like this person, sometimes I choose to flex boundaries, and sometimes I choose to keep the boundary in place. This is an invitation to you to be intentional about the choices you are making right now to balance effort with recovery time. We need both activity and recovery time in order to sustain our resilience. Check out your choices for sustainability!

D is for Downtime



"Every day I am learning the importance creating space for downtime."

For me downtime is being engaged in an activity where I am so absorbed in what I am doing that normal thought is suspended. Evidence suggests that doing something that gets us into that state of flow has exponential benefits for our health, well-being, brain, emotional health, the list goes on. For me that can be getting lost in a book, playing piano, counted cross-stitch, being in the garden and getting my hands into earth!

Sit down and write a list of the things that you know take you to that place of downtime, when you are completely absorbed and focussed. Be intentional about engaging in one of your downtime activities every day starting now.

E is for exercise



"I am exercising every day so my body and my brain can be energised for action."

I'm curious about what energises you! The differences between us means we may be energised by different things. Perhaps the best thing you can do to sustain your energy levels is pay attention to what energises any human body... and also what energises You!

There is strong evidence for the benefits of physical exercise in enhancing mental health and re-firing the brain with good chemistry.

We are also energised by quality sleep - so go all out during stressful times to maintain or establish the best sleep routine possible to get maximum benefit from the hours you are off duty.

So take a moment and write down 3 things that you know energises you and make it a priority to find space to act on these every day this week.

F is for fun



"I am choosing to be playful today and to create opportunities for fun."

This picture was taken last year, and I love the expectation on the little faces looking at the beauty of the bright daffodils on a dark night.

Just for fun I could write the conversation they are having. What are the things that you most often do just for fun? And perhaps most importantly, when did you last do something just for fun? This requires first and foremost intention and permission.

Intention to loose myself in something that brings me peace or joy, or that simply takes me out of myself. It may involve others - it may not!

Play is not just for children! Make sure whatever else is happening - you plan to have some fun today.

G is for Gratitude



"I feel gratitude for all that makes life good."

Much has been written about Gratitude in recent years. It is good for our health, our mental health, and our sense of self to remind ourselves of what we have around us.

Today's personal resilience challenge is to take a pen and paper (I know that requires some action on your part) and write down in three minutes as many things as you can think of that you are grateful for right now.

If this task is too easy for you, you might like to try putting 5 things on your phone you are grateful for every day for the next 28 days, one of them about yourself if you really want a challenge. I guarantee if you do this for 28 days you will feel the shift in your mood. How many things are on your gratitude list?

H is for Hopefulness



My curiosity is roused to wonder how much Hope and Hopefulness has played a part in your mental landscape this week. And if so, what is it you hope for? For me, Hope is, and always has been under-rated.

As human beings we have the ability to future focus, and imaginations to allow us to experience the full range of thoughts and emotions of some imaginary place and time, and research confirms our future imaginings are as powerful as actually having the experience.

One of the best things you can do right now to protect and enhance your resilience is learn the art of Hopefulness. Take some time today with a cup of tea or coffee, and pen and paper and simply take time to dream and hope and give your brain the chance to be filled with possibility and hopefulness.

“Today I am creating a positive mental space of future hopes and activities.”

I is for Intention



“I will back up my intentions by putting checks in place to support my actions.”

In terms of developing and sustaining personal resilience, Intention is important. In order to avoid the phrase... 'I had good intentions', it's important we put actions, accountabilities, and checks in place to support us to meet the intention.

Of course, it goes without saying that for there to be any commitment to an intention, the intention has to have real benefits or outcomes in the first place. So pause... what do you need to be intentional about right now in terms of self care and resilience. It is likely to be something pretty simple that could have a profound incremental effect for you. It is also likely to be something that is best done frequently, even daily.

What do you need to be intentional about?

J is for Journal



"I am taking time to clear my mind for six minutes every day."

I wonder if you keep a journal. I have a list at the front of my journal which gives 26 reasons for journaling. This picture shows some of my journals so you can see I journal regularly. I don't make a chore out of it and don't journal every day but a few times a week. I recognise it is something I have done more of when life has given me lemons!

Writing can help us to get rid of some of the jumble and structure our thinking; it can help us to explore our feelings in a safe way; it can help to give us perspective; it can help us to let things go; it can help us to reflect; it can help us to process challenging experiences.

Perhaps you are thinking 'I don't have time for this right now!' Set your phone timer for 6 minutes and just start writing. When the 6 minutes are up stop... Try that for a few days and see what happens.

K is for Kind



"I am building my personal resilience by focussing on kindness to others and to me."

One of the hashtags I use is #bekindtoyou too. I'm reminded of a quote by the Dalai Lama: "Be kind whenever possible, it is always possible."

Today, the action is simple... Find a way today to be kind to someone else, and find a way today to be kind to you too! And if you doubt the importance of turning this suggestion into action - think of the last time you benefitted from someone being unexpectedly kind to you.

In the midst of all the acts of kindness you have done this week motivated by compassion, care, or a desire to help others, take time today to offer that same level of compassion and care to yourself. I wonder what difference that will make to your day: I know it will make a difference to your personal resilience.

L is for Let it go



Sometimes we simply need to rebalance the priorities of our life and let some things go. The alternative is an ever increasing activity load which over time reduces us to exhaustion.

Perhaps today would be a good day to take stock and ask yourself: "What do I need to let go of?" Whether that is a routine we normally adopt or a thought pattern that is not useful, taking a moment to take stock and simply let some things go may help ease the pressure.

Take 10 minutes just for you today, to think about what you are trying to juggle, new activities and old, and decide what you can let go of.

So review your activity load and make wise choices about where you simply need to let it go.

"I am decluttering my priorities in order to ensure sustainability and good health."

M is for Move



"I am made for moving and am choosing to move with intention every day."

M is an easy letter to find words for when we think about personal resilience. I've chosen Move. It's such a simple thing to do even when our movements are restricted. Here are some ideas:

1. Create a standing desk
2. Set a Sports watch to ping every 45 minutes.
3. Ensure you get out for exercise every day
4. Join an online exercise class of your choosing
5. Find a pair of skipping ropes
6. Dig out a ball - or three balls and learn to juggle
7. Play Twister or the Cereal box game
8. Put on your favourite dance music and dance!
9. Get out into the green gym if you have one
10. Start a Couch to 5K programme

N is for 'No'

Sometimes
the hardest
thing and the
right thing
are the same.

"I am saying 'No' to some things in order to say 'Yes' to my real priorities."

One of the keys to personal resilience is the ability to know when to say No! A long time ago I was asked a question: "What is your 'Yes' worth if you never say 'No'?" It is, and always has been, important to say 'No' to some things in order to say 'Yes' to what's important. If we fail to make this distinction, we will simply arrive at overload, particularly in times of high stress.

Today think of the things you ought to say 'No' to, in order to ensure you have time and energy for the 'Yes' that only you can provide. Take time to re-evaluate your current priorities, and when you say 'no' know that it is for a more impactful 'yes'.

O is for Open



"I am choosing to be open with those I know will help me reflect without judgement."

In terms of personal resilience one of the best things we can do from a wellbeing point of view is be open about (1) how we are today, (2) what we are feeling, and (3) what our hopes are for going forward.

This degree of openness comes more naturally to some than others. Some will immediately go into thoughts when we ask them how they are feeling. The answer to the feeling question is best described in one word.

In my work with clients I often say of difficult thoughts and feelings that "it is better out than in", that is, it is better to be expressed. Whether that is releasing these thoughts and feelings through talking it out, writing it out, exercising it out or whatever. Letting the steam out a little at a time is way more helpful than holding it in until it explodes.

P is for Pause



"I am learning the art of pausing often to check in with my wellbeing."

It's easy to get caught up in the humdrum of daily life where we simply move from one task to the next in an unrelenting effort to get *everything* done.

Today in terms of personal resilience I want to encourage you to Pause: to take the time to consider how you have fared over the last week; to recognise those things you have done that have strengthened your resilience; and to recommit to making some of them a daily habit.

In times of high stress, we need to practise habits of high self-care, as there are so many possibilities for having our energy and resources zapped! So pause and set good habits for your self-care beginning today.

Q is for Question

“Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart... live in the question.”

Rainer Maria Rilke

“I am learning to have patience and to be at peace with some of the questions in my life.”

Questions fairly frequently disturb our equilibrium and perhaps that is their core purpose. For most of us, as we journey through life we ask ourselves questions. What is the point of this? What is happening here? Why is this happening to me?

As we think about personal resilience, I would encourage you to adopt the sentiment of this Quote. Embrace your questions and learn to live with and in the question. These may include questions of faith, questions about meaning, questions about the future and so on.

Right now there are many things that remain unsolved in our hearts. The invitation in the quote above to “Live in the Question” rather than to seek to resolve all the uncertainties of this time is wise advice.

R is for Remember



"I am accessing my memory to build resilience by remembering happy times!"

A couple of days ago I looked out my two Passports (of the electronic kind) to look at the photos stored on them, some of which go back to 1979! As we've looked at them some have made us laugh, some are pretty awful, and many of them have been reminders of days out and family holidays, significant events and people, and times of much fun and laughter.

To build your personal resilience today, go and pull out some random photos or a photo album from before the selfie took over, and revisit some of the times that you thought were significant enough to capture. Go laugh at what's fun, remember important moments, and revisit happy times. Write a list of 10 people you have photos of and get in touch with them. You have a vast store of happy memories - what a resource to revisit at this time.

S is for Sunrise



“I am paying attention to the beauty of nature and its constancy no matter what is going on”

If I live to be 100 and look back on my life, one of my moments of wonder will be sitting alone on Kaikoura beach at 5.30am in the morning waiting for the sun to rise. I left the campsite in darkness with camera and crossed over the railway to find a place to sit on the sand and wait.

All was silent, except the rhythmic sound of the waves, entrancing and soothing, constant and reassuring. I could feel the cool sand, and feel the gentle morning breeze, and internally I can still remember that feeling of wonder at being part of this amazing natural phenomenon that happens every morning.

Get outside and look at something amazing today!

T is for Talk



“Talking is one of life's gifts and I'm choosing to use it well.”

Have you ever lived close enough to a baby to track the many achievements required in simply learning to talk, from these first one syllable sounds, testing out the musical range of babbling, through learning the word 'no', to telling you fantastic tales about the adventures of various toys. It is a complex and effortful process accessing many parts of the brain. To produce a phrase, about 100 muscles of the chest, neck, jaw, tongue and lips must work together. That any of us can talk is one of life's miracles.

I love this photo. It symbolises all that is wonderful about being able to talk. Getting lost in the moment with friends over a cup of tea, oblivious for a time to what is happening around us, or the challenges we might face.

Today call one of your friends simply to chat.

U is for Uncertainty



"Today I'm choosing to focus on what I am certain of."

All that I know and have read about uncertainty confirms my belief that we struggle with uncertainty.

Earlier this year, I was touched by a colleague's post on social media written whilst sitting in an airport just as it was becoming obvious that flights would be grounded and travel would be grinding to a stop. As she sat there with all the uncertainties of future life, she decided to write a list of what she remained certain of. It was a very moving list and included things like, "I am certain I am loved", "I am certain of my faith", "I am certain this will pass", and so the list went on.

So two actions today: give yourself a daily routine; and secondly take pen and paper, find a quiet place and write down your personal "I remain certain..." list.

V is for Vulnerable



"Today I am choosing to acknowledge my vulnerability and embrace life."

It's 10 years since Brene Brown delivered her Ted Talk on Vulnerability and shared her wisdom around the importance of feeling and acknowledging our emotions, and not seeking to numb them. It is still worth a listen 10 years later.

There is perhaps no other time in your life when you have felt more vulnerable and threatened more acutely than you have in 2020. Having the courage to own our vulnerability is the first step to embracing all it means to be human.

Brene Brown encourages us "to let ourselves be seen in all our vulnerability, to love with our whole hearts even though there is no guarantee, to practise gratitude and joy when we have doubts, and to belief that we are enough to get through this together." (I have summarised)

Today acknowledge and embrace your vulnerability. In essence it is vitality stripped bare and the very thing that enables us to embrace life.

W is for Walk



"I am intentional about using all of my senses today as I walk to build my personal resilience."

Whether you walk in the woods, in your garden, or round your house today is the day for taking a walk and as you do so engage with all of your senses: what do you see or notice; what do you hear; how do you feel or what can you touch; what can you smell; and can you taste anything?

Walking is more natural to us than sitting for long periods. There is something both rhythmic and soothing about the motion, that leaves us feeling good and relaxed. If for any physical reason you are unable to walk, look out your window and imagine that walk using all of your senses, or google 'woodland', or check out the Facebook page of Max Out in the Lake District.

Where will you go for a walk today? Make it a priority.

X is for X-ray



"I am committing to prioritising my personal resilience and taking action to nurture my wellbeing"

If you've been following this Resilience Alphabet daily you will now have a lot of practical ideas to support your personal resilience if you do them!

Today is the day to Stop and like an x-ray, take a careful look under the surface. Perhaps these four questions will help you to do so. They are best answered with pen and paper... but in your head will do!

On a scale of 1-10, how well am I looking after Myself?

What could I do more of?

What could I do less of?

What one activity, if done daily, would make the biggest difference to my own resilience and well-being?

When you have some answers - Go do it!

Y is for You



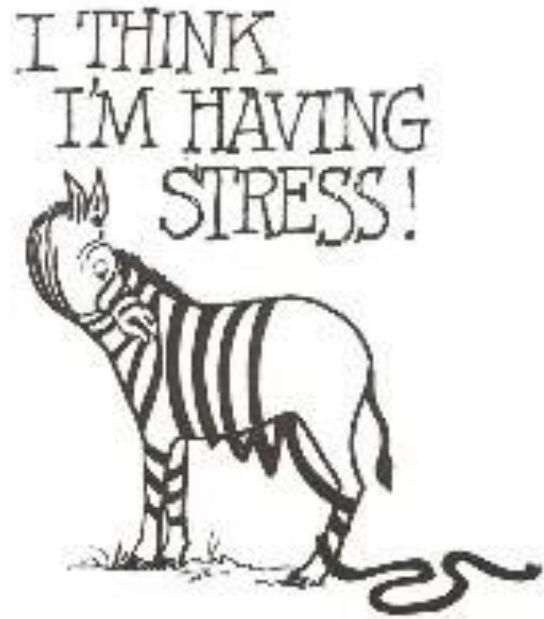
"My health and wellbeing matters to me and I will make the time to do the things that nurture and support my wellbeing."

Y is for YOU and with this post comes an Invitation with your name on it. Tomorrow sees Day 26 of the Resilience Alphabet and the last letter of the alphabet. However, your personal resilience and wellbeing will be important long after this Alphabet ends.

Take steps today to decide on your plan of action going forward. Then tell someone what you intend to do as a mechanism for building accountability for your intentions.

And finally, more than anything believe that you are worth the effort! Make the affirmation opposite something you say to yourself every day for the next 26 days.

Z is for Zebra



“An end is just a beginning with a different name. The resilience journey continues.”

Of course it is! Robert M Sapolsky got our attention with regard to Zebras when he wrote his classic book “Why Zebras don’t get Ulcers.” We know that living in a constant state of stress is harmful for us. That is why it is critical that we take seriously our need to actively and frequently find ways to give ourselves respite from the pressures of daily life in order to sustain our health and mental well-being, even if that is only for short bursts of time.

It is my strong belief that in order to serve others, including our family members and those we have contact with through work, or through other aspects of our lives, that is best done by looking after our own health and well-being..

Z is also for The End. Although for me Endings are often an opportunity to begin again. So either go right back to A or find another activity to continue your resilience journey.

The end...



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We are whole people and that means we need to pay attention to our health at many levels, the most obvious being physical, mental and emotional. We also need to pay attention to our social and spiritual wellbeing which will mean different things to different people. Enjoy the journey of strengthening your personal resilience.