

## Wellness | *Reimagining Resilience*

**Gindi Vincent\***

On November 11, I was invited to prepare this article. As a writer and blogger, I said “of course” because the offer would force me to write. I started to pen an article on resilience. “Resilience” is a bit of a buzzy term in leadership circles, and it is invoked in a wide swath of core leadership teachings:

- a. Bouncing back after setbacks or failures;
- b. Persisting in the face of significant obstacles to achieve successful results;
- c. Remaining optimistic, despite current negative circumstances (say, for example, a global pandemic); and
- d. Adapting to change.

You've probably heard it called different things too: grit, growth mindset, etc. R.M. Kanter said this in an article on resilience: "The difference between winners and losers is how they handle losing."<sup>1</sup> That's a key finding from ongoing research on great companies and effective leaders: no one can completely avoid troubles, and potential pitfalls are everywhere, so the real skill is the resilience to climb out of the hole and bounce back.

In the fall, I spoke at some conferences about my research on resilience, and what it means for us as a practical matter. I should have remembered what I learned in my youth. You see, my daddy and granddaddy were preachers. They used to say that they had to be careful about choosing the topics they preached about because God would test them in those very areas.

Maybe this is the equivalent for me. After what has been a hard year for the world -- a global pandemic, racial injustice, political instability -- and a hard year for my family, too, 2020 wasn't quite done. In early December, my doctor called to let me know I had breast cancer -- Stage 2 invasive ductal carcinoma.

If this was an opportunity to practice what I'd been "preaching," I wasn't particularly interested.

So what happened to this nice little article on resilience? I was given an "out." Permission not to write. Instead, I opted in. I kept writing. Because it's important that people encouraging you (and me) to face hard things, actually face the hard things when they come blasting through the door. So what do we do when facing a mountain?

### **1. Find the good.**

I am, at heart, an optimist, and this helps. But on days when it is deeply challenging to feel optimistic about a world turned upside down, you should find the good anyway. It's not lost on me that my diagnosis came one week after I spent 30 days on social media chronicling all that I am grateful for. Gratitude is tremendously useful when trying to build resilience.

### **2. Cultivate community.**

I'm bullish on community. When you feel utterly overwhelmed by another business setback, by being laid off, by receiving hard health news, or by dealing with young children or aging parents, you need people to encourage you (and maybe bring you some soup). Invest now -- those of you just starting out -- in relationships. Plug in to your neighborhood, your favorite charity, your kid's school, your church, your bar association, or whatever else it is that fills you up. Find people like you. Find people totally unlike you as well. Invest.

### **3. Set boundaries.**

During a difficult time, others' access to you should be limited. Know what you can and cannot do. It's okay if you don't volunteer to foster dogs, or bake cupcakes, or deliver food on the meal train right now. If you are facing what's hard, then give yourself permission to do less than you usually would. Turn your phone off. Allow yourself not to respond to everyone and everything within the hour. Deeply love the people closest to you, and take care of yourself. Or better yet, let others help.

We will get through this together. Practice seeing the good in every small gift that comes. Laugh. Cry. Hold on. Then, when you get to the other side of this hard thing, tell your story, and be the encouragement for others to become more resilient.

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<sup>1</sup> Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Surprises are the New Normal; Resilience is the New Skill," HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW (Jul. 7, 2013).