

When Resilience Strategies Save

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My husband's and my recent trip to Australia was filled with sights, sounds and lessons. My speaking engagements were successful. When I presented to a sold out crowd at the Ipswich Civic Centre I discovered the Australians love saying "You're darn tootin' Patricia!" in Australian accent. Maybe they thought it was Canada's equivalent of "G'day mate!"

Then there was touring Cairns' rain forest; snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef; exploring Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide; feeling concern for the farmers dealing with Australia's drought; learning about marsupials from wallabies to wombats; and finally six days in Tasmania. That's where my resiliency was tested.

We had signed on for a "three boot" Adventure Tour. We discovered that "one boot" means a typical bus tour; "two boot" means some hiking while "three boot" includes mountain climbing.

Off went Les, I and a handful of world traveling youth in a utilitarian bus pulling a trailer with our fifteen kilograms of extra clothes and bins of food. Bruce our tour guide was beyond robust. At fifty years of age each morning he rose at five am to prepare our day. He joined us on most of our mini-ventures including climbing up Mount Amos and Four Wheeling on the great ocean sand dunes. After preparing dinner, he'd entertain us with stories or conversation. Goodnights were said at 10 pm.

He encouraged the youth to do the mountain climbs and made a big deal of each attempt we made whether it was to climb a few hundred steps to a look out or help with clean up. Bruce demonstrated high resilience. I witnessed his physical stamina, ability to connect and encourage, problem solving ability, ease of dealing with delays and set backs, assertive skills and enthused satisfaction of being our *tour guy*.

But I began to question my resilience the day we walked for an hour up and down sand dunes to get to an isolated ocean beach. The noon hour walk back up and down the sand dunes had me muttering "a step at a time and you'll be there." Then I declined climbing Cradle Mountain, choosing the seven kilometre hike instead. I was pleased that I completed it with my legs feeling a little stronger and I saw beautiful scenery along the way. Then I said "Thank you, no," to the Mount Amos climb. However, old critical self chatter began.

“They’ll think you’re a loser. You’re just a wimp. Buckle up.” But there was a wiser voice that kicked in saying:

- “You know yourself and your own limitations.”
- “You have the right to take care of yourself. You’ve made yourself sick when you’ve pushed too far.”
- “Quit worrying about what you imagine other people think.”
- “Stop comparing yourself to Bruce, the Robust Guide, Les (who climbed up Mount Amos) and these youth. It’s self-sabotaging to compare yourself to different capacities and strengths.”
- “Compare yourself to a few years ago when you’d push yourself and end up ill needing Les to take you to a hospital.”
- “By declaring your limits and boundaries you not only look after you, you save others from having to rescue you.”
- “Celebrate that you are making a favourable memory for you and your marriage.”
- “You don’t have to shine in all areas of life. You do enough. You are enough. You have strengths and gifts that make a difference.”

Regardless of growing up on a farm where we all worked physically hard I have never had an exceptionally strong body. Still, as an older adult I have eliminated regular bouts of irritated bowel syndrome, headaches and strep throat. Overall, I am physically healthier. Activities that strengthen my body without exhausting me to the extreme are walking, aquacise, pilates and yoga. I’m back in Calgary, spring is here and jet lag from twenty-five hours of return travel has gone smoother than other long distance trips. Maybe it’s because I used strategies for resilience to save my self.

“Yes!” I concluded, “Both Bruce, the robust guide, and I demonstrated resilience!” Here are some questions to ask yourself to strengthen your resilience.

Attend to your body:

- What is your body’s capacity?
- Do you know how to strengthen your body without pushing to exhaustive shut down?
- Do you challenge or exercise your body regularly to achieve maximum health?

Attend to your inner self:

- Do you catch and halt your sabotaging self talk?
- Do you avoid calling yourself names like “loser,” “wimp,” “idiot,” or “lazy?”
- Do you ask, “What is a kinder and more supportive message?”
- Do you avoid comparing yourself to others?
- Do you compare how well you are doing now to the past, and celebrate your progress?

Attend to your communication:

- Do you say “yes” to challenges that are right and perfect for you and “no” to those that do not fit?
- Do you express appreciation to those who help?
- Do you encourage those who bravely attempt to do what is challenging for them?
- Do you recognize and acknowledge other people’s gifts and strengths?

Attend to the meaning in your life:

- Do you recognize and acknowledge your own gifts and strengths?
- Have you found ways to use your strengths at home, work or on holiday?

Patricia Morgan is an author, speaker and workshop leader. She helps people develop light hearted strategies for strengthening resilience. She can be reached at 403-242-7796, patricia@lightheartedconcepts.com or www.lightheartedconcepts.com