Resilient Summary

By Rick Hanson

How do you react when things don't go as planned?

Resilient gives us tools to build our resilience in a stressful world. Resilience isn't just bouncing back from difficulty; it's also enhancing and expanding our well-being. Based on neuroscience, positive psychology, and ancient wisdom, we're provided with ways to access inner strength, and connect with our needs so that we can thrive.

And isn't this precisely what the doctor ordered?

In this case, the doctor is Rick Hanson. Dr. Rick Hanson has the personal and professional credentials to guide us on the journey towards long-lasting resilience. Rick Hanson is a bestselling author, psychologist, and senior fellow of the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley. *Resilient* combines honest personal anecdotes from Hanson's childhood, personal experiences and journeys, and practical insights. The techniques and philosophies provide us with practical wisdom backed by theory from positive psychology, neuroscience, and ancient wisdom. Rick's son Forrest co-authored the book, and is a consultant and writer.

Human beings have three basic needs. These are safety, satisfaction, and connection. Feeling safe means being able to find shelter; both physically and psychologically. Satisfaction comes from being able to meet physical needs such as hunger, but also positive emotions like contentment and gratitude. Our need for connection is fulfilled when we're cared for, and care for others. It's crucial to identify when any of

these needs aren't met, so we can find ways to meet them. The "Four Rs" are four pathways we can take to meet these needs. The Four Rs are: recognizing them, resourcing what we need, regulating our thoughts feelings and actions, and relating well to others.

This book provides us with practical tools to build these pathways. The twelve inner strengths are explained by sharing mindfulness practices, positive psychology tools, personal examples, and neuroscientific explanations. Let's briefly dive into this a little more.

Our Basic Needs

Despite the numerous changes to the world, our three basic needs, safety, satisfaction and connection remain. We need to identify when these needs are not being met, and work out how to meet them.

Let's take a peek at our brains to understand where these needs come from. Hanson has a handy description. He says that the brain is like a house. The first floor is the brain stem, which focuses on keeping us safe. This is the oldest, reptilian part of our brain. On the second floor, we find the subcortex, including the hypothalamus, thalamus, amygdala, and basal ganglia. This is our mammalian brain, which seeks satisfaction, like food and comfort. On the top floor, we find some more recent, primate part of our brain, which is the neocortex. The neocortex extends our need from safety and satisfaction, to connection and logic. This is home to empathy, language, planning, and compassion. Hanson says that it's a little bit like having a zoo in our heads - a lizard who freezes when faced with danger, a mouse sniffing about for cheese, and a monkey searching for its tribe. Each floor wants its particular needs met.

However, this isn't as simple as we may think. Let's look at why this is, in the following example.

How We're Wired

Our ancestral family members were often faced with survival choices. They could believe there was a tiger in the bushes when there wasn't, or they could think there wasn't a tiger when one was about to pounce.

We can see that the second scenario is about life-and-death. Our ancestors generally opted for this frame of mind in order to stay alive. Nowadays, although much has changed about the world, our brains are still hardwired to expect danger. This makes us a little paranoid, prone to negativity, and often very anxious. We might know that what we worry about probably won't happen, but our brains ignore us. We also tend to overestimate the danger, and underestimate the inner resources and coping mechanisms we possess. The result of this is a lot of needless anxiety, and less resilience.

This book offers four pathways to change this wiring and build our well-being. Furthermore, we can learn and apply different inner strengths to build each pathway even more. There are twelve inner strengths that we can explore to help us on this journey.

Let's dig a little deeper.

The Four Pathways and Inner Strengths Linking to Them

So we have four pathways, or "Four Rs," and twelve inner strengths. An easy way of breaking this down is that for each pathway, we need three inner strengths.

First, we should recognize our needs by applying the inner strengths of compassion, mindfulness, and learning.

Then we should resource our inner strengths using grit, gratitude, and confidence.

The third step is to regulate our thoughts, feelings, and actions. We do this by being calming, motivating ourselves, and building intimacy.

Finally, relating to others can be achieved through courage, aspiration, and generosity.

Hanson explores how we can take what appear to be mundane daily experiences, and turn them into lasting internal resources that can build our brains. If we can repeatedly activate neural circuits, we can actually change our brains. This involves two steps. The first step is to know what we want to grow. For example, we may want to develop feelings of gratitude. The second step is to strive towards lasting change, by cementing these feelings in the nervous system. This process is a lot like building a muscle - use it a few times every day for a short time, and these little efforts eventually pay off. A little bit of work equates to

significant results.

Let's apply this to each of the four Rs.

Recognizing Our Needs Using Compassion, Mindfulness, and Learning

Compassion can sound like a fuzzy concept. However, when we feel compassion, the brain's motor planning areas actually light up, and gear up for action. We often treat our friends well, but don't make compassion a two-way street; we also need to treat ourselves kindly.

A practical starting point is to write down a simple statement about self-compassion, put it in a prominent place, and read it aloud every day. The example we're given is, 'I am on my own side.' The idea is to repeat experiences often enough for them to change the brain. We do this by taking time to notice and expand upon small but positive experiences. Such experiences can be as trivial as resting on the couch at the end of the day. Furthermore, we can create a positive experience, and then really enhance it by engaging with it more mindfully. After all, little things can turn into big things.

Mindfulness is the ability to stay present in the moment. The difficulty is that we need to remain mindful, no matter what's happening around us. As is so often the way, we often lack mindfulness when we need it the most.

We can use mindfulness to get the most out of positive experiences, and reduce the effect of harmful ones. Mindfulness is a muscle we can build

by using it, even for brief moments throughout the day. One idea is to set our phones at random times, reminding us to be mindful. We can use our breathing to calm us when talking to others, or carrying out tasks. Finding refuge also helps. In this case, refuge means a place like a library, or drinking a cup of coffee, or activities like playing with the dog. Perhaps refuge is less tangible - such as a memory of a place that felt safe when you were a child. Maybe it's sacred or divine? It could even be an idea, or knowing that someone loves you.

When you go to this safe space, the secret is to really notice how it feels, and try to absorb it.

Here are three things we can practice. The first is just to experience what's with us, and try not to change it, even if it's unpleasant. We can also try to decrease the negative by looking at what's painful and trying to let it go. Thirdly, we can try to increase the positive. The idea is to let it be, let it go, and let it in. If we use the garden as an analogy, we can choose to look at it, pull out the weeds, or we can plant flowers.

Mindfulness and compassion help us to respond rather than react. When we feel that our three needs are being met, we feel more emotionally and physically balanced. This is what's referred to as the green zone, which is the responsive space. When our needs aren't met, we often react strongly and move into the red zone, or the reactive mode. The reactive mode wears us down, and the responsive mode builds us up. While some difficulty is good for resilience-building, too much makes us anxious. Hence, the reactive mode is useful when danger confronts us, but we don't want to stay there indefinitely.

Recognizing our needs also involves learning. Learning is the superpower of all superpowers. About 1/3 of our attributes are built into our DNA, and

the rest we learn. When it comes to learning, we need to know that it has two crucial parts - activation and installation. We might have an experience, but we have to repeat this often. Repetition is how we hardwire the changes in our brains. For example, we may want to improve our perseverance, so to do this, we must practice, build on, and stick with a task to grow it over time.

We can entrench this learning neurologically by following four steps. Let's look at the acronym HEAL in order to explain this.

H is to HAVE the experience and really notice it. E is to ENRICH it by really feeling it and keeping with it. A is to ABSORB it and feel it internally. And L Is to LINK it to more difficult feelings. Linking means to notice both the positive and negative in yourself. Linking is actually an optional step, because have, enrich, and absorb are sufficient for learning. What's more, it's not always easy to engage with negative material.

The problem is that we have experiences, but don't install them. Enriching an experience can involve noticing and staying with it consciously for 5 or 10 seconds. We can further intensify this by breathing more fully, looking for related feelings, and noticing what's new or different about the moment. We can then value it by noticing why it's important to us.

Then we absorb it. Here we should feel it sinking in, and identify what's positive and hopeful about it. Linking can work as follows. Perhaps a colleague says something hurtful to you. However, in this moment, you could choose to remember something someone else once said that was comforting and affirming. The brain learns through association, so if two things are held simultaneously, they affect each other. However, we need to make the positive side more powerful to affect neurological change.

Once we bring compassion, mindfulness, and conscious learning to recognize and start meeting our needs, we can resource what we need to build on this.

Resourcing Grit, Gratitude and Confidence

Grit helps us develop agency, which is the feeling that we're in charge of our lives. Even when our options are limited, we can look for one small thing that we can do. If we're caught up in a difficult argument for example, we can decide what, or what not to say.

Grit requires determination, and determination requires vitality. Having vitality means that we also have to take care of our bodies. A healthy body helps us to generate positive thoughts, feelings, and actions.

We can also resource gratitude. Gratitude might sound like a typical self-help mantra, but researchers have noted how it builds optimism, compassion, better sleep, and greater resilience. We tend to rush past pleasure, and this is something that needs to be actively resourced. The suggestion is to keep a pleasure diary of all the little things that bring pleasure and build gratitude.

Confidence is influenced by the attachment we formed with our caregivers during our first two years of life. The good news is that even if our attachment isn't what we needed, we can find more security as adults. We need to develop a realistic account of what happened when we were young, but this may take a long time. Nonetheless, we can begin building healthy attachments by treating others as we would like to have been treated in earlier relationships.

Buddha talks about the first and second dart. The first dart we might receive is some pain or discomfort that we cannot avoid, such as being criticized at work. The second dart is avoidable because it's the unnecessary one we throw at ourselves. We hold onto resentment and grudges. As luck would have it, our inner critic is an excellent dart thrower.

To get to grips with this, notice what your inner critic says, and see if it reminds you of anyone familiar. Perhaps you heard someone say something similar when you were younger? At this point, you could try the "L" in HEAL. Remember linking? Well, perhaps you could visualize an internal "caring committee" that consists of people who represent different kinds of support you've received throughout your life. These could even be fictional characters. This exercise will help you recognize that you're a good person, and others have also seen this in you.

To meet our needs, we also have to learn to regulate ourselves.

Regulating Through Calming, Motivating Ourselves, and Building Intimacy

Pema Chodron said, '*You are the sky. Everything else - it's just the weather.*'

So often, we react in a fight, flight, or freeze response. This response involves the parasympathetic and sympathetic systems, which form part of our autonomic nervous system. These systems are like the brake and accelerator of a car. The parasympathetic, or "rest and digest" system, slows our heart rate and helps our body to refuel. It is the brake. Our sympathetic activity, on the other hand, is like the accelerator. It gets us going, speeds up our heart, and releases adrenaline and cortisol. It's helpful when it's combined with positive emotions, but when it's linked to negative emotions we get stressed. Unfortunately, the modern world often pushes us into sympathetic nervous system mode. The two systems work a little bit like a seesaw - when one goes up, the other goes down, and we need to help them balance out a little more.

To help how we respond in such cases, we can practice slow breathing. Slow breathing allows us to engage the parasympathetic nervous system. We can also try progressive relaxation by focusing on our feet, and gradually moving up to our heads, relaxing tension in each part of the body. Biofeedback and movement like yoga and t'ai chi can also help.

The sympathetic nervous system provides us with much-needed energy. However, to use this positively, we need to be motivated. We all differ in terms of the rewards we need to keep us going. If we're sensitive to the rewards we need, we can keep our motivation up.

Hanson explains that 'to get the most out of "we," we need to stay centered in "me."' He points out that fences make for good neighbors, and that paradoxically, a strong sense of autonomy can create a depth of intimacy. If we look after our own needs, it's easier to be open to the

needs of others. He asks if we can be autonomous when people want things from us, are upset with us, try to dominate us, or don't respect our boundaries. This depends both on our innate temperaments and how our environment affects us. We need to think about how easy it is to fully express our thoughts, state what we want, and trust our judgment if others disagree with us.

How do we build this? Maybe we could imagine a physical boundary between ourselves and another - like a line drawn on the ground. Perhaps it's a good idea to recall when you felt strong, and decide when you have to put up with something, and when you don't. Maybe it's time to call on your own internal "caring committee" and turn up the volume of what they say to you.

However, we also need to build our empathy because it helps us to understand and interact with others more effectively. It means shifting our own perspective, and increasing our cultural competence. We also need to track micro-expressions in others, and be sensitive to their suffering.

Regulating ourselves then helps with the final "R."

Relating Skillfully to Others, Using Courage, Aspiration, and Generosity

It takes courage to stand up for ourselves. It means speaking from the heart to prevent things from being left unsaid. It may require "talking about talking" before we start crucial discussions, and compiling a list of do's and don'ts before we navigate a conversation. We also need to

establish facts, know our values, and make requests as opposed to demands.

Hanson urges us to "lean into the future" so that we can aspire to achieve what's important to us. We also need to remember that the more willing we are to fail, the more likely we are to succeed. This may require us to work out what's ours to do and what belongs to someone else. We also need to embrace generosity, see ourselves as givers, be generous with forgiveness, and take others' perspectives.

On a broader level, we can try to widen our "circle of us," by avoiding sorting people into two clusters - those who are like us, and those who are not like us.

In Conclusion

Being resilient allows us to thrive, and building the skills of everyday resilience is something that we can all benefit from. To change our lives for the better, we need to understand how we can change our brains. As they describe it, the authors show us 'the practical *how* of experiencing, growing, and using key mental resources for resilient well-being.'

So, with resilience, 'R' you ready to lean into the future?