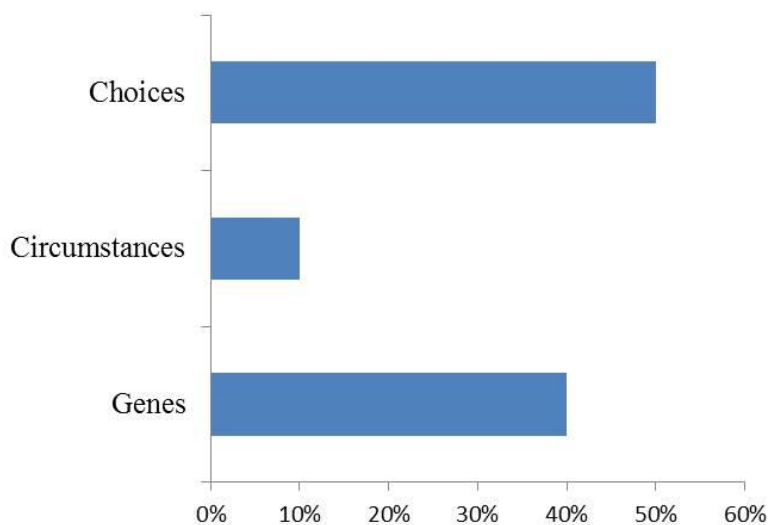


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## What is Resilient Living?

Your happiness, stress level, risk of depression and resilience depends on three interacting factors: your genes, circumstances, and the choices you make. Though the contribution of each of these factors varies in different studies, approximately half the variability in your happiness depends on a combination of genetic predisposition and life situations, with the rest half depending on the choices you make.



### The Three Factors That Influence Your Wellbeing

While you may have little control over your genes and the pace with which the world changes around you, you have incredible (and often untapped) ability to select the choices that will make you happier and more resilient. “Immerse: A 52-week Course in Resilient Living” will help you make those choices. Let’s first understand what is resilience.

Resilience is the core strength you use to lift the load of life. Resilience helps you withstand adversity, bounce back from life's downturns and grow with each adversity. Resilience also helps you develop the foresight to prevent future adversity. Think of someone you personally know who you truly admire for his or her ability to withstand different challenges. How would you describe that person’s positive attributes? I have asked this question of thousands of people. Here is the synthesis of the answers I have received.

Resilient people:

- are emotionally strong.
- are kind, gentle and patient.
- are grateful for life’s little and larger blessings.
- are compassionate even amid personal stress.
- are gracious in forgiving others.

- live a life of purpose.
- are filled with love and wisdom.
- live their days with intentionality and aren't quick to judge others.
- live for others.
- often have a strong anchor of faith.

Four core domains contribute to resilience:

*Physical resilience:* Physically resilient people fall sick less often and recover quickly from an illness. Healthy diet, physical activity, adequate sleep, self care and good quality medical help, all contribute to physical resilience. While physical resilience contributes to overall resilience, you don't have to be in perfect health to be resilient. In fact, some of the most inspiring examples of resilience come from people struggling with serious medical conditions.

*Cognitive resilience:* Cognitive resilience is your ability to maintain focus, judgment, insight and decision making skills amid life's difficulties. Cognitively resilient people aren't just intelligent; they preserve their intelligence even when feeling overwhelmed. They are excellent at handling deadlines and are the last to buckle under pressure.

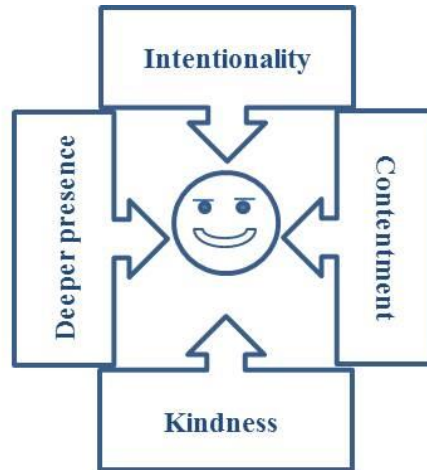
*Emotional resilience:* Emotional resilience is frequently experiencing positive emotions and recovering quickly from negative emotions. Emotionally resilient people are humble, kind, gentle, and patient, both toward others and themselves. They are flexible and are pragmatically optimistic. You'll generally find them calm and happy, and able to look at the bright side in an adverse situation.

*Spiritual resilience:* Spiritual resilience is your ability to maintain a higher meaning and altruistic perspective, both during happier and difficult times. Spiritually resilient people aren't limited by their mind's attraction to short-term gratification. They seek the good, not necessarily the pleasant. Their beliefs aren't shackled by burdensome dogmas. Instead, they use their positive beliefs to benefit the mankind. They see every human being as precious and are generous in gifting their compassion.

Each of these four domains of resilience are influenced by three factors: our genes, life situation and chosen actions. While the genes and life situations often aren't in our control, we have the option to choose our thoughts, words and actions based on our highest ideals, and through exercising this choice, live with resilience. My invitation to you is to exercise that option.

Through our collective individual resilience emerges organizational resilience, social resilience and resilience of the whole nation, ultimately the world. In this book, my focus will be on practices to enhance your individual cognitive, emotional and spiritual resilience.

Resilient living is bringing these insights to your daily life and thus choose to live a life with courage and meaning. I like to define resilient living as ***living with intentionality, deeper presence, contentment, and kindness***. Let's talk about each of these aspects.



## The Four Core Components of Resilient Living

### **Intentionality**

Most living beings spend their entire life driven by instincts and habits—a state of automaticity. In humans, automaticity traps us in the allure of short-term gratifications, the dread of imaginary fears, and the cobweb of ordinary ruminations, all fashioned by incessant mind wanderings. Living with an instinct-driven, automatic mind is like driving a car without holding the steering wheel. Such a car is bound to wander off its lane, onto the rumble strip, and eventually into the ditch. If you wish to govern your life with conscious choices, you'll need to break free of this automaticity—by cultivating intentionality.

*Intentionality* means taking charge by becoming an active participant in the flow of life. At a restaurant, you don't tell the waiter to just get whatever. You carefully pick the food that best matches your palate and wallet. Similarly, intentional living involves carefully choosing your thoughts, words, and actions.

Intentionality helps you maximally use the phenomenal thinking power of your brain. An intentional mind thinks about life's meaning and aligns the short-term actions with this long-term meaning. Such a mind is disciplined, virtuous, engaged, and filled with hope and possibilities. It chooses to think thoughts, speak words, and engage in life's pursuits based on timeless values.

The three most important skills that can help you strengthen intentionality are deeper presence, contentment, and kindness.

### **Deeper presence**

Our innate presence is superficial and partial because of fragmented and weak attention. During most conscious moments, we have two planes of presence—one in which we are doing and one in which we are thinking. Lack of congruence between physical and psychological presence blocks authentic, undistracted engagement with life.

Just as drillers dig a deeper well to access the water table or oil, to access the well of wisdom you need to fashion a deeper presence by strong attention. With such presence, you start seeing patterns in a random landscape. You appreciate details you hadn't seen before. Your error rate goes down. You learn

to discern complexity more easily. You become less reactive. When you immerse fully in life, your entire day becomes a ‘flow’ experience.

You need deeper presence in order to fully engage with the people you connect with each day. Such a presence is tremendously healing to both the giver and the receiver. Loving relationships, lasting friendships, professional partnerships, creative pursuits—you cannot achieve excellence in any of these without deeper presence.

Such presence isn’t innate to most of us, and it requires effort to cultivate. The good news is that with effort, you build capacity, so with time, your innate attention becomes stronger, translating into spontaneous deep presence.

Your deeper, authentic, undistracted presence gifts you with a fuller life driven by your core values of contentment and kindness.

## **Contentment**

Contentment is a deep feeling of fulfillment that emerges from the daily practice of gratitude. As we advance emotionally and spiritually, we pass through three phases with respect to contentment.

*Phase I: Lack of Contentment.* In this phase we strive for the world’s attention and busy ourselves collecting toys to thwart boredom and help us climb on the social totem pole. A proportion of us close our life’s book after having climbed barely a few rungs on this ladder. With so many rungs still unscaled, we experience only occasional sprinkles of contentment.

We don’t realize that the game we are playing is rigged. Our mind’s expectations and desires naturally stay a step ahead of our accomplishments—a state of programmed dissatisfaction. Relying on our mind’s natural state to find contentment is a recipe for failure.

*Phase II: Contentment.* Those who realize the above wisdom, amid their striving, dig deeper. They discover and taste the delicacy of gratitude and acceptance. Contentment naturally follows. Contentment provides them respite and fresh energy. It frees their attention so they can focus on living a meaning-filled life through enhancing the well-being of their fellow travelers.

The state of contentment slowly progresses to the third phase, which curiously again brings discontent. This time, however, the discontent is different, and it signifies real progress.

*Phase III: Contentment with Dissatisfaction.* People in this third phase are dissatisfied because even though they are content with their accomplishments and possessions, they can’t accept the status quo of the world—with countless beings experiencing unimaginable pain and suffering. They want to help and are passionate about making the world a happier and kinder place. They aren’t content with their own comforts. They wish to share their peace and joy with others. They create transformations through inventions, expeditions, revolutions, and more. They strive to decrease suffering.

Such striving is anchored by humility and powered by compassion. Lack of contentment now provides energy, tremendously increases social awareness, and fuels passion. An invariable accompaniment of this discontent is kindness.

## **Kindness**

World over, the single most desirable trait in your partner, friend, parent, teacher, neighbor, colleague, or child is kindness. Kindness is the daily practice of compassion. Kindness has countless expressions. Patience with someone who seems slower than usual; forgiveness for the waiter who spilled water on

your shirt; the ability to provide a loving, gentle presence at home; lack of judgment toward someone who looks different; humility in accomplishments; the ability to speak softly even in argument—all are different expressions of kindness.

Kindness isn't easy to consistently embody. It takes superhuman effort to remain kind while experiencing personal adversity, unkind treatment, stress, or anger. It is in these situations, however, that kindness is most needed.

A kind anchor provides the much-needed self-control and clarity of thinking that will prevent an argument from breaking a relationship. For example, if you are committed to kindness, even if your partner is snappy one evening, you won't immediately react. The clarity of thinking that kindness provides will help you exercise self-control so you can look past his or her reactivity. Such kindness needs practice. Just as a tree doesn't strengthen its roots the night of the storm, you can't develop kindness overnight; you'll have to practice it in the littlest experiences—to the moth visiting your home, the telemarketer who trespasses into your peace, and the airline agent who botches your flight booking. With practice, you'll become instinctively kind; kindness will become effortless and will require no active thought.

When your primordial instinct becomes that of kindness, you start gifting your kindness to everyone you touch. This change transforms your life. You create your own little heaven that walks with you wherever you go.

Come, let's immerse ourselves in the journey that'll take us there.

Take care,

Amit

<http://stressfree.org/>