

**A smooth  
sea never  
made a good  
sailor**

Navigating  
Adversity with  
Resilience

## Unveiling the Human Capabilities in Challenging Times

It was mid 2021, near a favela in Rio de Janeiro.

I was on a bus, on my way to work, when I overhear two women talking, and a part of their conversation catches my attention:

"This Covid needs to end soon! Last year was so hard! Remember I told you about it? Mariana, the woman I work for, is a lawyer, she was working from home, but the company went bankrupt with this pandemic business. She was fired and devastated, poor thing. She could no longer pay for my cleaning services. Now imagine my despair, with four kids to feed..."

The second woman replied:

"But how nice that you got your act together and managed to sell your cloth masks."

"Yes, thank God! But now she's famous, you know? She created a Tiktok, and got so many followers that she opened her own office online. She seems to be doing super well, she even bought a new car and hired me back."

To this day, two years later, I think about this short dialogue. I wonder, knowing that I will probably never know the answer, how Mariana's business is doing. She, like so many other professionals, has reinvented herself. An unemployed lawyer who created her own business using the TikTok boom as an impetus.

It couldn't have been easy. It took courage and strength to create her own methods when all seemed lost. Will she one day be one of those women in Forbes or speak at a TED-talk?

But I also thought about Naiara. A woman from the slums, who found herself unemployed with four children to feed. She could no longer go to other people's houses to do cleaning, and, even without the diploma or money that Mariana had, she also reinvented herself. She used her creativity, saw an opportunity, and used her sewing skills to earn money by selling customized cloth masks.

Both were resilient, each in their own way, with the resources they had.

Hard times are big dark clouds and storms that hit our organizations, institutions, economy, and community. But first and foremost, the drops hit each person within these systems. They hit me, you, Mariana, Naiara... Human beings with complex characteristics such as different personalities, histories, experiences and abilities. And from these attributes, we can unleash the power of resilience.

I don't want to glamorize the process, although it has its beauty. I could write a whole essay on the beauty of thriving. But, as I said, we are human, therefore we have our limitations. And

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between you and me, human to human, I feel free to tell you what you probably already know: the path of resilience is not easy and it is not always beautiful. The beauty is in the view, which is very, very rewarding.

If you don't believe me, just ask people you consider to have "made it far." Go ahead.

What do you think the founders of Netflix - Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph - when the company consisted in DVD-by-mail rental company, felt when they saw the demand for online content growing, and people becoming less and less interested in DVD's? That they were happy and imagined a nice hike? It must have been scary! Do you think Tom Cruise thought "all these kids bully me, make fun of my dyslexia and low grades, and call me a "loser" every day. But that doesn't bother me at all, because one day I will be one of the most famous actors in Hollywood"? He probably lost count of how many times he came home crying.

The examples are countless. People go through similar scenarios, but only a few manage to make great use of these situations.

So the fundamental question is: how do these people manage to react to such adversities, and find themselves rising stronger?

I may not have all these answers, and, in fact, I think no one does, since it is not a cake recipe and everyone has their own struggles. But we can look at tools and examples of people and organizations that simply did it, learned from it, and shared their paths inspiring others.

None of them found it fun to sail through a storm. How did they become good sailors? With virtues such as strength, emotional intelligence and creativity that guided what they did from the debris left by the storm. When they looked around, saw the damage and asked, "Okay, that was devastating and broke a lot of things. What am I going to do with these broken pieces?".

We can ask ourselves the same question when faced with adversity.

The answer will determine our level of resilience, and therefore our ability to adapt, bounce, and thrive.

### **Resilience in convergence: definitions from Physics and Peter Drucker's perspective**

Although we understand resilience centered on human aspects, a brief analysis of the verb "bounce", as well as the noun "resilience", reveal concepts based on physics before psychology: materials that return to their original shape after being subjected to deformation. Metaphorically, we are these materials.

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"When a bouncing ball falls, it initially gains speed or kinetic energy-the energy of motion. When it reaches Earth, it collides head-on with an incredibly massive object (...) The ball slows down, deforms temporarily and shoots back up."<sup>1</sup>

Let's look at energy of motion and massive object. All of us, in personal or professional moments, have already collided with massive objects. Objects that, instead of feeling that we found the ground, we felt that we had no ground to stand on. We deformed for a while, and shot back up in different ways. The pandemic was a massive object. It deformed the whole world.

But, Peter Drucker said:

*"The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic"*

So, resilience according to physics assumes that we should return to our original form.

But wait. How will we return to our original forms, to those people we were before the challenges, after devastating deformations?

The point is that a lot of us focus on the massive object damage and deformation, but if we don't ask ourselves "What can we take as a lesson, and what is the best action from here?" we will go back to thinking with yesterday's logic, the logic before the problem presented itself.

And I agree with Peter: this can be very dangerous.

I have asked myself this question in the face of my own adversities. After researching references and looking at what successful people and organizations have done, I've learned some things. I hope my writing skills are better than my illustrating skills, but here's an illustration of how I perceive resilience:

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<sup>1</sup> [Link Here](#)

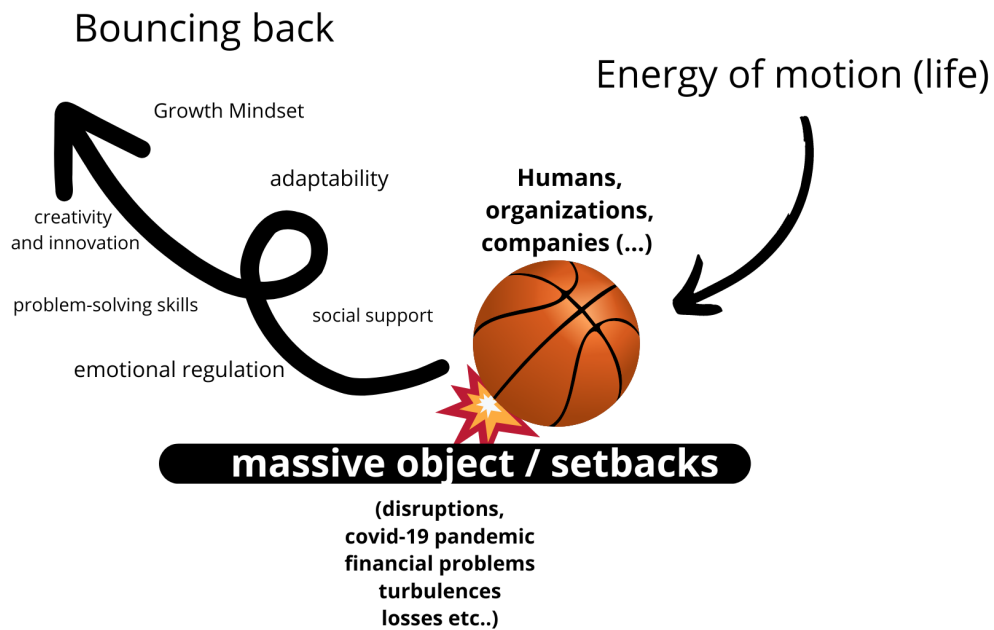


Illustration by me

The more of these skills we possess, the stronger we will emerge.

Notice that I chose the "bouncing back" arrow carefully. Because it is rarely a linear process. It is an attribute that develops. I have compiled the tools I have raised according to recent research by therapists, psychiatrists, and accounts of people and organizations that have conquered this attribute. In summary, the main ways to shoot back up after a setback, rely on the ability to adapt to the new scenarios presented, i.e., the changes after the setback and our ability to throw away yesterday's thinking; the people around us who will help us in this process, the support network that shows empathy, collaboration, understanding and validation of our experiences, and empowers individuals to better cope with adversity and develop effective strategies. A change of mindset (in my opinion, this is the most difficult of all, because it is not at all changing perceptions and concepts rooted for decades) that makes us able to embrace change and see opportunities where we only saw problems; emotional regulation, which includes self-awareness of our emotions, and being attuned to how they influence our thoughts and behaviors. Understanding, without judgment and punishment, that these emotions, even the negative ones, are part of our human nature, and that we need to find mechanisms to regulate and cognitively reconstruct them.

And creativity, which I cherish inestimably. It gives us flexibility, innovation, multiple perspectives, solutions, and reframes challenges and setbacks from a positive angle.

*"The most effective way to manage change successfully is to create it" - Peter Drucker*

## **The Creative Catalyst and The Magnitude Effect of Massive Objects**

Here is a brief personal account of how she was my lifeline when I thought it would sink in. I grew up in a small neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, in the middle of nowhere. No exaggeration. There was only grass, sheep and our house. When it rained, the electricity went out. I barely had internet, let alone a cell phone, and I couldn't afford the toys my classmates bought.

I had to create an alternative scenario, or I would die of boredom. The beloved creativity brought me a million of them, and I was never bored. Every day was a challenge, because every day I needed to create new games, and creativity held my hand and accompanied me on this journey. Monday I was an entrepreneur, Tuesday I was a captain, Wednesday was being a mom to my 6 dolls, and so on. When I finally got a camera and a computer with internet access, I created my first videos. Many years later, I posted one or two on Youtube, playing the characters I liked. I was an intern at an advertising agency, eager to suggest my ideas from this journey of creativity in campaigns. That's when the art director laughed, and asked if I thought we were playing Disney. That if I continued with this mentality, it would be better to focus on my Youtube channel to entertain children instead of dealing with clients. The others in the room laughed.

I felt so humiliated that I wanted to delete all the videos. It took me almost a week to remember it without falling into tears. My mother forbade me to delete the channel, and asked me: "Are you really going to let these people bring you down? Are you going to stay on the floor, crying?".

I was 19 years old. I had no idea what "Growth Mindset" was. But I knew I needed to stand up, that I couldn't let fear and shame overwhelm me. And anyone who has ever been bullied knows how hard that is. I wish Tom Cruise was here to reinforce my point.

I posted more videos. Within a few weeks my videos had reached one million views and 21.000 subscribers. A year and a half later the agency went bankrupt, because internet campaigns gained strength and were much more economical. And I don't tell this with an air of revenge. I just think that maybe, if they appreciated creativity as a catalyst instead of a vexation, maybe the agency would succeed. If they had seen the internet, a Youtube channel, as a tool, maybe they would have succeeded. Today, I earn money through my channel (more than I did at the agency), I work with

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content creation, characters, and social media for brands and people. In other words, I need that catalyst called creativity 24/7.

I don't know if my story is particularly inspiring. But I confess that I am very proud that I didn't stay down. That I didn't think with yesterday's logic. Because innovation became necessary in my adversity, and revealed itself in difficulties.

I take this opportunity to leave an important reflection: I believe that the more difficulties a person goes through, the more resilient he or she becomes. For example, behavioral differences between generations.

Last week my 56-year-old uncle sent me a funny video that showed the different reactions of each generation when hitting an object. Generation X would bump into it and keep walking as if nothing had happened. Generation Y complained a little and kept walking. Generation Z, on the other hand, would throw themselves on the ground and post pictures asking for help.

This is an exaggerated and generalized perception, since difficulties present themselves individually, regardless of age or time in history. But there is research, as well as several opinion pieces, such as that of Steven Bartlett<sup>2</sup>, that reaffirm the notion that the easier it is and the fewer challenges a person is presented with, the less they will exercise essential attributes such as problem solving skills, adaptability, and emotional regulation. Because, after all, there is no need to solve problems that don't exist, adapt to a stable scenario, or regulate emotions within these scenarios. When would we need to use creativity if everything has already been created for us?

One of my favorite writers is Ernest Hemingway, and a sentence that I like very much, although dramatic, says that "We are all broken. That's how the light gets in". As I said before, I don't want to glamorize the pain and our broken pieces. But we need to recognize that massive objects not only deform, but also open gaps for light and boost key attributes.

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<sup>2</sup>Link [here](#)

## **Fortifying Foundations: The Interplay of Resilient Sailors and Resilient Ships**

I conclude by saying that human complexity in the face of adversity demonstrates that "Navigare necesse est" (to sail is necessary - *Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus*) and the precious value of resilience in every human being who has navigated and is still navigating storms and turbulences.

Many corporations, institutions and companies understand the greatness of these people, because they understand that the whole structure of a resilient business is based on them. They understand that the ship will sink if there are no sailors who are willing to sail gracefully through the storm of adversity.

And who are these sailors? We are. Me, you, Naiara, Mariana, Reed Hastings, Marc Randolph, Tom Cruise - each one sailing the way they know how.

The waves will rise, crash, and the storms will come. But we will continue to sail, anchoring our ideas in reinvention, change, and fresh starts.

And I dare say that if Peter Drucker were the captain, he would say to throw all yesterday's logic into the sea and leave it at that!

Ahoy!



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