

# HOW RESILIENT ARE YOU?

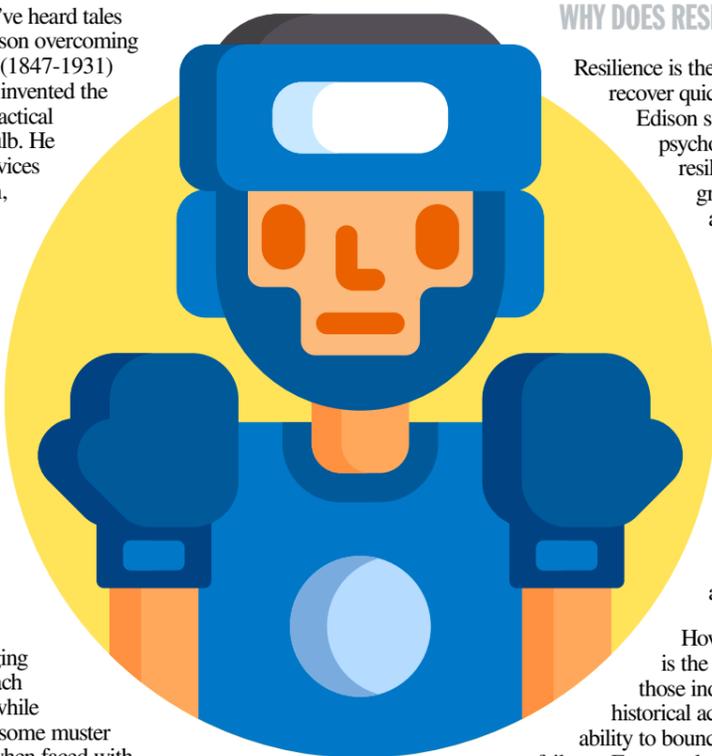
## WHY DO SOME QUIT WHILE OTHERS BOUNCE BACK?

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Chances are you've heard tales of Thomas Edison overcoming failure. Edison (1847-1931) most famously invented the long-lasting, practical electric light bulb. He is credited with developing devices for electrical power generation, mass communication, sound recording, and motion pictures.

As a master of trial and error, these innovations have had a widespread impact on the modern industrialised world. When asked about the many thousands of failures he had when trying to create the light bulb, he famously said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

Success is not for the faint of heart. Lofty goals are challenging to achieve, and most won't reach them. But why do some quit while others bounce back? How do some muster up the resilience to try again when faced with failure? Maybe some people are not equipped with the constitution to handle failing, much less, repetitive failure. Likely, most of us wouldn't stomach 10,000 failures in search of success. So, how do we develop the resilience we'll require for our ambitions?



### WHY DOES RESILIENCE MATTER?

Resilience is the capacity to bounce back; to recover quickly from difficulties or failure. Edison seems to have had a surplus. In psychological or sociological terms, resilience is the ability of a person, group, or society to withstand a brutal ordeal, then take advantage of it to strengthen itself. In systems theory, resilience is the ability to absorb a disturbance, reorganise, and continue to function as before. Ecologically, resilience is the ability of an ecosystem to persist or function in the face of disruption. In every description, the ability to recover quickly allows those with ambitious aims to stay the course and accomplish great feats.

However, it seems that resilience is the superpower of a select few; those individuals made famous with historical achievements fueled by an ability to bounce back from continuous failures. For ourselves, we often think of resilience as a trait that we either possess or we don't. We assume that we were born with it or developed it early enough to make use of it in our adulthood.

But, perhaps it is useful to consider resilience in a new light. What if it isn't an inherent trait or behavioral characteristic? What if it isn't something fate happens to bestow upon us. Maybe there is something we've overlooked. What if resilience is not an individual trait but to a greater extent, an environmental phenomenon?

### DO OUR SOCIAL GROUPS MAKE US MORE RESILIENT?

Perhaps much of what we call leadership characteristics (resilience, courage, boldness) is less about our inherent personality traits and more about our surplus of social capital. If you're unfamiliar, the term social capital refers to dense networks of valued relationships which yield resources and knowledge which benefit that network; a shared sense of identity, understanding, norms, values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity. We all feel more resilient (or courageous or bold) when we know we have a significant safety net; when we've nurtured a surplus of relationships with the collective knowledge, money and other resources to bounce back.

Our heroes embody traits that we may misidentify as rooted within that individual. Companies often send hordes of people to leadership training to develop these traits; the erroneous logic being that these traits, once established, will make that individual more fit to lead. Do we forget there is no leadership without followers? Leadership can only emerge in groups—it is an exclusively social phenomenon that arises through a surplus of carefully cultivated social capital. Given that some estimates put U.S. leadership development spending as high as \$50 billion annually, that's a significant commitment of financial firepower to back up what many see as central to future success.[1]

Should we be putting that money into the development of traits or the strengthening of our social capital? For example, Edison was one of the first inventors to apply the principles of organised science and teamwork to the process of invention. He worked with a significant number of researchers and employees to establish the first industrial research laboratory. As an individual, Edison didn't invent the light bulb sitting alone in some garage all by himself; he did so by building a surplus of valuable help.

Edison's resilience came with the establishment of a research lab built in Menlo Park, New Jersey in 1876. Considered an innovation itself, he made the lab with \$10,000 from the first sale of his quadruplex telegraph. It became the first institution set up for the specific purpose of fostering continual technological innovation and

improvement. Legally, Edison was attributed with most of the inventions created there, although many people carried out research and development under his direction.

We might rewrite his famous quote to read "[We] have not failed. [collectively, our large team of researchers and employees - using our surplus of financial, social, and intellectual resources - tried] 10,000 ways that [didn't] work [until together, we solved the problem]."

Our heroes don't often possess the traits we might appropriately assign to their collective team. As such, whenever we compare ourselves to these individuals, we always fall short. Whenever we claim individual accomplishment, rarely is this the case. Why do we assign the resilience to the individual, Thomas Edison, when it misidentifies the source of his resilience; the group? As a consequence, so many try to go it alone, striving, working harder without the safety-net of an extensive social ecology built to support their collective ambitions.

### WE MUST DEVELOP OUR RESILIENCE – BUT HOW?

How do we develop our resilience (or courage or boldness), instead of merely steeling ourselves to face disruptions and failures? Might we consider another strategy?

Our enterprise, Influence Ecology, is a good example. In 2009, John Patterson began working with Kirkland Tibbels to launch our now global company. In their first year, Kirkland knew John could not withstand the failures between the successes and made sure John was paid first. Kirkland knew John might jump ship early without financial certainty. John needed Kirkland's can-do attitude, while Kirkland needed John's focused work ethic to retain his sense of freedom. Both fostered resilience for the other.

Similar to Edison, in the years that followed, their strategy continued to focus on building a surplus of social capital. They formed teams. They assembled a significant number of people with the talent, resources, finances, and intellect to create not only a growing brand, but also to withstand the inevitable challenges that everyone faces.

Drew's role in Influence Ecology typifies this. In 2013, Drew was offered a partner role to focus on business development and program delivery in both North America and the Asia-Pacific. Drew's surplus of talent and resources freed the co-founders to address the challenges that came with managing an international company,

executing a long-term strategy, and developing a growing philosophy.

For a decade now, building a surplus is our focus and motto.

Why? Imagine for a moment that you've got a surplus of people, resources, and talent eager to help you. If challenged, could you withstand the disruption? If you've contributed to a substantial number of people and then find yourself in need, might they help you in return?

It may seem obvious, but if we had a surplus of financial capital, we would have the resilience to survive many challenges; we could quickly bounce back. But there are other types of surplus we must cultivate. What might a surplus of health be? Are we fit to overcome an illness or is our health teetering towards a disruption of our life (and livelihood)? Have we earned enough respect that our identity can handle a little public scrutiny or are far too many people indifferent to our reputation?

### HOW TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Instead of steeling yourself to withstand hardships, think of building a surplus to fortify yourself. Bouncing back is simple in an environment built to face challenges. Our recipe might include:

**Money:** build a surplus of financial capital and eliminate debt

**Health:** get healthy and maintain your health as you age

**Identity:** continuously earn a reputation for value and respect

**Work:** surround yourself with a team of talented people that are smarter than you

**Social capital:** build dense networks of valued relationships that yield resources and trust

Build a surplus of valued help and watch what happens with your ambitions. If you do, your legacy may include historical achievements fueled by an ability to bounce back from continuous failures and challenges. The future may be quoting you.



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[1] Follow the Leader(ship) Spending, Mike Prokopeak, March 21, 2018