

# RESILIENCE TOOLS FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES



## RESILIENCE TOOL ONE : JOURNALLING

Journaling is not a new concept. . It means writing stuff down on a daily basis. People have been doing this for thousands of years. Except, in those days it used to be called writing a diary! But it's only over the last forty years that psychologists have started to uncover what a powerful tool this can be.

“ I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn. ”

*Anne Frank*

## WHAT IS JOURNALLING?

In essence, what we are talking about is finding a quiet spot to sit, putting pen to paper, (or fingers on a keyboard), and writing on a specific subject for 10 to 15 minutes for three days on the trot. Whatever you write will be just for you, not to be shared, and don't worry about spelling or grammar.

## HOW IS THIS HELPFUL?

Research has shown that people doing writing about difficult challenges in either the present or the past, tend to deal with these challenges more successfully. For example, high level executives who were asked to write about their experiences as they faced redundancy were three times more likely to have found another job eight months later compared to people who didn't do this exercise.

Generally, writing things down in short bursts has been shown to improve people's immune system, sleep better, develop better mental health, require less pain medication and generally get significantly better at dealing with life's ups and downs.

## HOW DOES THIS WORK?

Firstly, it's about pausing to check in with yourself, and focus and reflect on what is happening in your life. Secondly, it's about organising your thoughts, and telling yourself a different story about what is happening. Thirdly, it's about working out what action you want to take – setting your intentions and making you take control rather than life taking control of you. But the beauty of this is that you don't have to consciously work through these steps. Just write away and this will happen automatically.



## THE BASICS

1. Sit down and decide on something that is important to you right now. See below for ideas.
2. Decide how long to write, (10 minutes would be ideal if you have the time, shorter if not), and then put down whatever comes to mind. Tip: Most people that get this far have actually done the hardest bit! As with many things in life it's about actually getting going and making a start. Thinking about writing something at some time in the future will not be very helpful!
3. Write away for the time you have allowed. Don't stop until the time is up.
4. Do this for at least three consecutive days. Four, five or more, if the mood takes you!



## WHAT DO I WRITE ABOUT?

### HERE ARE SOME IDEAS

**CURRENT CHALLENGES** Think about a situation that is stressing you out, or alternatively, something about yourself that you would like to improve. If you do this, make sure you do two things. Firstly, write about the challenge and how it's affecting you, and secondly, write about what your next actions will be, (For example, what practical steps will you take? How would the 'best you' deal with this situation?).

**YOUR IDEAL FUTURE** Imagine your life in five years' time. If you have been doing the things that matter to you, and being the person you want to be, then what do you see yourself doing. What will your life be like, and how will you be spending your time? Remember, you don't know whether this will happen or not. But just doing this exercise for a few days has shown to produce increased happiness, better immune functioning and fewer visits to the doctor. This kind of exercise has also been shown to be a powerful booster of optimistic thinking!

**GRATITUDE JOURNALLING** Future articles will focus specifically on this practice, but regularly doing this kind of exercise has been shown to bring about significant improvements in physical and psychological wellbeing.

1. Write about three good experiences, or moments, that you have had in the last twenty-four hours. Reflect on why they were positive. This exercise will take less than five minutes. I really would recommend you give it a go. After a few weeks reflect on whether you found it helpful. Most people don't do it because it seems to ridiculously trite – but have a go anyway. You will be pleasantly surprised!

2. Write about a bad situation that has happened, but see if you can write about any silver linings. (This is quite a hard exercise to want to do!).

“ I don't journal to 'be productive.' I don't do it to find great ideas or to put down prose I can later publish. The pages aren't intended for anyone but me. It's the most cost-effective therapy I've ever found. ”

*Tim Ferriss*

**MICRO-JOURNALLING** When I am strapped for time I do a very brief few minutes. I will structure my writing around three questions. These are:

1. What qualities do I want to bring to today? So, for example, I might try to bring more focus and purpose to what I am doing, or to show more compassion and kindness.
2. What one 'me' thing do I want to do today? What is the most important thing I can do to look after my wellbeing. This is about sorting out what is most important and putting a priority around that.
3. What one 'work' thing can I do today? Ditto. Our to-do lists don't tell us what is most important. This question gets you asking the question.



**“ Writing in a journal reminds you of your goals and of your learning in life. It offers a place where you can hold a deliberate, thoughtful conversation with yourself. Robin Sharma ”**



The regular practice of journalling can be enjoyable and enlightening. For many it is one of the few times they have to reflect on what their wishes and intentions.

Remember, this is not pie in the sky stuff! It is about keeping your feet on the ground and keeping it real. Researchers have suggested that about 97% of people benefit from this exercise – it makes them happier and healthier. Why not give it a go and see how it works for you!

And if there is only one suggestion about how you write I would say go easy on yourself. Imagine someone who thinks the world of you, warts and all, and knows how tough things can be. They care about you. Try to bring those sentiments to life in the way you write things about your own stuff. Be an inspiring and empathic coach to yourself and not a harsh critical know-all. (We've all got one of those!).

**Kevin Simpson, Chartered Clinical Psychologist,** has been delivering a number of resilience training sessions to police personnel in Cornwall, Devon and Dorset.