

COURAGE **TO CHANGE**



7 PRINCIPLES

**MOVE PAST FEAR, UNLOCK YOUR
POTENTIAL, BUILD INNER
CONFIDENCE, & ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS**

TESS HULACK

Courage to Change

7 Principles to Move Past Fear,
Unlock Your Potential, Build Inner
Confidence, & Achieve Your Goals
Tess Hulack





Unconditional love starts with you. It's not something to seek outside of yourself, but something to cultivate within—a reflection of patience, kindness, and truth.

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Dedication

Thank you!

FIRST AND FOREMOST I want to dedicate this book to my parents & my grandmother—always my #1 supporters—whose unconditional love, belief in me, and encouragement have been the bedrock of all my accomplishments.

A heartfelt thanks to Bob McIntosh for pointing out the obvious during the PMC event in October 2022. Your guidance to share my story and challenge to get the book to print gave me the push I needed. After years of sitting on a shelf, this book is finally moving forward, thanks to your encouragement.

To Dr. Duc Vuong, former director of Bariatrics at Lovelace in Albuquerque, NM—your expertise, encouragement, and guidance as my bariatric coach, mentor, and now close friend have been invaluable. You've helped me embrace a profound transformation, both physically and mentally.

To Chris Naugle, my #1 Money Mentor, whose financial wisdom, especially in the Infinite Banking Concept (IBC), has empowered me to take control of my financial future. Your unwavering guidance and support

continue to inspire and equip me as I embrace the entrepreneurial world with confidence and purpose.

To Stephen Nagy, whose guidance in the IBC concept and financial strategies has been pivotal in shifting my mindset from the W2 world to the world of entrepreneurship.

To Dan Clark, my professional speaking coach, whose mentorship has helped me develop my voice and the courage to share my story.

To Jennifer Bowerman, my lifelong friend, who held my hand virtually as I worked tirelessly to quickly bring this book to life.

Thank you for walking this journey with me, for your unwavering belief in my potential, and helping me turn dreams into reality.



About the Author

TESS (TERESA) HULACK HOLDS a Bachelor's Degree in Business focusing on Law, Accounting, and Management. With over 30 years of experience as an Insurance Accounting Professional, she has earned the prestigious AIAF designation (The Insurance Institutes Accounting Professionals designation). She is also a licensed Life Insurance Agent and a student of the IBC Practitioner Program offered by the Nelson Nash Institute.

Beyond her professional achievements, Tess is a Orton Gillingham Multi-Sensory Reading Practitioner, dedicated to fostering literacy and empowering readers of all ages.

Volunteer & Community Involvement

Tess has always been deeply committed to giving back to the community. Her volunteer work includes:

Participated twice in the Make-A-Wish Foundation's 300-mile Bicycle Ride and volunteered for the event on two other occasions.

Serving as a core volunteer for five years with the Michigan Chapter of the Tears Foundation, supporting families in need after the loss of a child with burial costs and grief support.

Hosting children's story hours at Waldenbooks to instill a love of reading in young minds.

In addition to these contributions, she has engaged in various other volunteer activities, demonstrating a lifelong commitment to making a difference.

*"The best way to find yourself is to
lose yourself in the service of others."*

- MAHATMA GANDI

Photo take at the 2024 PMC Money Tank Event



Chris Naugle - Tess - Dr. Duc Vuong

Photo by: Stephen Nagy



From My Heart to Yours Written with love...

DEAR READER,

First, thank you—from the bottom of my heart—for picking up this book. The fact that you're holding it in your hands means that, in some way, our stories have connected, and for that, I am deeply grateful.

Love is not a fleeting emotion but a deliberate choice—a choice to honor, protect, and persevere, even when it feels difficult.

By starting with yourself, you create a foundation for love that is patient, kind, and unshakable, radiating out into the world.

Please know you already have everything you need inside of you. Every ounce of courage, every spark of strength, every drop of determination—it's all there. You might not feel it right now. It might be buried beneath layers of doubt, fear, or exhaustion. But it's

there, waiting for you to uncover, nurture, and let it shine.

Life can sometimes feel like an insurmountable climb, the steps ahead looming so large they block out the light. But I want you to know you don't have to do it all at once. One step at a time, one small act of courage, one tiny victory—that's how we rise. As you embark on this journey, I am with you in spirit. You have the power to rewrite your story, to embrace the beauty of who you are and the brilliance of who you are becoming.

Let this book be a companion, a light to guide you through the dark patches, and a reminder that transformation is not only possible—it's inevitable when you trust in yourself.

I pray that as you read, you find the encouragement, hope, and inspiration you need to climb toward the life you've dreamed of—the life that is waiting for you, more beautiful and fulfilling than you can imagine. You are not alone on this path. I am cheering for you every step of the way, celebrating your wins, and holding space for you as you grow.

This is your time, your journey, your transformation. You are stronger than you know, braver than you feel, and more capable than you've dared to believe. The best is yet to come, and I can't wait to see where this climb takes you. The steps may feel steep, but every single one is worth it. Keep going, and know that I'm here, cheering for you every step of the way.

You've got this.



Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

— 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Preface

IN A WORLD THAT constantly pushes us to achieve more—to be more productive, more successful, more perfect—how do we uncover our true path to fulfillment? How do we sift through the noise and distractions, steering clear of the fleeting allure of instant success, to discover something real and lasting?

Maybe the answer isn't about chasing perfection but about embracing the messy, unpredictable journey of becoming our true selves. Perhaps the magic isn't found in one grand moment of triumph, but in the small, intentional steps we take every single day.

This book invites us to rethink how we approach growth, success, and joy. It's a call to understand that transformation is not a grand, one-time event but rather a series of interconnected moments woven together by resilience, creativity, and the quiet power of persistence.

In these pages, you'll find personal stories of my growth that break away from the ordinary and uncover the remarkable. They explore how embracing imperfection, harnessing the power of compounding, and building meaningful connections can transform

your life and those around you. This journey is not about a single destination but a process—an odyssey of continuous learning, becoming and creating a life you never thought possible.

Life isn't a series of random events; it's a canvas we shape with each choice, obstacle, and each person we touch. In a sense, we are both the artist and the artwork—crafting something beautiful and meaningful from the raw materials of our experiences. This is my story of transformation—about resilience, patience, and finding the power to turn challenges into masterpieces born from chaos.

If you're ready to discover how small shifts in mindset, collaboration, and persistence can unlock extraordinary potential, you're in the right place.

Let's begin.



PRINCIPLE 1

Building a Foundation of Self-Love

"How you love yourself is how you teach others to love you."¹

— Rupi Kaur

FOR AS LONG AS I can remember, my life has been a battlefield—a constant war between who I was and who I desperately wanted to be. My opponent was a shadow that followed me everywhere: my weight. It wasn't just about the numbers on the scale; it was the relentless whisper of inadequacy, the judgment from others, and the frustration of feeling trapped in a body that didn't align with my spirit.

Twenty years ago, I had tasted success, or so I thought. I lost 112 pounds by means of a weekly lunchtime weight loss program—a hard-fought victory over the weight that had held me back.

But life doesn't always follow the script we write. Medical complications arose as if to mock my progress.

A cascade of health issues forced the removal of my female organs, plunging me into a new hormonal reality that felt impossible to navigate. The weight I had shed came back, piece by agonizing piece, and with it came an additional 70 pounds.

The scale tipped to a number I had never seen before, my BMI climbing past 60. The despair was suffocating. I felt betrayed by my body, the journey I thought I had conquered, and the belief that if I worked hard enough, I could rewrite my story.

It seemed as if all I could do was exist under the crushing weight of failure and self-doubt. But sometimes, in our darkest moments, we are offered a lifeline—a single hope, a thread reminding us that change is still possible.

For me, that lifeline was bariatric surgery. It wasn't an easy decision.

The stigma surrounding it whispered, "This is the easy way out," while fear of failure hissed, "What if this doesn't work either?" But I couldn't ignore the small, flickering voice inside me saying, what if this is your chance to truly live?

So, I leaped. The surgery wasn't just about losing weight; it was about reclaiming my life. It forced me to confront not just the physical battles but the emotional ones—the patterns, habits, and beliefs that had kept me in a cycle of self-sabotage.

In the months and years that followed, I discovered something I never expected: the courage to change wasn't in the surgery but in embracing transformation. I began to see that the battle wasn't with my weight but with my mindset.

As I navigated this new chapter, I uncovered key principles that became my compass—guiding me toward a healthier body and a stronger, more confident, and more capable version of myself.

These 7 principles were my blueprint for unlocking potential, building inner confidence, and overcoming fear. They didn't just help me lose weight; they empowered me to tackle every area of my life.

My relationships deepened, my career flourished, and I found a strength I never knew existed. The change process revealed that the limits I once thought defined me were nothing more than illusions.

This book is not a weight-loss story—it's a transformation journey. It's about finding the courage to rewrite your narrative, no matter how often you've failed or how impossible it seems. If you've ever felt stuck, overwhelmed, or convinced that change is beyond your grasp, this is for you.

Because if I've learned one thing, it's this: The courage to change is already within you. Sometimes, you need the right principles—and a little faith—to unlock it.



"We are the ancestors of the future, and what we do now will have an impact." ²

— Luisah Teish , *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals*

Honoring the Past, Build the Future

We are not islands adrift; we are bridges built on the foundations of those who came before us, their strength woven into the fabric of our being. Honoring the past means recognizing the echoes of their struggles and triumphs in our lives.

But it's also to acknowledge that courage—the kind required to face our fears, seize the moment, and build a better future—is born in the here and now.

To understand who we are, we must start by acknowledging our origins. In a world driven by the pursuit of "what's next," it's easy to forget that our foundations are built on the dreams, struggles, and sacrifices of those who came before us.

Their stories are not just distant echoes of the past but are living reminders that the present is woven with threads of their experiences.

According to McMaster University Alumni Question of the Week³ many feel pride in learning about their ancestry.

The question asked: “Why do we derive satisfaction from knowing who our ancestors were? After uncovering details about their lineage, many of those who answered the question reported feeling a more profound sense of identity. This search for connection isn’t just a hobby; it’s an exploration of the past that shapes who we become.

When I set out to piece together my family’s history, I thought it would be a simple project—a neat collection of facts and dates to satisfy my curiosity. I imagined a straightforward path of discovery, unearthing details from the past like treasures in an attic.

But genealogy is rarely tidy. What began as a quest to fill in the branches of a family tree transformed into a journey of self-discovery that reached far deeper than I ever expected.

My mother’s family was familiar territory, rich with stories I had known for years. But my father’s lineage was a blank page—silent and still as if waiting for someone to bring it back to life. With each passing generation, fewer people could tell me about our history.

The only way forward was to become the storyteller myself. There were names on faded documents, half-remembered tales, and vague clues in old letters. I could have stopped there and let the trail go cold,

but I refused to leave the mystery unsolved. I needed to know who we were.

One name kept surfacing like a ghostly whisper: Wojciech. He was my great-grandfather, a name unfamiliar to my tongue yet connected to me by blood. His story began in a tiny Polish village and took shape when he boarded a ship to America, hoping for a better future.

The family he started with my great-grandmother, Aniela, took root on the edges of Detroit. They weren't wealthy or powerful but brave and determined to make a life in a new world they barely understood.

The more I learned, the more I realized that their grit was the foundation of my existence.

Their story was not without heartbreak. When the Spanish Flu devastated their community, Aniela fell victim to the disease, leaving Wojciech to raise their four children alone.

Suddenly, I saw the pandemic that had altered our lives through a different lens—the echo of a crisis that had happened a century before was vibrating in the present.

Wojciech's resilience in the face of unimaginable loss became more than just a story to me; it became a life-line, a reminder that our struggles are never isolated. I felt his determination every time I hit a roadblock, his silent encouragement guiding me to press on.

As I dug deeper, each discovery felt like a letter from the past—a way for my ancestors to speak to me, urging me to understand where I came from. This wasn't about piecing together a perfect portrait but finding the beauty in what was imperfect and incomplete.

Standing at the gravesite of Wojciech and Aniela, my father by my side, I felt a surge of connection so strong it was almost overwhelming. It wasn't just history; it was family. It was us.

My father and I stood there, the headstones shiny and bright. My father placed headstones where there were none in tribute to his grandparents to claim the ancestors we never knew—a testament to the strength that carried our family forward.

Their story became my story, a mirror reflecting the resilience that flowed through my veins. At that moment, the distance between past and present disappeared, and I understood that I didn't need to be perfect to honor them. I just needed to keep moving forward, acknowledging their sacrifices by living my life to the fullest.

Every name on a document, every piece of evidence I uncovered, proved that we are never truly alone. We are the sum of our ancestors' choices, hopes, dreams, and struggles. As I continue this journey, I know that the past isn't a shadow I walk away from; it's a light that guides me toward the future.

The stories of those who came before us are not just relics of the past; they are beacons illuminating the path ahead.

Honoring their journey is embracing our own, carrying their resilience and lessons forward as we write our chapter in the family legacy.

Your history is not a weight—it's a source of strength. Embrace it, learn from it, and let it inspire you to build a future that reflects the best of who you are and who they were.

Our past is not a burden but a gift, a source of strength and wisdom. Together, they create the bridge to the future we dare to build. Courage isn't just a bold act of bravery; it's a quiet defiance in the face of fear.

It's the decision to trust ourselves, to act when standing still feels safer, and to press forward even when uncertainty looms.

Together, the past and present create a powerful synergy. The lessons of yesterday inform our choices today, and our choices today shape the legacy we leave for tomorrow.

Cornerstone: Self-Love & Acceptance

In a world where we are constantly told to strive for more, it's easy to forget that self-love doesn't start with perfection.

It begins with self-acceptance—recognizing who we are, with all our flaws, scars, and complexities, and embracing ourselves exactly as we are.

Research supports this idea: a study by Dr. Kristin Neff found that individuals who practice self-compassion and acceptance are significantly more likely to maintain healthy behaviors over the long term.

Self-acceptance isn't just a feel-good concept; it's the foundation for meaningful and sustainable change.

This principle has been pivotal in my journey and is the cornerstone of lasting transformation.

Learning to Love Myself

Ten years ago, I weighed nearly 400 pounds. My body felt like a prison, and I convinced myself that weight loss alone would unlock the door to freedom. I was wrong.

Even after losing 116 pounds, I found myself still battling the same negative self-talk. I'd stand in front of the mirror, scrutinizing every imperfection, believing I wasn't enough. One slip—missing a workout or indulging in a comfort meal—felt like a catastrophe that confirmed my worst fears: I was a failure.

But something shifted within me over the years. I realized that self-love isn't about perfection; it's about persistence. It's about showing up for yourself, even when you feel unworthy. It's about looking at your scars and seeing strength, not shame.

A pivotal moment came one winter day when I stood at the edge of a zipline platform, strapped into a harness, paralyzed by fear. All my thoughts of progress and self-love seemed to vanish in an instant.

The voice in my head whispered, "You're not cut out for this. What were you thinking?" But another, quieter voice spoke up: "You don't have to be perfect to be brave."

The weight of my past was hanging on that line with me, the nearly 400-pound woman who once sat on the sidelines, invisible, wishing for a life she was too scared to pursue. I had lost so much weight and battled anemia for nearly a decade, and yet, here I was, feeling like that scared, unworthy person all over again.

My hands were shaking, clinging to the rope with the desperation only fear can bring. I was holding onto more than just the line; I was clinging to a lifetime of shame and self-doubt.

And then, something happened—a slight shift, almost imperceptible, but it was enough. A quieter voice broke through the storm of self-criticism. It was the voice of the woman I had fought to become, reminding me that perfection wasn't the goal; persistence was.

I didn't need to be perfect to be worthy of this moment. I needed to hold on, keep trying, and believe I was more than my fears.

Twenty years earlier, when I had lost 112 pounds, I didn't honestly believe in myself. I remembered Oprah's infamous red wagon of fat—a public declaration of triumph that turned into a story of regaining what was lost.

I feared the same fate. Even as the numbers on the scale dropped, the fear that I would inevitably fail lingered, casting a shadow over every victory. But this time was different.

This time, I knew my journey wasn't just about the scale. It was about becoming a woman who could hang from a zipline, shaking with fear but still moving forward. It was about embracing my imperfections, my history, and the parts of myself I still struggled to love.

I wanted a life where I could be fully seen, fully alive, and unapologetically myself.

At that moment, I realized self-love was not a destination but a process. It was about showing up for myself, even when I felt like turning back.

It was about being brave enough to dangle mid-air, trusting that I was strong enough to reach the other side. With the guide's encouragement, I made it across the platform. It wasn't graceful, but it was mine.

That moment taught me that self-acceptance isn't a single leap; it's a series of imperfect steps forward.

Self-Love Starts with Self-Acceptance

"Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves, even when we risk disappointing others." ⁴

— Brené Brown

Self-acceptance is the cornerstone of lasting transformation. Without it, every effort to improve becomes a battle against us.

When we embrace who we are—not despite our imperfections, but because of them—we unlock the power to grow.

The Foundation of Transformation

This concept has been pivotal in my journey and is the cornerstone of lasting transformation.

Studies have shown that individuals who practice self-compassion and acceptance are more likely to maintain healthy behaviors, with the majority of those who focus on positive self-talk demonstrate a higher likelihood of sticking to long-term goals compared to those who rely solely on willpower alone. (Neff, Feb 2022⁵)

This suggests that loving ourselves as we are, imperfections and all, is not just a feel-good idea—it's a practical strategy for sustainable change.

Self-love begins with self-acceptance. Self-acceptance doesn't mean settling or giving up. It means acknowledging where you are today so you can move forward tomorrow.

When we stop punishing ourselves for falling short of impossible standards, we create the space to thrive.

Every step you take towards self-acceptance is a step towards a life where you are free to be unapologetically yourself. Hold on, even when it feels impossible—because you are worth it.

Growing up, I was taught that saying “yes” was synonymous with being good, kind, and worthy. The lessons were clear: always prioritize others, never be a burden, and if someone needed you—no matter what—you were there.

This mindset was deeply ingrained in my upbringing, a byproduct of my Baptist-like faith and the societal norms that subtly shaped my sense of self-worth. I was a master of self-sacrifice before I even understood what that meant.

But as the years passed, I began to notice a pattern. I was exhausted—emotionally and physically drained from constantly putting everyone else's needs ahead of my own. Even when I was overwhelmed, saying “no” felt out of the question.

It was as if my identity depended on my willingness to be available, to say “yes,” even when my well-being hung in the balance.

Studies show that 80% of people experience significant stress when they struggle to say “no” or set boundaries, leading to burnout, anxiety, and even depression.

Yet, despite these risks, many resist boundaries, fearing we’ll be seen as selfish or unkind. I was one of those people—until a quiet, unassuming breakfast with an old friend changed everything.

It was a Saturday morning, and I was seated across from a friend I’d known since elementary school. The sunlight filtered through the café windows as we chatted over eggs and coffee.

In a moment of vulnerability, I shared my struggles—the weight of constantly saying “yes” when every part of me wanted to say “no” and the exhaustion of being there for everyone except myself.

I expected empathy, maybe some shared frustration, but what she said next stopped me cold.

“If I wasn’t feeling up to breakfast today,” she said with a gentle shrug, “I would have just rescheduled. There’s nothing wrong with needing time for yourself.”

It was a simple statement delivered quickly and confidently, yet it hit me like a revelation. For years, I had thought that being a good friend meant always showing up, no matter what. The idea that it was okay—even healthy—to honor my needs was almost foreign.

But there it was, clear and unapologetic, sitting right in front of me like a truth I had always known but never acknowledged.

Something shifted inside me that day. For the first time, I allowed myself to set a boundary, say “no” without guilt, and prioritize my well-being. I realized that taking care of myself wasn’t selfish but necessary.

It was a revelation that reverberated throughout my life, slowly dismantling the belief that self-worth was earned through sacrifice.

I started small: declining an invitation when I felt overwhelmed, choosing rest over obligation, and permitting myself to step back. Each decision was a step toward reclaiming my sense of self.

But the real test came when I faced the discomfort of saying “no” to those I loved most. There were moments when the old guilt crept back, whispers of “you’re letting them down” echoing in my mind.

Yet, with each boundary I set, I felt a sense of empowerment I had never known before. I was honoring myself in a way I never had, and that self-respect began to spill into every area of my life.

This wasn’t an overnight transformation. It was a practice—a continual learning journey to say “no” with kindness and “yes” with authenticity.

I discovered that boundaries weren’t about shutting people out; they were about creating space for myself

to thrive so I could show up for others with a whole heart instead of a resentful one.

Then something remarkable happened. As I honored my own needs, my relationships deepened. I was more present, engaged, and genuine in my connections. The fear that saying “no” would drive people away was replaced by a sense of liberation and peace.

Setting boundaries became a profound act of self-love, a way to nourish my spirit and protect my emotional well-being.

I understood that self-love wasn’t about indulgence—it was about integrity. It was about showing up for myself so I could show up for others without losing who I was.

The journey wasn’t easy. There were—and still are—moments of doubt when saying “no” feels uncomfortable or unfamiliar. But I remind myself that I’m not rejecting people. I’m simply choosing to prioritize my health and happiness. In doing so, I’m better equipped to contribute to the lives of those I care about.

Setting boundaries is not selfish; it is a profound affirmation of self-love. By prioritizing our well-being, we can engage more deeply and authentically with the world around us. Boundaries allow us to replenish our energy, show up fully, and share our best selves with those who matter most.

Embrace the courage to say “no” when necessary, and let it declare your worth—a testament to your love and respect for yourself. **Remember:** Every time you say “no” to something that drains you, you are saying “yes” to your health, happiness, and authenticity. Boundaries are a reflection of the love and respect you deserve.



Practice Saying “No” with Compassion

Start Small: Identify one area where you feel overwhelmed—social commitments, work tasks, or family obligations. Choose one request this week to decline.

Use Gentle Language: Saying “no” can be kind and firm at the same time.

Try responses like:

- “I’d love to help, but I can’t commit right now.”
- “Thank you for thinking of me, but I need to focus on other priorities.”
- “I can’t make it this time, but let’s plan something soon!”

Reflect on the Outcome: Notice how setting this boundary makes you feel.

- Do you feel lighter, less stressed, or more at peace? Reflect on how saying “no” supports your well-being.

Expand Gradually: As you grow more confident, apply boundaries in other areas of your life. Celebrate small victories and remind yourself that honoring your needs is an act of love and courage.



Key Takeaways

1. Self-acceptance is the foundation of true self-love, self-care, and positive personal growth.
2. Transformation doesn't require perfection; it requires action and persistence.
3. Exploring your ancestry can offer insight and deepen the connection to yourself to explore the stories that shaped who you are today.
4. Every small step, even imperfect ones, brings you closer to the life you deserve.
5. By uncovering our past, we create a bridge to a brighter, more connected future.



Practical Steps to Self-Acceptance

Reframe Your Challenges: Write down three things about yourself that you struggle to accept. Then, reframe each one with compassion.

- **Example:** "I hate my scars" could become "My scars are a testament to my strength and resilience."

Replace Negative Self-talk: Commit to replacing one moment of self-criticism each day with a positive affirmation. Post your affirmations where you will see them as a reminder to be kind to yourself.

- **Example:** Instead of saying, "I failed again," say, "I am learning and growing through this experience."

Celebrate Small Wins: Each day acknowledge one small victory-whether it's getting out of bed, preparing a nourishing meal, or practicing kindness toward yourself or others. These small moments of success build momentum for greater change.

By starting with self-acceptance, you're laying the groundwork for transformation and teaching yourself that you are worthy of love, just as you are.



PRINCIPLE 2

Progress Over Perfection

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.”⁶

— Aristotle

The Myth of Perfection

A DEEP-ROOTED MYTH IN the journey of self-improvement often holds us back: the idea that perfection is necessary for success. This belief convinces us that it's not worth trying unless every step is executed flawlessly. But perfection is not the path to progress—it's a roadblock.

A study by the American Psychological Association⁷ found that 92% of people who achieved long-term behavioral changes credited consistent, small steps over drastic, all-or-nothing approaches. Fundamental transformation happens not through perfect execution but through persistence and adaptability.

Breaking free from the myth of perfection is the first step toward meaningful growth. But what does

progress look like in practice? Let me share a moment that changed my perspective forever.

Lessons from the Platform

I stood on a zipline platform, trembling with fear. My heart pounded in my ears as I gripped the harness tightly, my inner voice taunting me: “You’re not cut out for this. What were you thinking?” Fear doesn’t magically disappear when you decide to be brave; it clings to you, daring you to quit.

I called for help. The guide’s voice cut through the chaos in my head: “Do you want me to save you, or do you want me to show you how to save yourself?” With his guidance, I took shaky, uncertain steps forward and made it to the platform. Relief and disappointment mingled within me, but I learned something profound: progress isn’t about perfection. It’s about persistence.

In the past, I tied my self-worth to flawless execution. One slip—skipping a workout or indulging in comfort food—felt like proof of failure. But that day, I realized that every imperfect step forward was still a step toward growth. Progress is messy, but it’s what keeps us moving.

In that moment of fear on the zipline, it was tempting to see my panic as a failure. After all, I had walked to that platform intending to soar to the other side, to prove that I was no longer the woman who watched

life from the sidelines. But I knew I wasn't ready as my legs wobbled and my breath caught. I called for help.

In the past, admitting I wasn't ready would have felt like giving up. Back then, my self-worth was tied to perfection. I'd spent years trapped in an unforgiving cycle, convinced that if I wasn't "all in," I was all out. One slip—whether it was missing a workout or a moment of indulging in comfort food—would send me spiraling back into old habits.

I'd look at the number on the scale like it was a judge, jury, and executioner, my progress undone by a single misstep. It felt like any stumble confirmed that I wasn't enough and would never be enough.

But something had changed in me. Even as I unclipped from that zipline harness, I knew it wasn't the end of my story—it was just a pause. The woman who once couldn't bear to leave the house for fear of being seen was now standing on a platform, daring to step into the unknown, even if it meant stepping back for a moment. This time, I wasn't ashamed. I didn't feel the weight of failure.

Instead, I felt a strange pride because I knew that simply showing up had taken courage I'd never acknowledged.

I started to see that progress isn't about flawless execution. It's about being willing to make the messy, imperfect choices that keep you moving forward. It's about learning to ask for help instead of pretending you have it all together. It's about choosing to get

back on track, even when doubt is louder than your determination.

The only thing I had to get right was the commitment to keep going, believing that my worth wasn't tied to perfection but to persistence.

This mindset shift began to show up in every part of my life. I stopped measuring my success by how quickly I could achieve a goal or how perfectly I could follow a plan. Instead, I started celebrating every tiny step that moved me closer to the person I wanted to become.

Every time I chose to keep going—whether it was getting back to healthier habits after a rough week, revisiting a goal I had put on pause, or daring to speak up for myself in situations where I used to stay silent—I was winning.

The finish line was no longer about a number or an outcome; it was about how consistently I could keep choosing to move forward.

When I look back on my journey, it wasn't grand leaps that changed my life. It was the small, consistent choices.

Join me and commit to progress today. Choose one area of your life where you feel stuck. Identify a single, small step you can take to move forward. For example, if you're working on physical health, start with a 10-minute walk instead of a full workout.

If you're building confidence, practice speaking up once in a low-stakes situation. At the end of the day, reflect on that step and celebrate it as proof that progress is happening. Repeat tomorrow.

Importance of Progress, Not Perfection

"Success always demands a greater effort
."3

— Robert Menzies

Progress is the true measure of success, not perfection. In our self-love journey, each small step forward—no matter how imperfect—is a victory. It's not about never stumbling; it's about how often you get back up, recalibrate, and keep going.

Trust yourself to keep moving, even if you pause along the way. Each act of persistence, no matter how small, is a testament to your strength—and you are enough every step of the way.

Growing up, I lived in a world shaped by rules and expectations. I was the model student, the classic "goody-goody" who always did as she was told. It was a role I embraced, believing it was the safest way to navigate a world that sometimes felt confusing and overwhelming. Statistics⁴ show that adolescents often struggle with peer pressure and judgment, leading to misinterpretations and assumptions about one another's actions.

In a large metropolitan high school with almost a thousand students in my graduating class, these assumptions ran rampant, affecting our behavior and how we saw ourselves and others.

In eighth grade, my tidy world of rule-following came crashing down one spring afternoon. It happened during math class, where my bright red hair was a beacon for teasing. I liked to sit near the front, diligently taking notes, but my friends found endless amusement in making my cheeks flush to match my hair.

On that day, however, I felt the embarrassment was entirely on a different level.

A folded note landed on my desk—a harmless thrill in the days before cell phones.

I was excited to be included in the secret exchange, a rare disruption in my orderly routine. Without thinking, I unfolded it, expecting a silly joke or a friendly comment.

But instead, I found a handful of grass clippings. I stared, confused, unsure why anyone would pass a note full of grass.

Shrugging off the oddness, I passed it along, not realizing the situation I had just entered. Suddenly, the room went silent, and I looked up to see my math teacher standing above me, fury etched across his face. Before I could explain, he confiscated the note

and gave me detention—a punishment that, to my rule-abiding soul, felt like the end of the world.

What happened next was even more bewildering. News of my detention spread like wildfire. Suddenly, I was infamous—the redheaded rebel who defied authority in front of the entire class. People I'd never spoken to offered high-fives in the hallway, impressed by my boldness.

I was stunned. Did breaking a rule—something I had done completely by accident—suddenly make me more interesting?

The next day, the real story emerged. The note I had innocently passed was not a joke but a covert signal related to drugs—a code that flew right over my head.

My classmates, who initially saw me as an unsuspecting participant, now viewed me as a cool, unflappable daredevil. My teacher, convinced I was taunting him with contraband in plain sight, saw me as a defiant rule-breaker. But to me, it had just been grass—a harmless prank gone wrong.

This incident, though short-lived in the grand scheme of high school drama, left a deep imprint on me. It became clear how easily we misinterpreted each other's actions and intentions.

I saw how quickly we all assign motives to others, often based on our limited understanding. The teacher thought he saw a rebel, my peers saw a risk-taker, and I thought I saw a simple prank.

None of us truly understood each other, and that misunderstanding lay the seeds of a lesson I would carry forward for the rest of my life.

Over the years, this moment has come to symbolize empathy's importance—pausing before passing judgment, seeking to understand rather than assume. I learned that what we see is rarely the full story.

Everyone has layers, complexities, and experiences that can't be captured by a single moment or action. It taught me to withhold judgment, lean into curiosity, and be gentler with others—and with myself.

As I look back, I realize that this lesson in empathy is also a call to embrace imperfection—both my own and others. None of us have it all figured out, and that's okay. The messiness of life is what makes it beautiful, rich, and transformative.

I believe that genuine connection comes not from pretending to have all the answers but from acknowledging that we don't and meeting others where they are, not where we wish them to be.

This story reminds us that our greatest teachers are in life's awkward, uncomfortable, and imperfect moments.

In those moments of confusion and misunderstanding, we find the most incredible opportunities for empathy, humility, and connection. By embracing our imperfections and those of others, we create space for deeper understanding and compassion.

Empathy for ourselves grows when we allow ourselves to see beyond our assumptions and judgments. Life is messy and imperfect, and so are we. Letting go of the need to define others—or us—by a single moment opens the door to a world of connection and compassion.

Let's approach each other with curiosity instead of certainty, embracing the truth that every person we meet is more complex than we can ever know. Doing so makes room for understanding, acceptance, and empathy that can genuinely change lives.

Liberation of Embracing Imperfection

"Have no fear of perfection—you'll never reach it." ⁵

— Salvador Dalí

For much of my life, I believed success required perfection. Every report card, task, and goal was a measuring stick of my worth. My life became a relentless pursuit of perfection and, with it, an endless cycle of anxiety, frustration, and self-criticism.

When I embarked on my weight loss journeys , I thought I had to maintain perfection to avoid failure. But perfectionism doesn't sustain progress—it hinders it.

However, research shows that perfectionism is a double-edged sword. According to another study published by the American Psychological Association, perfectionism is linked to higher levels of anxiety and depression, hindering well-being and creating a barrier to authentic happiness.

I didn't need a study to tell me that—I was living it. The tighter I gripped the idea of perfection, the more it slipped away, leaving me overwhelmed, exhausted, and stagnant.

My obsession with perfection wasn't limited to one aspect of my life. It infiltrated everything—especially my weight. I had experienced significant weight loss before, by shedding 112 pounds with my sheer determination and rigid discipline.

But instead of celebrating that achievement, I was paralyzed by the fear of gaining it all back.

As the weight slowly crept back on, my perfectionism went into overdrive. I became consumed with guilt and self-doubt, convinced I had failed yet again. This cycle of losing and regaining weight reached a breaking point.

When my BMI climbed above 60, it was a number that terrified me—a stark reminder that my life was slipping out of my control. For the first time, I allowed myself to consider a different path: bariatric surgery.

Even then, the specter of perfectionism haunted me. Would surgery mean I had failed? What if I couldn't maintain the weight loss afterward?

Skepticism from those around me only fueled my doubts and all the negative self-talk. But in the end, I chose to prioritize my health over my fear of imperfection.

Bariatric surgery became my lifeline—a chance to reclaim my body and my future. I lost 115 pounds and felt a new surge of hope, but just as I was finding my footing, the world shifted.

The pandemic hit, locking us all into an uncertain, isolated reality. It was precisely the moment when many struggled with weight regain, and the temptation to fall back into old habits was intense.

This time, however, something had changed within me. I realized that my journey wasn't about achieving a flawless outcome but learning to adapt, grow, and face challenges without self-judgment. With the guidance of Dr. Vuong, who became a trusted mentor and ally, I began to build my emotional toolkit.

Gratitude journaling, affirmations, meditation, and focusing on self-compassion became my anchors. Instead of beating myself up for every misstep, I celebrated my progress—even the smallest victories.

Perfectionism had kept me stuck for years, and I was determined to break free. I began to challenge the

rigid expectations I had placed on myself, letting go of the idea that every decision had to be flawless.

I took risks, knowing that mistakes were inevitable, and I found strength in my resilience rather than in my ability to avoid failure. Slowly, my mindset began to shift.

I became kinder to myself, recognizing that true success wasn't about never stumbling—it was about having the courage to get back up again and again.

During the lockdown, I wasn't just battling the scale. I was confronting a lifetime of perfectionist thinking that had held me back. I learned that imperfection was not a weakness but a sign of growth, humanity, and a life lived authentically.

I discovered that I didn't have to hide my struggles or mask my flaws. The more I embraced them, the stronger I became.

By the time the world began to open up again, I had lost 170 pounds and gained a deep sense of self-compassion and an acceptance of my imperfect, yet incredible journey.

I had defied the odds—not by being perfect, but by refusing to quit when things didn't go as planned. I shed the heavy burden of perfectionism, and in its place, discovered a newfound lightness and freedom I had never experienced before.

My story isn't one of flawless success; it's a testament to the power of persistence, adaptability, and learning to love oneself, imperfections and all. I look back now and realize that I would never have made it through the dark days of the pandemic if I had continued chasing the illusion of perfection.

I might have given up when the inevitable setbacks occurred, losing myself in a tide of self-doubt. But instead, I embraced progress, not perfection—a mindset that has reshaped my life in ways I never imagined.

Embracing imperfection isn't a sign of weakness; it's a sign of courage. Actual growth is found not in the perfect execution of our plans but in the willingness to keep moving forward despite setbacks. Life is a journey, not a performance.

Let go of the unrealistic expectations that hold you back, and celebrate each step of progress, no matter how small. In doing so, you free yourself to experience the fullness of life, with all its messiness, beauty, and wonder. After all, it's not perfection that defines us but the strength we show in our imperfect journey.

During the pandemic, I learned to embrace imperfection. With guidance from mentors like Dr. Vuong, I built an emotional toolkit rooted in gratitude, affirmations, and self-compassion.

Instead of focusing on what I did wrong, I celebrated even the smallest victories.

This mindset shift liberated me from the paralyzing grip of perfectionism and gave me the courage to keep going.

The Power of Taking Action Over Perfection

"The journey of a thousand miles begins
with a single step."⁶

— Lao Tzu

For years, I was stuck in a cycle of overthinking, convinced that action without perfection was pointless. This mindset left me paralyzed by fear and robbed me of growth opportunities.

According to research⁷ by the Journal of Counseling Psychology, perfectionism can hinder goal achievement, leading to procrastination and a cycle of self-defeat. I knew this truth all too well. Every time I hesitated, I allowed opportunities to slip through my fingers. I always focused on getting it "just right" rather than getting it done.

In July 2021, after spending over a year pouring over books and living in the cocoon of lockdown, I felt a powerful urge to step into the world, find something different, and reshape my life.

I registered for The Experience event with the Money School crew in Buffalo, New York, hoping to find my

path, even if I did not know what it looked like. I attended an event that forced me to confront this fear.

As soon as I arrived, I was confronted by the reality of my fears. The room was buzzing with people who seemed so sure of themselves, their business and real estate expertise shining through every conversation. I was an outsider—burdened with doubt and grappling with the nagging feeling that I didn't belong.

These people had achieved the kind of success I had only imagined, and I wondered if I could ever stand among them as an equal. The fear of failure, of being “less than,” lingered in my mind, holding me back even as I stood in the middle of this vibrant, welcoming space.

But something shifted that weekend. It was a quiet, almost unremarkable moment, standing around a barbecue when the words of a mentor cut through my doubts: “You either live your life achieving, developing, and fulfilling your dreams, or you spend your life helping someone else create the life of their dreams.” It was a jolt to my system.

I suddenly saw that my perfectionism was never about doing things right—it was about avoiding the vulnerability of stepping into the unknown. The illusion of perfection had been my shield against the risk of trying and failing.

In the final hours of the event, I found myself in a conversation with Chris Naugle, the #1 Money Mentor. He saw right through my hesitations, and as he

encouraged me to take a leap, I felt the familiar urge to withdraw. But instead of pushing, he did something unexpected.

He raised his hands in a gesture of surrender and said, "There's no pressure. You don't have to do anything. I just thought you wanted to change your life." His words pierced my defenses.

For the first time, I understood that my real fear wasn't failure but the fear of even trying.

As I left that day, I couldn't shake the feeling that I had missed an opportunity. Driving back to my hotel, I felt a mix of regret and determination building inside me. I knew I had to do something, but I wasn't sure what. With tears welling in my eyes, I was preparing to leave Buffalo.

My phone rang. It was Shawna, the Director of Operations in Chris's organization. Shawna told me they had a t-shirt that was believed to be mine. I looked down at the shirt I already had, confused.

But I knew this was my sign—a chance, an opportunity to rewrite the narrative I had almost left unfinished.

The following day, I returned to the office, accepting the second T-shirt—this beacon of possibility, a chance to rewrite my ending. I approached Chris and the team and expressed my gratitude for their patience.

I shared my epiphany—that the worst thing wasn't failing. It was never daring to take the first step.

At that moment, I was no longer weighed down by perfectionism. I was free to take imperfect action, to make mistakes, and to learn along the way.

From that day forward, my life shifted. I no longer sought perfect conditions or ideal scenarios. Instead, I focused on momentum—trying, failing, learning, and trying again. The grip of perfectionism began to loosen.

I let myself take on projects without knowing every detail, embraced challenges without a guaranteed outcome, and found that the more I acted, the more confident I became.

Growth doesn't come from careful planning and flawless execution—it comes from doing, learning, and the willingness to be vulnerable in the face of uncertainty.

Taking action, even if it's imperfect, became my new mantra. It empowered me to pursue bigger goals, forge new connections, and find a purpose that transcended my fears.

The liberation I felt wasn't because I got everything right but because I allowed myself the grace to get it wrong and to keep moving forward regardless.

Action is the antidote to perfectionism. It's not about getting everything right; it's about having the courage to begin. Each step, no matter how small or

uncertain, brings you closer to your goals than endless planning ever will.

Remember, the fear of failing should never outweigh the thrill of trying. Embrace the unknown, leap, and learn as you go.

True success is found not in perfection but in the relentless pursuit of progress. By breaking free from the grip of perfectionism and focusing on progress over perfection, you'll find momentum that leads to real growth.

Remember my mentor's words: "You either live your life achieving your dreams or spend your life helping someone else achieve theirs." That moment taught me the power of imperfect action.

From then on, I committed to moving forward, even if the steps weren't perfect. Each imperfect action built momentum and confidence, proving that growth comes from trying, failing, and learning.



Key Takeaways

1. Progress happens one small step at a time—don't wait for perfect conditions.
2. Embracing imperfection frees you to take risks and grow authentically.
3. Action, even if imperfect, builds confidence and momentum.
4. Reframe failure as feedback—each setback is an opportunity to learn.



Action Steps to Commit to Progress

Identify an Area of Perfectionism: Choose one area where perfectionism holds you back or reflect on past judgments.

- Think about a time when you misjudged someone, how you felt, or how they may have felt. Try to practice Curiosity over assumption in the future.

Set a Manageable Goal: Break your goal into small, actionable steps.

- Instead of "I must lose 10 pounds this month,"

reframe it as "I'll focus on drinking more water and moving my body three times a week."

- If you make a mistake, forgive yourself. You are human. Mistakes are how we learn. It's okay!

Take Imperfect Action: Commit to one small step today, even if it feels messy.

- Write one page of a project instead of waiting to have everything planned.
- Reframe the imperfection and ask yourself, "What can I learn from this?"

Celebrate Small Wins: Reflect on one thing you accomplished each day, no matter how small.

- "I chose a healthy snack" or "I reached out to a mentor for guidance."

Take a compassionate step: reach out to someone with whom you have had a misunderstanding or misjudged. With empathy in your heart, acknowledge either perspective or move on. Stop beating yourself up over things you cannot control.

- Adjust and keep moving learn from setbacks and continue without judgment.

You'll discover a life filled with resilience, authenticity, and joy by letting go of perfection and embracing progress. Remember, every imperfect step is still a step forward.

According to the National Institute of Health⁸ Patients who engage in consistent post-surgery follow-up and lifestyle adjustments see a 75% greater success rate in maintaining long-term weight loss than those who don't. The ongoing, imperfect effort—step by step—creates a lasting impact.



PRINCIPLE 3

The Beauty of Transformation

"What lies behind and before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

14

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Resilience: Foundation of Inner Strength

RESILIENCE IS THE ABILITY to bounce back from setbacks, adapt to change, and keep moving forward in the face of challenges. It's not about avoiding difficulties but developing the tools and mindset to face them head-on.

For years, I believed resilience was something you either had or didn't. I thought I lacked it. But resilience isn't an inherent trait—it's a skill you cultivate through experience, persistence, and self-compassion.

I spent much of my life on the sidelines—waiting, hoping, and convincing myself that "someday" I'd make the necessary changes. But someday never comes, and perfection is a lie we tell ourselves.

Life requires the strength to move forward, even if it's imperfect. Merely existing is not living. Observing is safe, but nothing changes until you dare to enter the game.

During the most challenging moments of my journey—whether battling self-doubt, facing weight regain, or navigating the isolation of the pandemic—I discovered that resilience came from within.

It wasn't about being unshaken but about learning to recover when life knocked me down.



Finding Resilience in the Darkest Times

I spent most of my adult life feeling like a spectator in my own body. With a BMI over 60 and weighing nearly 400 pounds, my world was limited by fear.

Every day felt like a rehearsed excuse: Maybe I'm not ready. Maybe I'll fail. Perhaps everyone who doubted me was right.

Then I learned something that hit me hard: for many people, the weight returns within ten years after bariatric surgery if they don't commit to ongoing change. Ten years. The clock was ticking, and I had a choice to make. I could wait for the "right" moment or face my fears and act.

You don't have to be great to start, but
you have to start to be great.²

— Zig Ziglar

So, I did. Surgery was just the beginning, not a magic fix. I knew that to keep going, I'd need to change my mindset and accept that setbacks were part of the journey. A couple of years after my surgery, the world went into lockdown. The pandemic swallowed us in fear, forcing me to face not just external challenges but the demons in my mind.

The biggest blessing was when Dr. Duc Vuong, a mentor who guided me through my bariatric journey during the pandemic, reached out virtually to the bariatric community. His words became a lifeline: "Resilience isn't about never falling; it's about always rising." Those words stayed with me as I began rebuilding my strength one small step at a time.

I was no longer a passive observer—I was in the driver's seat, taking control, one imperfect decision at a time.

There were setbacks, doubts, and plenty of moments when I questioned myself. But there was also a step forward for every stumble—a reminder that participating, even imperfectly, was a thousand times better than sitting out. It was never about perfection; it was about being brave enough to try repeatedly without guarantees.

I don't aim for flawless anymore. I aim for engagement. I show up, even on the days when I feel not enough because the only absolute failure is not participating at all. My story is far from perfect, but it's mine, and I'm no longer a spectator in my life.

Perfection is a myth that keeps you on the sidelines. Progress is what makes life meaningful. Don't wait for the perfect moment—act now, knowing that every imperfect step is still a step forward.

I started with gratitude journaling—writing down three things I was thankful for each day, even when it felt impossible to find anything positive. I leaned on affirmations to remind myself that setbacks didn't define me—how I responded to them did. Slowly, I rebuilt my confidence and found the strength to keep going. Each stumble was an opportunity to stand up again, and every imperfect step forward reminded me that resilience is an ongoing process, not a destination.

The Ontario Psychological Association³ found resilient individuals are more likely to overcome adversity and use those challenges as a springboard for personal and professional growth. This speaks to the transformative power of persistence, particularly when coupled with creativity and a belief in one's potential.



The Power of Positive Thinking, Embracing Fear & Transformation

"Your life does not get better by chance, it gets better by change."⁴

— Jim Rohn

Positive thinking isn't about ignoring challenges or pretending everything is fine. It's about focusing on what you can control, finding the silver lining, believing in your ability to overcome obstacles, and acting despite fears.

Resilience and positive thinking go hand in hand. Together, they create a mindset that empowers you to face adversity with courage and optimism. By cultivating these qualities, you can navigate life's challenges without losing sight of your goals.

Fear. It's a universal experience—paralyzing, humbling, and sometimes transformative. What if we saw fear as an invitation to grow instead of running from it? Confronting what scares us isn't just about overcoming an obstacle; it's about stepping into a new version of ourselves, unshackled by the limits we once accepted as immovable.

Front Psychiatry⁵ Study found that exposure to controlled fears—like public speaking or heights—activates resilience, rewires the brain for confidence, and fosters personal growth. But statistics and studies

pale compared to the raw, visceral experience of standing at the edge of fear, looking into its depths, and deciding to leap anyway.

For me, that edge was literal. Now, let's return to the zipline platform perched high above the earth in the rugged, breathtaking terrain of Sundance, Utah. That day started with excitement and camaraderie, a gathering of brilliant minds committed to growth, positive thinking, and transformation. Among them, I stood, determined to face one of my deepest fears: heights.

The irony wasn't lost on me. Here I was, a woman who had clawed her way back from the edge of despair, who had overcome physical and emotional mountains, now brought to her knees by the thought of soaring through the air. But this wasn't just about conquering heights—it was about confronting the version of myself that still whispered, *You're not strong enough. You're not worthy of freedom.*

The journey to the summit was both thrilling and terrifying. The real challenge lay ahead: with a 3,871-foot descent from the peak of the Outlaw Zipline. The views were majestic, the air electric with anticipation. Yet, as I stood on the platform, thinking: *Could I do this?* Digging deep to embrace this fear I was facing.

The first few seconds were euphoric. The wind rushed past me, the landscape blurred below, and for a brief moment, I felt free. But the bliss was fleeting. When it came time to slow down to prepare for the landing platform, panic set in, and I came to a jarring halt

halfway between the start and the finish of this line. This misstep – the thud as my line halted sent doubt spiraling through my mind.

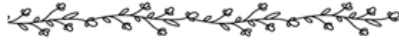
This is it, I thought. This is where I fail. Years of insecurities came rushing back, louder than the wind in my ears. You're still that fat girl, the voice sneered. You're out of your league.

As I dangled midair, frozen, this experience became pivotal in my transformation.

I chose to keep going at that moment. My decision to think positively and put hand over hand inched forward, each movement in defiance of the fear that had gripped me for so long. The process wasn't pretty or seamless, but it was mine, and I embraced it. And when I finally reached the platform, and my feet touched solid ground, the applause that greeted me wasn't for grace—it was for grit.

That day, I didn't just conquer a zipline; I shattered the emotional shackles that had held me back for years. The moment wasn't about perfection; it was about persistence. The fat girl who doubted her strength was replaced by a woman who had found her power in the decision to keep going.

Fear is inevitable, but it doesn't have to define us. Each moment we face head-on, we step closer to the person we're meant to be. Transformation doesn't come from avoiding discomfort; it comes from embracing it, from leaning into the moments that challenge us and discovering the strength we didn't know we had.



The Power of Resourcefulness

"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."⁶

—Nelson Mandela

Life is unpredictable, and challenges are inevitable. Resourcefulness is the ability to adapt, think creatively, and find solutions even in the most challenging situations. It's about making the most of what you have rather than fixating on your lack.

Life has a way of testing our mettle, presenting challenges that can either break us or force us into becoming stronger.

Resilience is the art of transforming setbacks into stepping stones, while positive thinking serves as the compass that keeps us moving forward, even through life's darkest moments. Together, they shape our capacity to overcome, thrive, and inspire others.

The Journal of Happiness and Health⁷, is developing a tool for assessing a resilient mindset. Individuals who experience significant personal growth after a life challenge attribute it to developing a resilient mindset.

This speaks to the power of resilience and creative problem-solving in navigating obstacles.

For over a decade, I battled a relentless enemy: iron deficiency anemia. It wasn't just the fatigue that weighed me down; it was how it stripped the color of my life. Simple tasks felt Herculean.

My world was punctuated by flashing ocular migraines that left me with flashing lights that would take an hour before they would clear my field of vision. These struggles always directed my thoughts to worry whether this would be the way I lived forever—I was purely running on empty every day.

The most unnerving part? To the outside world, I looked fine. I wore my exhaustion like an invisible shroud, quietly enduring the weight of a struggle no one else could see. Every step forward was an act of defiance, a refusal to let this unseen burden define me. Still, I couldn't ignore the quiet erosion of my spirit. The question "Why me?" became a recurring refrain, echoing through the darkest corners of my mind.

But then, one day, something shifted. I realized that while I couldn't control every aspect of my health, I could control my thoughts. I began to challenge the narrative I had been living with for years. Instead of "Why me?" I started to say, "Watch me." It was a simple reframe, but it planted the seeds of transformation.

Iron infusions became a ritual of rebuilding—not just my body, but my mind. Slowly, as my physical health

improved, so did my perspective. I began to see myself not as a passive victim of my circumstances but as an active participant in my recovery. My story was still being written, and I held the pen.

Then came the next challenge, exaggerated by the treatments for anemia: my weight. After years of battling anemia, I found myself facing another uphill climb—a journey that mirrored the mental and emotional struggles of the one I had just endured. This time, however, I had a secret weapon: the knowledge that my thoughts could shape my reality.

I approached this new chapter not with dread but with determination. I learned that resilience isn't about bulldozing through life but bending without breaking. It's about knowing that setbacks are not the end of the story, but opportunities to rewrite it.

This journey taught me a profound truth: resilience is born in our darkest moments, and positive thinking is the light that guides us through them. It wasn't just my body that changed; it was my spirit. I became stronger because of the challenges I faced.

Life will never be a smooth, unbroken path. It's a mosaic of triumphs and trials, each piece adding depth and meaning to the whole. What matters is how we choose to respond. Do we let the storms drown us or learn to dance in the rain?

Life isn't just about survival—it's about transformation. I'm not the person I was a decade ago, and I have the challenges I faced to thank for that. Resilience

and positive thinking aren't just buzzwords; they're lifelines, tools that can reshape how we see ourselves and the world around us.

How did I change those troubling thoughts? Step by step. I began each day with a mantra and a meditation. To this day, I meditate and write positive affirmations to start my day. Then, I take a walk watching the sun rise each morning, clocking nearly two miles as the sun rises.

As I approached a near normal blood panel, I realized it was time to take my pen to paper and write a new story. I was thrilled when an unexpected opportunity arose—the "Wish a Mile" bicycle ride, a 300-mile challenge to raise funds for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. With less than three months to train, I embraced the challenge wholeheartedly. I was filled with equal parts excitement and dread.

The idea of biking that distance was as much intimidating as it was inspiring, but I dove in headfirst, training through rain, exhaustion and self-doubt. The day of the ride, I faced obstacles I hadn't anticipated—my gear system broke, the summer heat was relentless, and my body ached in ways I hadn't thought possible. But instead of turning back, I kept going. I embraced each problem as a puzzle, something to solve on the fly.

Midway through the ride, I earned the nickname "Queen of the Mountain" for maneuvering up steep hills with a malfunctioning gear shifter. Each turn of

the pedals felt like defiance against my limitations. Medical conditions that would have once stopped me cold became mere hurdles, not roadblocks. It wasn't just about physical endurance anymore but about proving that I could rewrite my narrative.

When I finally crossed the finish line three days later, a young child—one of the recipients of a Make-A-Wish grant—placed a medal around my neck. It was the kind of moment that silences doubt. The ride had been more than a fundraiser or a personal challenge; it was a testament to the transformative power of resilience and the creative energy that emerges when we push beyond the limits we thought defined us.

Creating transformation isn't about avoiding difficulties but using them to fuel our most significant transformations. We can transform life's friction into a polished gem to turn every "can't" into a "can" through sheer determination and resourcefulness. The journey is never easy, but the finish line—whatever that looks like for each of us—makes the struggle worthwhile.

I used small, actionable strategies to stay on track when I struggled. I adapted my workouts to my living room, replaced restaurant meals with home-cooked alternatives, and leaned on virtual support groups for encouragement. These adjustments weren't perfect, but they kept me moving forward.

I dare you to take the "Imperfect Action Challenge": Choose a goal you've been putting off because you

feel unprepared—starting a fitness routine, learning a new skill, or tackling a personal project. Commit to taking one small, imperfect action step toward that goal every day for a week. It doesn't matter how messy or incomplete it feels; the goal is to move forward each day, not to be perfect.

At the end of the week, reflect on what you learned. Did the world end because your actions weren't perfect? Probably not. Use this experience to create momentum for the next step. Progress is built on small, consistent actions—embrace each imperfect attempt as a victory.

Finding Empathy in Imperfection

"Accept yourself, love yourself, and keep moving forward. If you want to fly, you have to give up what weighs you down."⁸

— Roy T. Bennett (The Light in the Heart)

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. It's a cornerstone of resilience because it allows us to connect with others and find strength in shared experiences.

We become more compassionate toward ourselves and others when we embrace our imperfections.

In the stillness of the lockdown, the world felt suffocatingly quiet, and I was left alone with my

thoughts—a dangerous place to be when self-doubt is already lurking. The isolation was more than physical; it was mental, emotional, and spiritual. I had lost 115 pounds—a tremendous achievement by any measure—but even as the number on the scale dropped, my internal battles raged on.

Fear gnawed at me, whispering that the old, heavier version of myself was waiting to resurface, to drag me back to a place I had fought so hard to escape.

Research shows that nearly 95% of people who lose weight through dieting regain it within one to five years. This statistic haunted me, a looming specter threatening to unravel my progress. I was desperate for a lifeline to anchor me as the world outside and within felt more unpredictable than ever.

That lifeline came from an unexpected source—a virtual community. During those isolated days, I stumbled across Dr. Vuong's online weight loss group, led by a former bariatric surgeon turned motivational coach. His daily live sessions were more than a series of tips and tricks; they were a sanctuary for people like me, seeking guidance for the body, mind, and soul.

Dr. Vuong's lessons weren't about calorie counting or restrictive diets but about affirmations, gratitude, and the quiet but relentless practice of appreciation.

I had never considered these tools—simple practices that seemed almost naive in their optimism, yet I was willing to try anything. I began integrating affirmations into my daily routine, scribbling self-love phrases in a

journal, whispering them to myself before bed, and letting them fill the empty spaces that doubt had once occupied.

It was working. Slowly but surely, I felt a shift. I wasn't just losing pounds—I was shedding layers of insecurity and guilt.

Night after night, I played recordings of my affirmations as I drifted off to sleep, their gentle cadence lulling me away from the anxiety that often crept in after dark. These nightly rituals became a lifeline, a quiet revolution against the negativity gripping me for so long.

Then came the night that nearly shattered it all. As I lay in bed, listening to my voice affirming my worthiness, a sudden, dissonant phrase broke through the recording: "I have enemies." My breath caught in my throat.

How had this message of darkness slipped into my sacred space of positivity?

Childhood memories of whispered warnings about subliminal messages flooded my mind. Had I betrayed myself with a careless mistake?

I nearly erased the recording in a panic, but something stopped me. Instead, I chose to listen again, this time with full awareness. And there it was—clear as day.

The message wasn't "I have enemies." It was, "I have inner peace."

My fears had twisted the words, distorting their meaning until they reflected my insecurities. At that moment, I laughed—a deep, honest laugh that felt like the first breath after coming up for air.

My fear had been a phantom, a creation of my anxious mind.

That night was a turning point. I realized I was the composer of my own life's melody, and self-love was the instrument that could bring it into harmony.

With each affirmation and each practice of gratitude, I rewrote the narrative of who I was and who I could be.

Self-love wasn't just a tool; it was a practice, a discipline, a lifestyle that reshaped my mind and reality.

My journey didn't end with the pandemic; it continued well beyond it. I lost another 60 pounds, not through deprivation but through the steady nurturing of my mind and spirit.

The affirmations that had once felt awkward and forced now came naturally, like the notes of a well-practiced song.

Negativity lingered at the edges of my mind, but it no longer held power over me. I had found something more substantial, a deep, unshakable peace born from realizing I deserved my love and care.

The transformation wasn't just physical. It was spiritual, emotional, and profoundly personal. I was no

longer at war with myself. Instead, I was in concert with the person I was becoming, conducting a symphony of self-love that resonated in every corner of my life.

It was a song of resilience, joy, and authenticity that had been there all along, waiting for me to listen.

Self-love is not a destination but a practice—a symphony we compose daily. Through simple yet profound acts of affirmations, gratitude, and appreciation, we can transform our mindset and embrace the harmony of inner peace.

Each word of kindness we offer ourselves is a note in the song of our transformation, guiding us away from doubt and into a life of joy, resilience, and authenticity.

During my journey, I learned that vulnerability isn't a weakness—it's a bridge. Sharing my struggles allowed me to connect with others facing similar challenges. Together, we found support, encouragement, and hope.

The human spirit is remarkably resilient, and our thoughts have the power to shape our reality. We unlock the strength to rise, grow, and inspire by choosing positivity and resilience in adversity.

Remember, you are the author of your story. You can write a triumphant ending no matter how difficult.

Key Takeaways

1. Identify and name your fear(s) or challenges: whatever they are, acknowledge them and know that by doing so, you bring them into the light and can overcome the shadows of doubt they create.
2. Resilience is not about avoiding challenges but learning to rise after every fall.
3. Positive thinking empowers you to focus on solutions rather than problems.
4. Resourcefulness helps you adapt and thrive, even under challenging circumstances.
5. Empathy creates deep connections and resilience by embracing shared experiences.



Action Steps: Build a Morning Routine

By practicing gratitude every morning with a 5–10-minute Meditation can truly start the day the right way.

Reflect on Past Judgments: Consider a time when you misjudged someone or a situation based on limited information. Reflect on how this misjudgment made you feel and how the reality of the situation differed from your initial assumptions.

Practice Curiosity Over Assumption: In your next interaction with someone, focus on listening deeply rather than jumping to conclusions. Ask open-ended questions to understand their perspective better. Instead of assuming you know why they act as they do, approach them curiously.

Affirmations: Start your day by writing or reciting three affirmations.

Examples:

- “I am worthy of love and care.”
- “I choose to embrace joy today.”
- “I am enough, just as I am.”
- “I am capable of facing any challenge”
- “Every setback is a step toward my growth.”

TIP—Create a Ritual: Pair your affirmations with a relaxing activity, such as walking at sunrise, sipping tea, or meditating. Let this ritual be your grounding practice.



Reframe Setbacks: When faced with a challenge, ask yourself, "What can I learn from this?"

- **When doubt creeps in, remind yourself:** I am a work in progress, and that's okay. Say your affirmations or re-read your journal to reinforce positivity.
- When encountering a challenge, write it down so you can visually see it. Then, ask, "How can I see this differently?" Writing it down opens our mind to breaking it down into manageable tasks or approaching it from a different angle.

Adapt to Your Circumstances: Identify one area where you feel stuck and brainstorm creative solutions to move forward. Example:

Move your Body: If you can't access a gym, create a simple home workout routine.

- There is always another way to overcome an obstacle; be open to finding it. Whether it's a walk, yoga, or just stretching, physical activity clears the mind, gets the blood flowing, and clears your lymphatics. Depending on the time you walk, walking can also allow you to reflect on the day's events or prepare for the day.

Connect with Others: Share your journey with someone you trust. Vulnerability can create deeper connections and mutual support.

Share Your Imperfection: Openly acknowledge a mistake or imperfection in your own life. Sharing your imperfection can humanize you and foster more profound, empathetic connections with others, whether it's a personal vulnerability or a professional misstep.

Commit to Compassionate Action: Choose one person who has made you feel misunderstood or judged in the past. Reach out with empathy, acknowledging their perspective and offering compassion instead of judgment. Let them know you're open to understanding them better.

Celebrate Small Wins: Reflect on one thing you accomplished today, even if it feels insignificant.

Commit to this ritual for 30 days (about four and a half weeks), observing how your mindset and resilience strengthen over time. Making these practices a habit will equip you with the tools to face life's challenges with positivity and grace.

By cultivating resilience, positive thinking, and empathy, you'll discover an inner strength that empowers you to navigate life's challenges with grace and determination. Remember, every step forward—no matter how small—is a testament to your courage and resilience.

By actively practicing empathy through imperfection, you can build richer, more authentic connections with others and yourself.

The human spirit is remarkably resilient, and our thoughts have the power to shape our reality. We unlock the strength to rise, grow, and inspire by choosing positivity and resilience in adversity. Remember, you are the author of your story. You can write a triumphant ending no matter how difficult life is.

never give up

PRINCIPLE 4

Build Meaningful Connections

"The quality of your life is the quality of your relationships."¹

— Tony Robbins

The Importance of Connection

HUMANS ARE HARDWIRED FOR connection. Relationships give us meaning, support, and growth. Yet, building meaningful connections can be challenging in a world where isolation is increasingly common. Connections aren't just about proximity; they're about richness. They're built on empathy, trust, and shared vulnerability. During my journey, I learned that leaning on others doesn't make you weak—it makes you human.



The Role of Mentors and Community

In the early stages of my transformation, I thought I had to do everything alone. Asking for help felt like admitting failure. But that mindset changed when I met mentors who guided, encouraged, and believed in me even when I couldn't believe in myself.

During the pandemic, I also discovered the power of community. Virtual support groups became a lifeline, offering encouragement and accountability. Sharing my struggles and hearing others' stories reminded me that I wasn't alone.

The Power of Proximity

"You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with."²

— Jim Rohn

When I first heard this quote, I brushed it off as just another motivational platitude, one of many circulating in the self-help world. But as I moved deeper into my journey of transformation, the truth of these words began to resonate with me in a way that I could never have predicted.

Research shows that social networks profoundly impact our behavior and health—our close relationships can influence our decisions, our outlook, and even our habits in subtle yet powerful ways.

This understanding shifted my approach to personal growth and professional development, revealing the untapped potential that proximity holds for genuine transformation.

I wasn't always someone who saw the value in networking or mentorship. In fact, for a long time, I didn't believe in it at all. I thought success was about going it alone, proving myself through hard work and self-determination.

The idea of relying on others or seeking guidance from mentors felt like a cop-out—like admitting I couldn't make it alone.

Yet, despite my independence, I found myself stuck, constantly bumping against the same walls, unable to see past my limitations.

The turning point came when I started engaging with an online community centered around professional growth. These virtual connections were the first step in broadening my horizons, showing me perspectives I had never considered.

My initial skepticism began to fade as I saw the value of sharing experiences and learning from others who had walked similar paths.

But the fundamental transformation didn't begin until I took those online connections offline. When I started meeting people face-to-face—mentors, coaches, and peers already living the life I aspired to live—I felt a shift.

Suddenly, the things that once seemed impossible began to feel within reach.

It's a proven fact: Our closest relationships can determine our habits, outlook, and success. A study by the Framingham Heart Study³, which tracked social networks over decades, showed that a person's chances of becoming obese increased by 57% if they had a friend who became obese.

Conversely, the opposite was also true—healthy behaviors were contagious. This realization hit me, especially as I reflected on my weight loss journey. After undergoing weight loss surgery in 2016, I lost half my body weight—a monumental achievement but one that required constant vigilance and support.

I began to understand that it wasn't just about what I ate or how I exercised; it was also about who I spent my time with and what values they reinforced.

Proximity became my secret weapon. The more time I spent with people who were pushing boundaries, challenging old beliefs, and living life on their terms, the more I began to see the world differently.

I started to question my personal and professional assumptions about what was possible. In these spaces—around mentors who believed in my potential, in communities that celebrated growth and resilience—I found the courage to redefine my life.

Breaking away from the confines of my W2 job, I took a leap of faith.

With the guidance of experienced mentors and the encouragement of my peers, I transitioned into roles that aligned with my passions—becoming an author, an aspiring speaker, and a coach.

These were titles I never thought I would hold, but they were possible because I had surrounded myself with individuals who saw potential in me long before I saw it in myself.

They became the mirrors that reflected a version of me I had yet to embrace, and their influence was the catalyst I needed to step into that vision fully. Parallel to my professional evolution, my health journey mirrored the same lessons.

It wasn't just about losing weight but shedding old habits, outdated mindsets, and limiting beliefs. The discipline I cultivated in one area of my life fed into the other, creating a cycle of positive reinforcement.

I learned that proximity didn't just apply to the people I surrounded myself with—it also applied to the thoughts I entertained, the spaces I inhabited, and the values I chose to uphold.

Who you surround yourself with matters. Proximity to supportive, inspiring people can amplify your growth, while toxic relationships hinder it. Transformation thrives in environments that nurture your potential.

Surround yourself with individuals who challenge you, uplift you, and believe in your dreams. Seek mentors,

friends, and communities that align with your values and goals. Remember, proximity isn't just about physical closeness—it's also emotional and intellectual alignment.



Coaches, Mentors, and Embracing the Unexpected

"A mentor is someone who sees more talent and ability within you than you see in yourself and helps bring it out of you."
4

— Bob Proctor

The role of coaches and mentors in personal growth is transformative. They guide us to spaces we would have otherwise avoided. These guiding figures help us step beyond our comfort zones, confront our fears, and see the possibility of change in ourselves. For me, mentorship wasn't just a nudge—it was a challenge to unearth a voice I didn't even know I had.

Research suggests that having a mentor can be pivotal to personal and professional growth. According to a study by the American Psychological Association, individuals with mentors are more likely to experience increased self-confidence and professional success,

with mentoring relationships boosting motivation by up to 50%.

It's a reminder of how the right guidance can change the trajectory of one's journey.

From Shy Observer to Reluctant Star

I was content with blending into the background for most of my life. As a teenager, I was the quintessential shy student. I prided myself on being so adept at invisibility. I wasn't surprised when I was nominated in high school for one of the "Class Shyest." The anonymity was comfortable, and I made an art of sidestepping the spotlight.

But life rarely respects the comfort of the shadows. During the isolation of the pandemic, an unexpected opportunity found me—a challenge from Dr. Vuong, a mentor with a knack for encouraging people to embrace the uncomfortable. He tasked me and others with going live on Facebook for 30 consecutive days, sharing pieces of our journeys.

The mere thought of hitting that "**Live**" button filled me with dread, but I agreed—on the condition that I could cloak myself in the darkness of my dimly lit room. I imagined I could stay hidden and avoid being truly seen.

The first few broadcasts were as awkward as you'd expect. I stumbled through my words like a deer caught in the headlights of my self-consciousness. Yet, some-

thing curious happened each time I hit "End Broadcast." I realized that I had survived—no disaster, no humiliation—just another step forward.

Gradually, those five minutes of sharing my story, even shrouded in dim light, became less terrifying. I was learning that every small moment of courage builds upon the last.

The turning point arrived when Dr. Vuong issued a second challenge: to go live "in a public Facebook group," a space I couldn't control or manipulate with strategic shadows. In a coaching session, he pointed at me and said, "You're ready."

I wasn't, but I also knew I couldn't turn back. His belief in my ability became my compass, even as self-doubt clawed at my resolve.

Stepping Into the Light

My first public broadcast was a nervous battle, but I did it.

Then, something incredible unfolded—I started to receive feedback. Messages of support, stories from strangers who resonated with my words, and encouragement from unexpected corners of my life poured in.

I began to understand that this wasn't about perfect storytelling or polished delivery; it was about showing up and allowing myself to be seen.

Family members who had once been indifferent were suddenly watching and cheering me on. A small but meaningful gesture, a phone stand from my cousin, symbolized the unseen network of support I was building with each vulnerable moment. And somewhere along the line, the challenge stopped being about facing fear and transformed into something empowering.

I had found a community, a platform, and a voice that resonated with others. The girl who once feared being noticed was now connecting with hundreds of people, not from a place of perfected expertise but from raw, honest experience.

A Mentor's Challenge, A Life Transformed

This transformation would never have been possible without the guidance of mentors like Dr. Vuong, whose challenge to step into visibility altered my course.

He saw potential in me that I couldn't yet see in myself and dared me to grow into it. Mentorship isn't about directing someone down a pre-planned path, it's about nudging them toward the edges of their comfort into the spaces where actual growth happens.

Mentors and coaches play a unique role in personal growth. They see possibilities in you that you might not see in yourself. Mentors helped me reframe chal-

lenges, set realistic goals, and stay accountable during my journey.

But growth also comes from unexpected connections. A chance conversation at an event, advice from a stranger, or a moment of shared vulnerability can spark transformation. Embracing these opportunities requires an open heart and a willingness to step outside your comfort zone.

The most remarkable transformations often result from embracing the unexpected and trusting those who challenge us to step beyond what we think is possible. Mentors and coaches aren't just guides, they are catalysts for change, shining light on the paths we're too afraid to walk alone.

When you step out of the shadows and into uncertainty, you might discover a version of yourself you never imagined.

Let go of the desire to remain unseen; a world of growth waits when you decide to be visible.

The Synergy of Collaboration

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."⁵

— Helen Keller

Collaboration isn't just about working with others; it's about creating something greater together than you

could alone. During my journey, I realized that my progress wasn't just my own. It resulted from shared effort—mentors guiding me, friends supporting me, and communities cheering me on.

When collaborating, you tap into collective wisdom, skills, and strength. This is a reminder that transformation is rarely a solo act. We grow stronger together.

In the landscape of personal and professional development, there is an undeniable truth: we are not meant to journey alone. The most profound transformations arise not in isolation but through the power of connection—the threads of networking, collaboration, and compounding skills that intertwine to create a fabric far more potent than any single strand.

This principle speaks to the heart of my journey, where community synergy and incremental progress catalyzed lasting change.

According to a LinkedIn study⁶, nearly 85% of jobs are filled through networking, and connection extends far beyond careers—transforming personal endeavors and sparking unforeseen opportunities. For me, this truth was brought into stark relief during the global lockdown—a time when isolation could have driven me backward. Instead, it became the fertile soil for a profound metamorphosis.

Before the lockdown, I had long felt the weight of my past, battling both physical limitations and mental barriers that seemed insurmountable. Each attempt to change felt like taking two steps forward and three

steps back. But during those months of isolation, I faced a pivotal choice: retreat into old habits or seek out new connections that could help me break the cycle. I chose the latter, which altered my life's course.

What began as a few tentative connections—a Zoom support group here, a professional network call there—soon evolved into a web of relationships I never imagined. I was surrounded by individuals who had faced similar challenges and emerged with new tools, fresh perspectives, and a willingness to share their experiences.

I realized that networking wasn't just about making contacts but forging a community that lifted each other up, sharing wisdom, struggles, and triumphs. The compounding effect of this newfound community was astonishing. Thanks to insights from those who had walked the same road, the weight-loss techniques I had struggled with for years began to click.

My writing, communication, and public speaking skills, areas where I had always felt insecure, flourished as I collaborated with mentors and peers who saw my potential and guided me forward. What started as a series of small, manageable changes snowballed into an overwhelming momentum.

My journey soon took me beyond the bounds I had set for myself. The book I once hesitated to write was completed. A connection tool, seeking to inspire others who had faced similar struggles. The online speaking engagements I had once feared now became

opportunities to share my story and to stand as proof of what's possible when you harness the power of community and the compounding strength of incremental growth.

It all started with small steps, one conversation, connection, and collaboration at a time. This is the essence of "cynosure": becoming a guiding light, not because of grand achievements made in isolation but because of the combined effect created by the collective. Just as the North Star guides lost travelers, the power of connection can steer us through life's darkest moments, leading to a place of clarity and purpose.

The beauty of networking, collaboration, and compounding skills is that they are accessible to all. You don't need to have it all figured out; you need to take that first step, to reach out, connect, ask for help, and share your knowledge. Doing so creates a ripple effect that spreads far beyond your story, impacting lives you may never even meet.

The power of proximity is real and transformative. Who you spend time with and what you expose yourself to influences your beliefs and life. Surround yourself with people who challenge you to grow, inspire you to dream bigger, and hold you accountable for your potential. Let go of environments that reinforce limitation and mediocrity and seek out those that cultivate possibility and excellence.

The right proximity doesn't just change circumstances, it changes you. It gives you the courage to pursue the dreams you've kept hidden and the support to see them through. In the end, transformation isn't about doing it alone; it's about choosing the right people to walk alongside you on the journey.

Transformation is not about solitary struggle but the connection that arises from networking, collaboration, and continuous effort. The compounding power of small, daily actions, guided by the wisdom and support of a community, can turn the impossible into reality. Let your journey become a beacon of possibility, lighting the way for others as you embrace the art of connection and the brilliance of compounding progress.



Key Takeaways

1. Meaningful connections are built on trust, empathy, and shared vulnerability.
2. Proximity to supportive people amplifies your potential for growth.
3. Mentors and unexpected connections can open doors to transformation.
4. Collaboration creates opportunities for collective growth and shared success.



Action Steps to Build Meaningful Connections

Perform a "Proximity Audit": Take an honest inventory of the five people you spend the most time with, in person, online, and through media consumption. Reflect on each relationship in your life.

- Are they supportive, uplifting, and aligned with your goals?
- Do they reinforce limiting beliefs?
- Are they pursuing growth and excellence, or are they content with the status quo?
- How do I feel after spending time with these people —motivated or drained?
- Identify one relationship to nurture and one to reassess.

Note: If you identify relationships that hinder your growth, consider creating more distance or set boundaries.

Seek spaces—whether in professional networks, social groups, or online communities—where you can connect with individuals who align with your aspirations.

- **Start small:** attend a meetup, join a master-mind group, or schedule a coffee chat with someone you admire. The goal isn't to cut ties

abruptly but to be intentional about surrounding yourself with people who uplift and elevate you. Your growth depends on the company you keep.

Seek a "Visibility Challenge": Identify one area in your life where you've been hiding—whether at work, in a personal relationship, or in a passion project you've kept quiet. Choose a trusted mentor or coach and share your goal of stepping into visibility in that area. Then, agree to a specific challenge together—such as giving a presentation, sharing a story publicly, or leading a meeting—that forces you to stretch beyond your comfort zone.

- After completing the challenge, reflect on the experience with your mentor.
- What did you learn about yourself? How did you grow?
- Use this reflection to identify the next step, creating a cycle of courage and visibility. The goal isn't to eliminate fear but to gradually expand your comfort zone with the support of someone who believes in you.



Join a Community: Find a group or community that aligns with your interests or values. Engage in conversations, share your experiences, and build connections.

Practice Vulnerability and reach out to one person: Share one challenge or goal with a trusted friend or mentor. Vulnerability strengthens bonds and invites support.

Start today by planning to connect with at least one person this week—whether for advice, collaboration, or to listen—and watch how the momentum builds, compounding into something far more significant than you could achieve alone.

Collaborate on a Goal: Partner with someone to work toward a shared objective, whether a fitness challenge, a creative project, or a professional milestone. By fostering meaningful connections, you'll create a network of support and inspiration that fuels your growth. Remember, life's most profound transformations happen in the company of others.



PRINCIPLE 5

Living Authentically

"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."¹

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Essence of Authenticity

AUTHENTICITY MEANS SHOWING UP as your authentic self without masks or pretenses. **It's about aligning your actions with your values** and being unapologetically you. Yet, in a world driven by comparison and societal expectations, living authentically can feel like an act of defiance.

Authenticity embraces who we are rather than who we think we need to be. It isn't about perfection but integrity—being honest with yourself and others, even when it feels uncomfortable.

Breaking Free from Expectations

For much of my life, I felt trapped by expectations imposed by others and the ones I placed on myself. I needed to fit a specific mold to be accepted and successful. But no matter how hard I tried, I always felt like I was falling short.

The turning point came during a workshop where we were asked to write down what we valued most. As I stared at the blank page, I realized many of my actions didn't align with the person I wanted to be. I had spent so much time trying to meet external expectations that I had lost sight of my values.

That realization was both painful and liberating. I began stripping away the layers of what I thought I "should" be and focusing on who I indeed was. It wasn't an overnight transformation, but each small step toward authenticity brought a profound sense of freedom.

I want to share that my journey toward understanding myself began with a personal connection to adversity—my cousin, who struggled with undiagnosed dyslexia for most of his childhood education. By the time the truth came to light, the damage had been done.

He was labeled "difficult" and "unmotivated," a bright mind caught in a system that didn't understand him.

Watching him fight against the tide and drift away from his dreams was heartbreaking. His story became my driving force—a silent promise to help others navigate the labyrinth that had trapped him. Fueled by that commitment, I became a tutor, guiding students through the complexities of reading and learning.

Equipped with Orton-Gillingham techniques, I worked one-on-one with thirty students each week over five years while juggling a demanding full-time job.

The hours were long, and the work was intense, but witnessing the gradual transformation in my students was worth every moment. Each breakthrough, each spark of understanding, felt like another thread in a tapestry of triumph woven from resilience, patience, and a willingness to dig deeper.

But life has a way of throwing curveballs. The health challenges mentioned previously forced me to step away from tutoring, a decision that felt like closing a chapter I wasn't ready to end. I wondered if the impact I had made would fade as quickly as my presence in those children's lives.

Then, the lockdown hit, and echoes of my work began to reverberate back to me. Former students, now young adults, reached out—one had earned a bachelor's degree, several working in healthcare, and others had become pilots or aviation mechanics. They had taken the lessons we built together and had crafted their own lives, overcoming obstacles with the tools I had given them.

In those moments, I understood the true art of creation. It wasn't just about tutoring or guiding individuals but about planting seeds of resilience that grew long after I had moved on. The students I once helped were now passing the torch, becoming mentors, and inspiring others.

We were all part of a larger, interconnected work of art—a collective masterpiece built from shared moments of struggle and perseverance.

Aligning Actions with Values

Ultimately, the essence of creation is about more than individual triumphs; it's about how our stories interlace with the stories of others, crafting a vibrant tapestry of collective transformation. Each thread of effort, each struggle we face with courage, adds to a bigger picture that is rich, textured, and endlessly evolving.

As we mentor and guide others, we become part of a collective work of art—a tapestry where each story enriches the whole.

True transformation requires persistence and patience, but the masterpiece that emerges is a testament to the beauty of a life with purpose and passion.

Living authentically requires clarity about what matters most to you. Life feels more meaningful and fulfilling when your actions align with your values. But first, you must identify those values.

Take time to reflect on the principles that guide you. Are you prioritizing them in your daily life? If not, what changes can you make to live more authentically?

Overcome Fear of Judgment and Setting Realistic Goals

"When you judge another, you do not define them; you define yourself."²
— Wayne Dyer

One of the most significant barriers to authenticity is the fear of judgment. We worry about what others will think, and this fear can keep us from fully expressing ourselves. But living authentically means letting go of the need for external validation.

Transformation is rarely a straight path; instead, it is a relentless process of turning setbacks into stepping stones. It's about embracing each challenge, not as a barrier but as raw material for growth.

The ability to turn adversity into a catalyst for personal evolution is what I call creative alchemy—transforming life's inevitable challenges into moments of triumph through persistence, resilience, and a dash of creativity.

When I started sharing my journey openly—the struggles, the setbacks, and the victories—I was terrified

of being judged. But vulnerability created deeper connections and inspired others to embrace their truths.

The more I let go of the fear of judgment, the more authentic and fulfilling my life became.

In the complex symphony of life, progress is rarely a straight line. It's a dance that requires rhythm, resilience, and a willingness to pivot when the melody shifts.

According to a study published in *Psychological Bulletin*³, individuals who set realistic, achievable goals are 32% more likely to maintain long-term habits and experience sustainable growth than those who set overly ambitious targets. This highlights the importance of a measured, adaptable approach to personal development, where progress is celebrated in its smallest forms.

My lesson in setting realistic goals unfolded in a world governed by numbers—an office filled with the musty scent of old paper ledgers, the kind that crinkled when touched and resisted change with every fiber of their yellowed pages.

While these habits learned early in my career held on, I was now later in my career, a time when manual bookkeeping ledgers were a thing of the past.

With rigid columns and rows, these old-style paper ledgers became a powerful metaphor for how I initially approached goal setting: structured, uncompromising, and unyielding. But life, much like the arrival of

digital accounting systems, doesn't adhere to the rigid paper plans of the past.

This revelation hit hard during a period of intense upheaval. I was knee-deep in property & casualty filing requirement discussions—a convoluted web of regulations, compliance, and countless debates that often spiraled into chaos.

The pressure to navigate this shifting landscape was immense, and I was buried in an avalanche of unrealistic expectations, both from others and myself. Each time a plan unraveled and a carefully crafted goal fell apart, I felt like I was losing ground.

Where would I find the data needed in this remote world?

Everyone was remote, and no one was prepared for this new environment. It happened too quickly. Just two weeks and our pandemic would be over, but that turned into two years.

The lockdown—a period of forced stillness that became fertile ground for rethinking my approach to progress. I was stuck at home, with my plans for weight management and personal development thrown into disarray.

If I had to rework my work environment, why wasn't I reworking the personal landscape? That's when it hit me: I needed to focus on what I could do right now instead of striving for the impossible. It wasn't about perfection; it was about consistency.

I set small, achievable goals—daily walks around the block, a commitment to cook one healthy meal each day, and a promise to engage in mindful breathing and meditation every morning.

The results were initially subtle, barely noticeable ripples in the vast pool of uncertainty. But as I stuck with these small changes, something began to shift.

My daily walks became longer hikes, my healthy meals became more elaborate, and the simple mindful breathing became a full meditation practice. Each small victory created a ripple effect that spread into other areas of my life—finances, relationships, and beyond.

By the end of that first year in lockdown, I realized that I had achieved more than I ever thought possible, not through a rigid plan but through adaptable, consistent effort.

The greatest lesson I learned was that growth is not about being perfect or sticking to an inflexible plan. It's about setting achievable goals that you can adjust as circumstances change.

Life will throw curveballs, but if you focus on the next small, realistic step, you'll keep moving forward. Each of those steps adds up, slowly but surely, into a dance of progress that carries you to a place you couldn't have imagined when you first began.

Transformation isn't a sprint; it's a marathon. It's not about making massive leaps but embracing one foot's steady, patient step in front of the other.

As you navigate your journey, remember that every step counts, no matter how small. Keep moving, stay flexible, and trust that progress, even in its smallest form.

Embracing Vulnerability as Strength

"The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials."⁴

— Seneca

Vulnerability is often seen as a weakness, but it's one of the greatest acts of courage. When we allow ourselves to be seen as we are—flaws and all—we create space for genuine connections and self-acceptance.

Life has a way of shattering the assumptions we hold closest. It often takes a profound, sometimes devastating experience to challenge the biases we didn't even realize were there. For me, it was the tragic loss of my cousin Joey.

His complicated, difficult, and all too brief life forced me to confront the simplistic narratives I'd unknowingly relied upon.

Assumptions about success, failure, right, and wrong were stripped bare, revealing the truth: human lives

are rarely straightforward, and empathy is the only way to bridge the gap between what we think we know and what's there.

A recent study published by the American Psychological Association⁵ found that people who practice empathy and work to understand others' perspectives show a 40% improvement in emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships.

Challenging our biases isn't just a moral imperative; it has tangible, transformative benefits for our mental health and community.

I'll never forget the day I learned that Joey, my cousin, had been murdered.

The shock of his death was only the beginning. I'd always seen Joey as a "troubled" kid who had gone down a path that seemed inevitable to those who knew him.

He struggled with dyslexia, and the school system failed him in ways that I didn't fully understand until much later.

I'd always viewed his life choices through a judgmental lens, silently categorizing him as someone who "just didn't try hard enough."

But as I started to piece together his story—his quiet determination, his battles with a world that dismissed him because he couldn't learn the way others did—I saw how wrong I had been.

Joey's world differed from mine, but it wasn't less meaningful. He dealt with challenges I had never faced, and judging him from the outside was too easy. His struggles with dyslexia, a poorly adapted education system, and the choices he made later in life were the result of a context I'd never indeed considered.

When Joey's life ended so suddenly, I found myself wrestling with grief but with guilt—for the way I'd simplified his life into black-and-white terms, never understanding the shades of grey in between.

That grief became my catalyst. Joey's death shattered my preconceived notions of "success" and "failure."

I realized that empathy begins by questioning our own stories about other people. It's about understanding that behind every choice lies a struggle and behind every failure, a desire to succeed.

Joey's story wasn't just a cautionary tale but a lesson about the weight of assumptions and the power of compassion. It taught me to see the person, not just the narrative about them.

Joey's life taught me that the most important journey isn't about climbing some ladder of success, it's about digging deep, questioning our assumptions, and extending empathy to those whose experiences don't neatly fit into our definitions.

In his memory, I strive to see people as they are, not as I assume them to be.

Joey's story isn't about the way he died; it's about how his complicated and real life changed the way I chose to live mine.

Practice "Curiosity Conversations" once a week: Talk to someone whose experiences, background, or beliefs differ from yours. Approach the interaction with genuine curiosity—ask open-ended questions and listen without the intention of responding.

Aim to understand their perspective, even if you disagree. This practice can help dismantle biases and strengthen your capacity for empathy, one conversation at a time.

During my journey, there were moments when sharing my truth felt overwhelming. But each time I opened up, I found support, encouragement, and a deeper sense of belonging. Vulnerability isn't about exposing yourself for the sake of it; it's about being honest and allowing others to see your humanity.



Key Takeaways

1. Authenticity comes from aligning your actions with your values.
2. Overcoming the fear of judgment frees you to live a more genuine life.
3. Vulnerability is a strength that fosters deeper connections and self-acceptance.
4. Transformation begins when you embrace who you are, not who you think you should be.

**Strength
builds
Success**

Action Steps: Embrace Authentic Living

Identify Your Core Values: Write down your five most important values. Reflect on whether your current actions align with those values.

Challenge the Fear of Judgment: Share one authentic thought or feeling with someone you trust. Notice how it feels to express your truth.

Set Goals: Choose one area where you've been living inauthentically and set a goal to make a small, meaningful change. If you've been saying yes to commitments out of obligation, practice saying no to one thing this week.



Try the 7-Day Goal Reset:

Commit to a goal that feels manageable but meaningful. Rather than aiming for perfection, break it down into small, adaptable actions you can track for seven days.

- For example, if your goal is to improve mental clarity, try dedicating 10 minutes each morning to journaling or mindfulness.

Reflect on your progress each day: Reviewing any obstacles and how you can adjust the goal to better suit your circumstances.

At the end of the week, assess how you feel. This reset will help you recalibrate and stay on course, allowing you to adjust your goals as needed while still moving forward.

- What improvements have you noticed?
- What could you change to make the goal more achievable next week?

Practice Vulnerability and curiosity Conversations. Share a personal story or struggle with someone who values you. Allow yourself to be seen without fear of judgment.

Celebrate Your Authenticity: At the end of each day, reflect on one moment when you showed up as your true self and acknowledge the courage it took.

Living authentically isn't about perfection; it's about being authentic. As you embrace your true self, you'll discover a more profound sense of freedom, connection, and purpose. Remember, your authenticity is your superpower.



Your Voice Matters

Unock the Power of Connection

MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH your review. By sharing your thoughts, you can help someone just like you—someone ready to embrace change, but unsure of where to begin.

"The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention."³³ – Oscar Wilde

This book, *Courage to Change*, is about finding strength, embracing imperfection, and taking the small steps that lead to transformation. My mission is to empower more people to discover their resilience and live authentically.

But to reach those who need it most, I need your help.

Reviews are how most readers decide to pick up a book. Your words can guide someone on their journey of courage and growth. By leaving a review, you could inspire...

...one more person to overcome their fears.
...one more reader to embrace their true self.
...one more life to be transformed.

It's quick, easy, and costs nothing, but your review could change someone's path. Simply scan the QR code below to leave your review:



Thank you for being part of this mission and for helping to spread hope and courage. Your generosity means the world to me!

With heartfelt gratitude,
Tess



PRINCIPLE 6

Cultivating Emotional Resilience

"Resilience is knowing that you are the only one that has the power and the responsibility to pick yourself up."¹

— Mary Holloway

Understanding Emotional Resilience

LIFE ISN'T A SERIES of random events; it's a canvas we shape with each choice, obstacle, and person we touch. In a sense, we are both the artist and the artwork—crafting something beautiful and meaningful from the raw materials of our experiences.

These principles are about the beauty of creation: the power of resilience, patience, and creativity to turn challenges into moments of profound transformation, crafting masterpieces out of chaos.

Emotional resilience is the ability to navigate challenges with strength and adaptability. It doesn't mean you won't feel pain or struggle; it means you develop

the tools to recover and grow through those experiences.

Resilience isn't something you're born with. It's a skill, like a muscle, that you can build through practice and intentionality. Emotional resilience is about choosing growth over defeat and finding meaning even in difficult moments.

Rebuilding After Setbacks

One of the most challenging moments in my journey came after I thought I had it all figured out. I'd made significant progress in my health and personal growth, but I found myself slipping back into old patterns during the pandemic.

The weight of uncertainty, isolation, and self-doubt threatened to undo everything I had worked hard to achieve.

There were days when getting out of bed felt like a victory. But instead of letting those moments define me, I leaned into resilience.

I continued with daily affirmations, gratitude journaling, and reaching out to trusted friends for support. Each step reminded me that setbacks were not the end—they were opportunities to begin again.

Accepting What You Can't Control

"You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them."²

— Maya Angelou

One key to emotional resilience is learning to focus on what you can control and let go of what you can't. Worrying about things beyond your control only drains your energy and keeps you stuck.

My lesson in the power of consistent practice began with an unexpected challenge—scuba diving. I had always seen myself as a lifelong learner, eager to embrace new experiences, but scuba diving presented a daunting reality check.

While I quickly absorbed the technical aspects of diving—calculating pressure and mastering the equipment—the real obstacle lay in the water. I wasn't a strong swimmer, and as much as I loved exploring the underwater world, the physical demands of swimming left me feeling like I was in over my head—literally.

Faced with the decision to quit or press on, I chose the latter. I needed a plan—something concrete to tackle my weakness. I set a goal: 100 laps in the gym pool every night, with no exceptions.

At first, the water was my adversary. My muscles ached, my lungs burned, and my self-doubt felt heavier than the water pressing against me. But I kept showing up. I showed up on days when I was exhausted, on nights when it was the last thing I wanted to do, and on mornings when I wondered if all this effort was worth it.

With each lap, something began to shift. My strokes became smoother, and my breathing became more controlled. I learned to find a rhythm in the water and my mindset.

I wasn't just training my body; I was rewiring my determination, solidifying my commitment to a goal that once seemed unreachable. Every lap was a vote of confidence in myself—a reminder that persistence, even in the face of discomfort, builds resilience.

The day of my scuba test arrived, and I felt the familiar twinge of anxiety as I faced the water. But this time, I had a quiet confidence. Those 100 laps, repeated night after night, had become a part of me. I dove in, and everything clicked. I not only completed the swim within the required time but exceeded it.

The challenge I feared had been overcome, not in a moment of brilliance, but through the steady accumulation of effort over time. Plus, I crossed the finish line at the end of that certification before every female in class and five gentlemen.

Oh, it felt good to welcome them to the finish line as I extended a hand and a smirk in congratulations for completing the task!

The real victory wasn't the scuba certification itself, though that was undoubtedly a triumph. True success is the profound lesson that consistent practice holds transformative power. The once-insurmountable obstacle had been conquered, stroke by stroke, by a commitment to show up every day, no matter what.

Consistency doesn't promise instant results, but it guarantees progress. Each small, repeated effort builds on the last, creating a foundation of strength, skill, and confidence that carries us forward.

When we commit to the process of practice—when we focus on the journey rather than the destination—we find that challenges become stepping stones, each one a testament to our resilience.

Transformation isn't found in dramatic, one-time events but in the power of consistent, daily practice. By committing to small, steady actions, we harness the compounding effect of effort, leading to significant and lasting change.

Every step, every stroke, every moment of persistence moves us closer to our goals, reminding us that proper growth is a journey, not a destination.

During difficult times, I've learned to ask myself: "What can I do right now to improve my situation?" Whether taking a deep breath, stepping outside for fresh air, or

tackling one small task, these actions ground me and shift my focus toward solutions.

Building a Toolkit for Resilience & Courage

“Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.”³

— Robert Collier

Practice Mindful Courage

Take one step toward facing a fear today—whether it’s setting a boundary, saying “no” to something that drains you, or speaking up in a situation that challenges you.

Notice your body’s signals—tightness in your chest, a racing heartbeat, a gut feeling—and honor them as signs to trust your instincts.

After taking the step, reflect on how it felt. Write down what you learned about yourself and how you can use this moment to build more courage in the future.

By practicing courage in the present, you build the strength to face future challenges with confidence, resilience and the belief you can do anything.

Past experiences are a beacon, guiding us with their lessons and grounding us in a legacy of resilience.

Yet courage takes root in the present moment, transforming those lessons into actions that move us forward. Acknowledging the past isn't about staying tethered to it—it's about using it as a foundation to leap confidently into the unknown.

Remember, you are both a descendant and an ancestor, carrying the strength of those before you while paving the way for those yet to come. The courage you show today honors their sacrifices and becomes the bedrock of a brighter future.

So, take a deep breath and trust yourself. The past has prepared you, the present calls to you, and the future awaits you to write its story.

Resilience demands a personalized toolkit of strategies tailored to support you during life's toughest moments. These resources empower you to face challenges while staying focused on your goals.



Tools that have worked for me:

1. **Gratitude Journaling:** Writing down three things I'm grateful for daily helps shift my perspective.
2. **Affirmations:** Positive self-talk reinforces my belief in overcoming obstacles.
3. **Mindfulness Practices:** Meditation and deep breathing keep me present and reduce stress.
4. **Support Systems:** Leaning on friends, family, or mentors provides encouragement and perspective.
5. **Create a "Legacy Journal":** Start a journal dedicated to documenting challenges you've faced and how you've overcome them.

For each entry, identify one lesson learned and advice you would offer someone facing a similar struggle. Reflect on how those lessons could be shared or passed on to help others—whether through mentorship, storytelling, or even a small gesture of encouragement.

Review this journal monthly to track your growth and identify opportunities to mentor others, reinforcing that every challenge is an opportunity to create something lasting and impactful.

The Role of Self-Compassion

"Talk to yourself like you would to someone
you love." ⁴

— Brené Brown

Consistency is often overlooked when pursuing personal growth in favor of quick wins or dramatic transformations. Yet, the quiet, persistent efforts—those small, daily actions—ultimately shape who we become. This principle is about embracing the power of consistent practice, the steady rhythm of effort that builds momentum over time and transforms the seemingly impossible into achievable triumphs.

Research from The Journal of Behavioral Medicine⁵ shows that individuals who consistently practice, even in small amounts, are 60% more likely to sustain long-term progress than those who rely on short bursts of intense effort. This underscores the idea that incremental steps, repeated faithfully, lead to enduring change.

Self-compassion is a key ingredient of resilience and can help us adapt, recover, and grow. Breaking negative thought patterns and treating yourself with kindness and compassion can help us improve our emotional regulation. Choose one key phrase that resonates with you to build a positive and resilient mindset. For example, "Everything is going to be okay."

Resilience doesn't mean being tough all the time. It's about treating yourself with kindness, especially during failure or struggle. Self-compassion allows you to acknowledge your pain without judgment and reminds you that you're not alone in your experiences.

There were many times when I felt like giving up. But instead of beating myself up, I learned to speak to myself like a close friend. I reminded myself that progress is not linear and that every step forward—no matter how small—matters.



Key Takeaways

1. You can build emotional resilience through practice and intentionality.
2. Focus on what you can control and let go of what you can't.
3. Develop a personalized resilience toolkit to navigate challenges.
4. Practice self-compassion and treat yourself with kindness during difficult times.

Action Steps to Cultivate Resilience

Identify Your Stressors: Write down your current challenges. For each one, ask yourself: "What can I control in this situation?"

Create a Resilience Toolkit: Choose two or three strategies to incorporate into your daily routine.

- Start a gratitude journal.
- Practice mindfulness for five minutes each day.
- Reach out to a trusted friend or mentor for support.

Practice Self-Compassion: When you face a setback, write a compassionate letter to yourself. Remind yourself that mistakes are part of growth.

Take Small Steps Forward: Choose one actionable daily step to address a challenge or goal. Focus on progress, not perfection.

- Remember to "Flip the Script":
- The next challenge you encounter, write down the problem in a sentence.

Then, transform it into an opportunity by reframing it. Instead of saying, "I can't do this because I'm not experienced," rephrase it to, "This is an opportunity to learn something new." Write down one concrete action you can take to move forward.

- This could be seeking advice, breaking the task into smaller steps, or approaching the problem differently.
- The goal is to cultivate a mindset that sees every setback as raw material for success.

Reflect and Adjust: Review your progress at the end of each week. Celebrate your wins, no matter how small, and adjust your strategies as needed. By building emotional resilience, you'll be able to navigate life's ups and downs with greater strength and adaptability. Remember, resilience isn't about avoiding challenges but rising each time you fall.



PRINCIPLE 7

Turning Obstacles into Opportunities

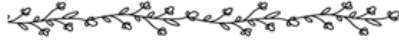
THE THEMES OF ADAPTABILITY, empathy, and transformation deeply resonate, emphasizing the idea of viewing obstacles not as barriers but as opportunities for growth, connection, and innovative problem-solving. The two principles—Resourcefulness in Navigating Challenges and Creative Transformation—turn adversity into triumph.

Every challenge we face has the potential to break us or build us. The obstacle does not determine the outcome, but how we approach it—with resourcefulness, creativity, and an unyielding belief in transformation.

This chapter explores the power of resilience and ingenuity, showcasing how the most daunting challenges can catalyze innovation and unity. Whether you're navigating interpersonal conflicts or life-threatening health crises, the tools you bring to the table—adaptability, empathy, and creative vision—can transform adversity into profound growth.

Life will always present challenges, but the secret lies in how we respond. When we approach obstacles with resourcefulness and creativity, we discover that

every difficulty holds the potential for transformation. Whether we are uniting teams or reclaiming health, we learn that the strength we build along the way becomes the foundation for our greatest triumphs.



Resourcefulness in Navigating Challenges

“The measure of intelligence is the ability to change.”¹

— Albert Einstein

Life and work are rarely straightforward. Challenges, conflicts, and unexpected obstacles are inevitable. But navigating these challenges determines our success. Resourcefulness isn’t just about making do with what you have, it’s about creatively finding solutions, fostering understanding, and uniting others in the face of division.

In my experience, true prosperity comes not from the absence of obstacles but from our ability to turn them into opportunities for growth and collaboration.

Research from the Harvard Business Review highlights that companies with leaders who demonstrate high levels of adaptability and resourcefulness are 3.5 times more likely to perform in the top quartile of their industries. It’s not the resources at hand but how they

are utilized that often marks the difference between failure and success.

I once walked into an accounting department plagued by division—a group fractured by mistrust and inefficiency, struggling to work toward a common goal. At the heart of this discord were two senior figures who held onto outdated attitudes that separated them from their peers.

Their derogatory comments about female colleagues deepened the rift, creating an impossible collaboration environment. Morale was low, and the team's productivity had hit rock bottom.

Then, a new CAO stepped in, signaling a moment ripe for change. As this man assumed his new role, he quickly identified the struggle within the department and privately met with me, asking if I could help him unite the group. I knew that if there was any hope of uniting this team, it would take more than authority—it would require a resourceful, strategic approach.

I started by meeting with each team member one-on-one, not with a plan to enforce unity but to listen. It became clear that the division wasn't just about inappropriate comments but about years of unresolved tension and a lack of communication.

Armed with that insight, I crafted a strategy to shift the culture from the inside out. I engaged them instead of forcing the team into compliance, fostering a sense of ownership over the solution.

I enlisted the help of the most recent colleagues in participating in offsite meetings, adding each additional colleague with a longer tenure to the group as the group's willingness to collaborate grew.

Finally, skeptical of the changes, one of the more influential senior members agreed to open up an opportunity to reunite the team.

I framed his involvement not as a concession to past behavior but as a crucial step toward a greater goal—collective success. This allowed the team to come together, whether onsite or offsite.

It was a delicate balance. I pushed for progress without alienating anyone, listening deeply to each concern while staying firm in my commitment to a more inclusive and productive environment. Slowly, the team began to shift.

Where there was once resistance, I saw the beginnings of collaboration. What had been a divided group started to come together, finding common ground not in agreement on every detail but in a shared commitment to the bigger picture.

What happened next was nothing short of transformative. A department fraught with discord became a space of shared goals and mutual respect. The once-isolated team members now worked together seamlessly, understanding that prosperity wasn't about individual triumphs but about what they could achieve together.

My experience showed me that resourcefulness goes beyond material solutions—it's about bringing people together, finding common ground in the midst of conflict, and creating pathways to unity. Resourcefulness is the art of turning obstacles into opportunities. It requires empathy, strategic vision, and a willingness to adapt, even when facing resistance.

What do you do?

Host a Solution-Focused Workshop.

When faced with a persistent challenge, gather your team (or relevant group) for a solution-focused workshop. The goal isn't to point fingers or rehash old grievances but to collaboratively brainstorm ways forward.

Start by framing the issue clearly and then guide the group through a structured session: identify obstacles, propose solutions, and vote on the top ideas. Ensure every voice is heard and focus on generating actionable steps everyone is willing to commit to.

This approach fosters a sense of ownership, empowers participants, and sets the stage for resourceful problem-solving.



Be Creative —Turn Adversity into Triumph

"The harder the struggle, the more glorious the triumph. Self-realization demands very great struggle."²

— Swami Sivananda

In the vast landscape of our lives, adversity is inevitable. Yet, it's not the adversity that defines us but how we respond to it. It's about recognizing that the darkest moments often hold the brightest potential for transformation—where the impossible becomes possible, and the ordinary transforms into the extraordinary.

According to a study published in *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*³, individuals who actively reframe negative experiences are more likely to report higher levels of well-being and satisfaction. This highlights the transformative power of viewing challenges as opportunities for creative solutions and growth.

For me, a moment of transformation began in a place I never expected—the stark, fluorescent-lit rooms of a hematologist's office. Years of unrelenting anemia had turned iron infusions into a necessary weekly ritual.

I grew accustomed to its routine—the slow drip of life-giving iron into my veins, the chair's cold steel,

and the staff's detached professionalism. But despite my best efforts, my health was a puzzle with missing pieces.

Then came a revelation wrapped in surgical necessity. A routine procedure led to the discovery of three hidden tumors, stage 4 invaders that had been stealing my energy, quietly sabotaging my body. Surgery was swift and successful, but it only marked the beginning of the actual challenge—a six-week waiting period before the next phase of my treatment could begin.

It was a strange, unsettling pause in which I felt caught between hope and fear, health and illness.

The turning point arrived in a conversation with Dr. K, my hematologist, who had walked this path with me for years. As she reviewed my latest bloodwork, her professional mask cracked. "I lost two patients to cancer today," she said, her voice thick with sorrow. In that vulnerable moment, the sterile barrier between doctor and patient dissolved, leaving two people grappling with the fragility of life.

Her tears reflected the gravity of my situation and the profound weight of our shared humanity.

Very quickly, Dr. K and I became more than doctor and patient—we became partners in a creative endeavor to reclaim my health. We examined the data, mapped out strategies, and, more importantly, allowed room for hope to take root. This wasn't just a medical plan but a new narrative unfolding, one

where empathy and expertise wove together into a fabric of resilience.

Thankfully, it wasn't cancer, but I was facing a serious medical condition—that needed to be addressed or I could have died.

This moment redefined my understanding of triumph. It wasn't about erasing the scars of adversity but embracing them as part of the process, using them as markers of strength and testament to the human spirit's capacity for growth. Adversity became the catalyst, and creative problem-solving, grounded in empathy and resilience, became the fuel that propelled me forward.

In hardship, we find the potential for greatness—not by avoiding pain, but by letting it transform us. Each challenge we face holds the seeds of a story waiting to be told, a narrative of triumph over adversity that resonates far beyond ourselves.

Life's greatest triumphs come when we embrace challenges as invitations for creative transformation. Through courage, resilience, and empathy, we can transmute adversity into powerful stories of hope and growth. Each obstacle we face is raw material waiting for us to shape it into a chapter of our ongoing masterpiece.

Create an Adversity Transformation Plan for yourself today. Choose a recent challenge you've faced and write a summary of the situation—what happened, how it made you feel, and the impact it had. Then, reframe the narrative by listing three positive lessons or strengths you gained from that experience.

Use this as a blueprint to tackle future challenges: whenever you encounter adversity, document the situation, find the silver lining, and identify at least one actionable step you can take to move forward with resilience and creativity. Revisit your plan monthly to track progress and celebrate the small victories as part of your personal transformation journey.



Take the first step...

NOW THAT YOU'VE GLIMPSED the possibilities within these pages, I ask you to consider this:

What if the life you've been waiting for is already within your reach?

What if the transformation you seek begins with the decision to take that first step—however small it may seem—and the courage to keep moving forward, day by day?

The world will continue to rush past you with endless distractions and promises of shortcuts. However, true fulfillment lies not in rushing but in fully engaging with each moment, choice, and challenge. You don't have to wait for the "perfect" time, plan, or circumstances.

The time is now.

Will you be the architect of your destiny?

Will you embrace the power of compounding skills, resilience, and connection to create a life that truly resonates with your deepest desires? The door is open. All that's left is for you to walk through it.

So, take that step. Start today—no matter how small. Commit to one action, one change, one shift in perspective. As you do, remember this: every small, consistent effort builds the momentum for your more considerable transformations. The life you've imagined can begin right now. It's up to you to make it happen.

Are you ready to step into your greatness? To shape a life that speaks of your true potential. Then, let's begin.



Final Thoughts

As we end this journey together, I leave you with one final thought: You are the creator of your own narrative. The following pages are not set in stone—they are fluid, ever-evolving, and shaped by your choices, actions, and beliefs. The principles within these pages are not meant to be followed as rigid rules but as guiding lights, illuminating the path to a life of fulfillment, growth, and resilience.

The power to transform, to craft a life that reflects your deepest aspirations, lies within you. It always has. Every small step you take, every challenge you face with courage, and every lesson you learn along the way compounds to create a life that is uniquely yours.

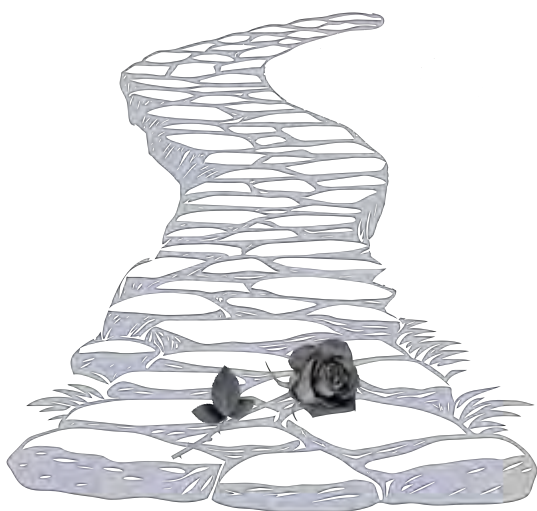
Remember, the journey is not about perfection; it's about progress. It's about showing up repeatedly, even when the path seems unclear or the obstacles insurmountable. It's about knowing that each moment holds growth potential and that every decision you make contributes to the masterpiece of your life.

So, as you close this book, know that the story is far from over—it's just beginning. What happens next is in your hands. I believe in you, the strength within you, and the limitless potential ahead.

Embrace the adventure, trust in the process, and continue to write your story with purpose, passion, and unwavering belief in your ability to create the life you deserve.

Thank you for allowing me to walk this part of the journey with you. Now, go forward and live your masterpiece.

The world is waiting for the brilliance that only you can bring.



Farewell

A Farewell to the Woman I Once Was

TO THE WOMAN I once was, I see you now with a clarity I didn't have before—with love, gratitude, and a profound sense of respect. You carried a weight that went far beyond the physical.

You bore the burden of self-doubt, judgment, and pain, yet you never let it crush you. You may have stumbled and struggled, but you never truly fell. You stood when it felt impossible, and I owe you everything.

Thank you for your resilience and for holding onto hope even when it was faint and fragile. Thank you for keeping your heart beating and taking one more step forward when it felt like the world was asking too much. You held onto the tiniest sparks of faith—faith that life could change, that a better version of yourself was waiting to be found, even if you couldn't see her yet.

I know there were days when the mirror reflected more than a body, it showed scars, disappointments,

and the weight of deferred dreams. But I want you to know that you were always enough. Even in your most challenging moments, you were strong, capable, and worthy of the life you wanted.

I owe my new life to you. I wouldn't be here without your courage and stubborn refusal to give up. You protected me in ways I didn't understand then, and because of your strength, I was able to rebuild—to break free from the chains of the past and step into the light of a new beginning.

So, as I step forward into this new chapter, I do so with deep gratitude for the woman who made it possible—the woman who carried the pain and planted the seeds of change. I honor her, cherish her, and thank her. But now, it's time to let her rest. She's earned it. It's time to say goodbye—not with sadness but with love.

Her journey brought me to this moment; her story will always be part of me. She is not gone; she is the foundation on which I stand.

To the woman I once was, thank you for never giving up.

Thank you for holding on, for believing—even in the smallest, quietest moments—that life could be more than it was. Because of you, it is different and now, I step forward, not as someone who has left you behind, but as someone who carries your strength and lessons in every step.

With all my love, the woman you allowed me to become.



Who knew a year could do this?

**The progress continues...I welcome
you to join me!**



Taken Aug 2016

Taken Sept 2017

A Sneak Peek Ahead

Connect with me!

This is just the beginning.

THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE pandemic and the life-altering decision to leave behind the W2 world didn't end here—it ignited a transformation I never imagined. From surviving to thriving, and from employee to entrepreneur, my story continues to evolve in ways I can't wait to share with you.

In my next book, I'll reveal the blueprint for building a future fueled by passion, resilience, and the courage to embrace the unknown. It's a roadmap not only to entrepreneurship but to discovering the life you were meant to live. I'd love for you to stay connected and be part of this incredible journey.

*Let your
Dreams
be your
Wings*

Join me to share your thoughts, ask questions, and get updates on what's next. Together, we'll keep moving forward—one step, one story, one breakthrough at a time.

Facebook: <https://facebook.com/teresa.hulack>

Instagram: @tessie806tess

TikTok: @tesshulek

YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/xmlImwxWrQr8?si=ME3CSyUSctcKHAwM>

See you soon,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tess". To the left of the name is a small heart outline with three small stars or dots trailing off to the left.



I Value Your Opinion—Tell Me What You Think

NOW THAT YOU'VE COMPLETED this journey of transformation, resilience, and hope—now it's your turn to inspire others. By sharing your honest review of this book, you can help others discover the courage to embrace their own paths to change.

Your review on Amazon will guide readers who are searching for inspiration, support, and the practical tools they need to take the next step toward a life of courage and growth. Transformation thrives when we share our stories, and your voice can help keep the spirit of courage alive. Thank you for being part of this mission.



What did you think?

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