

Why Should We Teach/Coach Others in Building Resilience

From Resilience Building: Peer Coaching Manual

By Ronald L. Breazeale, Ph.D. & Richard C. Lumb, Ph.D.

The experts tell us that there will be another 911-like event sometime in the near future. It is not a matter, they say, of if, but when. A number of countries have developed fairly elaborate programs in assessment and training in resilience. They have defined resilience as both resilience of citizenry of their country as well as the infrastructure. Unfortunately, many of us in the U.S. have slipped back into believing that there will not be another 911.

Whether we believe there will be another 911-like event, we would all agree that there will be natural disasters and probably no shortage of them, given the predicted climate changes occurring. Hurricanes, ice storms, floods and tornados are expected to be more frequent in the immediate future. And there are, of course, other threats that loom on the horizon such as pandemic, bird flu or the California earthquake, the big one.

Perhaps you are saying, *I have never been affected that much by a natural disaster in my life and probably will not be.* This, indeed, may be true for many of us. But life has no shortage of personal disasters. Death and taxes come to us all. We are living longer, but because of our long lives we are more susceptible to health problems and crises.

We know that skills and concepts developed through research on resilience can be learned and applied and can assist individuals in being more able to adapt to and survive difficult times. Training in resilience may reduce the frequency and intensity of post-traumatic stress disorders and other health problems that occur after a national or a personal disaster. Such training may allow our society and the individuals and families affected directly to recover more quickly and completely. Just as we know that reinforcing a bridge may make it stronger and less likely to be washed away by flood, we know that reinforcing an individual's coping skills, their resilience, can make it less likely that they will be overwhelmed, washed away, in the same flood.

We also know that people who cannot deal with their emotions, specifically fear, may become more narrow, exclusive, and rigid in their view of the world and less able to see the bigger picture. This "circle-the-wagon" mentality can increase the level of paranoia in a society and result in the rejection and persecution of those who are different from the mainstream by their religion, race, sexual preference or physical or mental ability. Witness our society's reaction to these groups during the years since 911. Reacting out of emotion rather than thought and rational problem-solving can result in decisions made through fear that negatively affect the entire society and are later regretted when we think carefully about them. Defending our society and our culture can be inclusive rather than exclusive involving the seeking of alliances, cooperative problem-solving and consensus regarding actions that need to be taken.

We should all have an investment in building our own resilience and in supporting the building of resilience of our family members, friends, and all members of our society, since we are all in this together.