

# BUILDING RESILIENCE



## IN HARD TIMES

By **Laura Brenner, DDS**



**W**e could all agree that having abounding resilience is the key to a long, successful dental career, right? The ability to recover from challenges and then continue on to thrive is vital. Without that quality, we would not be able to survive the stresses of dentistry.

We all want more resilience, but some of us aren't thrilled about doing what it takes to build it. Wouldn't it be great if we could become more resilient through a lifetime of smooth sailing? I wish that were the case, but unfortunately, that is pure fantasy.

**The only way to build resilience is to endure hard times.**

Does it seem at all ironic to you that the very thing that builds resilience is the same thing that often makes us want to give up? The very challenges that make us want to crawl into a hole and hide until the problem disappears, are the only keys to growing our resilience.

As we navigate this new world of pandemic precautions, I'm noticing two different reactions to the problem. For some, it has created a catastrophe, and it truly is that. With an abundance of loss all around us: lost wages, closed businesses and, even worse-- illness and loss of a loved one; it's hard to imagine life could be worse.

For others, it simply feels like an extended staycation. They feel content at home, finding more time for self-care or quality time with their children, or

picking up that hobby or habit that always gets pushed to the side. They may even realize how much less stressed they feel without days in the office. It's easy to stay positive because things aren't so bad, or it could always be worse.

**Regardless of which side of the coin you fall, your reaction is perfectly appropriate for you during this time.**

On the one hand, it's likely that those who are struggling are enduring worse hardships than those who are enjoying this time. That seems logical and fair. Maybe those who are enjoying this time at home don't really have that much at stake, so they're naturally not suffering as much.

There might be a different source of their positivity. Perhaps they have endured worse hardships and therefore have a different perspective that is helping them to cope more easily. That is resilience.

Personally, I fit into the second category of people. As of now, I'm not enduring tragic losses. I'm healthy; I have saved enough money to get through some financial loss; and I have plenty to keep me busy. I have also just finished almost two years of grueling treatments to fight stage three breast cancer. For the past two years, my life was filled with sickness and sadness and constant setbacks that kept beating me down. If something is going to help build resilience, that's it!

When the fears of the unknowns set in as we were beginning to shut down our country, I thought to myself, "If I could get through that hell, then I've got this!" It was amazing for me to experience a natural gratitude for the positives

instead of feeling the anxiety that comes with loss and the unknown.

I didn't acquire that superpower because I'm better or stronger than anyone else. I earned it by enduring my own personal hell and, as a result, building my own resilience.

**In some ways, it was a choice.**

I did a lot of reflection during my year of cancer hell. I allowed myself to grieve properly, and giving myself that space is exactly what allowed me to bounce right back, even before the ordeal ended. It was a choice. I could have decided to be bitter about the world giving me cancer when I had done everything right up until that moment; or, I could have chosen to grow from the experience. I chose the latter, and with that I got to feel the beauty of resilience.

Let's turn this back to you. If you share my perspective, you would probably agree that you built your resilience by experiencing tough challenges.

If, on the other hand, you are depressed, afraid, angry, or anxious; this moment, right now, is building your resilience. Now is the time to honor and accept those uncomfortable feelings. If you judge and dismiss your discomfort, you'll only prolong it. Give yourself a break. Anyone would feel anxious in your situation. Validating and supporting your reaction during this time will help you move through it. Judging it and stuffing it down will only make it linger.

*"The ability to recover from challenges and then continue on to thrive is vital. Without that quality, we would not be able to survive the stresses of dentistry."*

We all hate pain. Of course, we do. It's uncomfortable. However, that pain builds our resilience. Without it, the smallest problems would put us over the edge. In a way, it can be good for us.

Whether it's enduring the many challenges of COVID-19, a chronic illness, or even the daily hassles of dental practice, accepting and working through pain makes us stronger. I wish the realities of dental practice meant that teeth didn't get perf'd, patients didn't get angry, or that one team member didn't miss work all the time. Just think, if that were the case, the smallest of inconveniences might start to feel like huge problems.

It's those very problems that we often hate to endure, that make us stronger. It's those very problems that help us appreciate what's important. Learning to cope with and manage those problems are exactly what allows us to bounce back from life's challenges.

When you do bounce back, you'll be even better prepared to face the next challenge. ■

**About the Author**

*Dr. Laura Brenner worked in private practice in Denver for 10 years until she left clinical dentistry behind for good. As the author of the Lolabees blog and 10 Reasons Your Dentist Probably Hates You Too, she began connecting with other dentists from around the world who wanted more from their careers. This work inspired her to become a Certified Professional Coach who is passionate about helping dentists find joy in their careers again.*

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