

"Be Your Own Guru": The 7 Step Guru Way

Guru mantra 1: "In times of stress, the expectations I place on myself and others may be arbitrary, unrealistic, or distorted"

Guru mantra 2: "I avoid seeing a pattern based on a single event, jumping to conclusions, or seeing things out of proportion"

Guru mantra 3: "I avoid negating my own power over situations"

Guru mantra 4: "I notice, expect, and appreciate the positive and take purposeful action"

Guru mantra 5: "I think creatively, flexibly, and account for different perspectives"

Guru mantra 6: "I have control over my own decisions and actions"

Guru mantra 7: "I seek to build relationships with others where we reciprocally feel open and available to each other"



STRESS

Resilience Is About How You Recharge, Not How You Endure

by [Shawn Achor](#) and [Michelle Gielan](#)

JUNE 24, 2016



As constant travelers and parents of a 2-year-old, we sometimes fantasize about how much work we can do when one of us gets on a plane, undistracted by phones, friends, and *Finding Nemo*. We race to get all our ground work done: packing, going

through TSA, doing a last-minute work call, calling each other, then boarding the plane. Then, when we try to have that amazing work session in flight, we get nothing done. Even worse, after refreshing our email or reading the same studies over and over, we are too exhausted when we land to soldier on with the emails that have inevitably still piled up.

Why should flying deplete us? We're just sitting there doing nothing. Why can't we be tougher – more resilient and determined in our work – so we can accomplish all of the goals we set for ourselves? Based on our current research, we have come to realize that the problem is not our hectic schedule or the plane travel itself; the problem comes from a misunderstanding of what it means to be resilient, and the resulting impact of overworking.

We often take a militaristic, “tough” approach to resilience and grit. We imagine a Marine slogging through the mud, a boxer going one more round, or a football player picking himself up off the turf for one more play. We believe that the longer we tough it out, the tougher we are, and therefore the more successful we will be. However, this entire conception is scientifically inaccurate.

The very lack of a recovery period is dramatically holding back our collective ability to be resilient and successful. Research has found that there is a direct correlation between lack of recovery and increased incidence of health and safety problems. And lack of recovery – whether by disrupting sleep with thoughts of work or having continuous cognitive arousal by watching our phones – is costing our companies \$62 billion a year (that's billion, not million) in lost productivity.

And just because work stops, it doesn't mean we are recovering. We “stop” work sometimes at 5PM, but then we spend the night wrestling with solutions to work problems, talking about our work over dinner, and falling asleep thinking about how

much work we'll do tomorrow. In a study released last month, researchers from Norway found that 7.8% of Norwegians have become workaholics. The scientists cite a definition of "workaholism" as "being overly concerned about work, driven by an uncontrollable work motivation, and investing so much time and effort to work that it impairs other important life areas."

We believe that the number of people who fit that definition includes the majority of American workers, including those who read HBR, which prompted us to begin a study of workaholism in the U.S. Our study will use a large corporate dataset from a major medical company to examine how technology extends our working hours and thus interferes with necessary cognitive recovery, resulting in huge health care costs and turnover costs for employers.

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The misconception of resilience is often bred from an early age. Parents trying to teach their children resilience might celebrate a high school student staying up until 3AM to finish a science fair project.

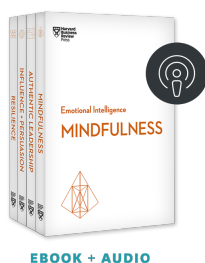
What a distortion of resilience! A resilient child is a well-rested one. When an exhausted student goes to school, he risks hurting everyone on the road with his impaired driving; he doesn't have the cognitive resources to do well on his English test; he has lower self-control with his friends; and at home, he is moody with his parents. Overwork and exhaustion are the opposite of resilience. And the bad habits we learn when we're young only magnify when we hit the workforce.

In her excellent book, *The Sleep Revolution*, Arianna Huffington wrote, “We sacrifice sleep in the name of productivity, but ironically our loss of sleep, despite the extra hours we spend at work, adds up to 11 days of lost productivity per year per worker, or about \$2,280.”

The key to resilience is trying really hard, then stopping, recovering, and then trying again. This conclusion is based on biology. Homeostasis is a fundamental biological concept describing the ability of the brain to continuously restore and sustain well-being. Positive neuroscientist Brent Furl from Texas A&M University coined the term “homeostatic value” to describe the value that certain actions have for creating equilibrium, and thus wellbeing, in the body. When the body is out of alignment from overworking, we waste a vast amount of mental and physical resources trying to return to balance before we can move forward.

As Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz have written, if you have too much time in the performance zone, you need more time in the recovery zone, otherwise you risk burnout. Mustering your resources to “try hard” requires burning energy in order to overcome your currently low arousal level. This is called upregulation. It also exacerbates exhaustion. Thus the more imbalanced we become due to overworking, the more value there is in activities that allow us to return to a state of balance. The value of a recovery period rises in proportion to the amount of work required of us.

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So how do we recover and build resilience?

Most people assume that if you stop doing a task like answering emails or writing a paper, that your brain will naturally recover, such that when you start again later in the day or the next morning, you'll have your energy back. But surely

everyone reading this has had times where you lie in bed for hours, unable to fall asleep because your brain is thinking about work. If you lie in bed for eight hours, you may have rested, but you can still feel exhausted the next day. That's because rest and recovery are not the same thing. Stopping does not equal recovering.

If you're trying to build resilience at work, you need adequate internal and external recovery periods. As researchers Zijlstra, Cropley and Rydstedt write in their 2014 paper: "Internal recovery refers to the shorter periods of relaxation that take place within the frames of the workday or the work setting in the form of short scheduled or unscheduled breaks, by shifting attention or changing to other work tasks when the mental or physical resources required for the initial task are temporarily depleted or exhausted. External recovery refers to actions that take place outside of work—e.g. in the free time between the workdays, and during weekends, holidays or vacations." If after work you lie around on your bed and get riled up by political commentary on your phone or get stressed thinking about decisions about how to renovate your home, your brain has not received a break from high mental arousal states. Our brains need a rest as much as our bodies do.

If you really want to build resilience, you can start by strategically stopping. Give yourself the resources to be tough by creating internal and external recovery periods. In her upcoming book *The Future of Happiness*, based on her work at Yale Business School, Amy Blankson describes how to strategically stop during the day by using technology to control overworking. She suggests downloading the Instant or Moment apps to see how many times you turn on your phone each day. The average person turns on their phone 150 times every day. If every distraction took only 1 minute (which would be seriously optimistic), that would account for 2.5 hours of every day.

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You can use apps like Offtime or Unplugged to create tech free zones by strategically scheduling automatic airplane modes. In addition, you can take a cognitive break every 90 minutes to recharge your batteries. Try to not have lunch at your desk, but instead spend time

outside or with your friends – not talking about work. Take all of your paid time off, which not only gives you recovery periods, but raises your productivity and likelihood of promotion.

As for us, we’ve started using our plane time as a work-free zone, and thus time to dip into the recovery phase. The results have been fantastic. We are usually tired already by the time we get on a plane, and the cramped space and spotty internet connection make work more challenging. Now, instead of swimming upstream, we relax, meditate, sleep, watch movies, journal, or listen to entertaining podcasts. And when we get off the plane, instead of being depleted, we feel rejuvenated and ready to return to the performance zone.

Shawn Achor is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Big Potential*, *The Happiness Advantage* and *Before Happiness*. He serves as the Chief Experience Officer for BetterUp. His TED talk is one of the most popular, with over 11 million views. He has lectured or researched at over a third of the Fortune 100 and in 50 countries, as well as for the NFL, Pentagon and White House. Shawn is leading a series of courses on “21 Days to Inspire Positive Change” with the Oprah Winfrey Network.

Michelle Gielan, a national CBS News anchor turned UPenn positive psychology researcher, is now the bestselling author of *Broadcasting Happiness*. She is partnered with Arianna Huffington to research how transformative stories fuel success.

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Gina Marescia a year ago

I agree that Resilience is NOT only grit, perseverance and that RECOVERY is a very necessary action to maintain resilience. I disagree however with the title statement that that resilience is how you recharge. I offer an alternative: resilience is the positive adaptation to stress, challenge and setbacks that allows for performance and well-being. The recharging techniques in the article offer some practical, relevant actions to positively adapt but recharging is only a small pie of the resilience pie.

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STRESS

Pressure Doesn't Have to Turn into Stress

by [Nicholas Petrie](#)

MARCH 16, 2017



Cat Yu for HBR

When I was in my late twenties, I was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Doctors operated and told me to hope for the best. I returned to Japan, where I was working, and tried to forget about it. The tumors returned a year later, this time in my liver. After a long search, the surgeons found a new procedure to remove them, but I knew this was, again, perhaps only a temporary fix. I was a mess for the next six months. The hardest part of my illness was my constant anxiety about it coming back.

Then I met a man who changed my outlook. Dr. Derek Roger had spent 30 years researching why some people in difficult situations become overwhelmed, while others persevere. He taught me everything he'd learned, and as I started applying it, my anxiety subsided, even though my situation didn't change. In fact, the cancer came back about five years ago and remains relatively stable in my liver. But I no longer worry about it. Derek became my mentor, and over the past 10 years we have trained thousands of leaders to overcome their stress.

The process starts with understanding that stress is caused not by other people or external events, but by your reactions to them. In the workplace, many people blame their high anxiety levels on a boss, job, deadlines, or competing commitments for their time. But peers who face the same challenges do so without stress. Derek and I often meet executives who have high levels of pressure but low levels of stress, and vice versa.

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Stress



Turning Stress into an Asset

by Amy Gallo

Resilience Is About How You Recharge, Not How You Endure

by Shawn Achor and Michelle Gielan

Steps to Take When You're Starting to Feel Burned Out

by Monique Valcour

all rumination happens during this state, the first step is to break out of it. You can do this physically: Stand or sit up, clap your hands, and move your body. Or you can do it mentally: Connect with your senses by noticing what you can hear, see, smell, taste, and feel. The idea is to reconnect with the world.

Control your attention. When you ruminate, your attention gets caught in an unproductive loop, like a hamster on a wheel. You need to redirect yourself to areas in which you can take useful action. Here's one exercise we encourage executives to use: Draw a circle on a page, and write down all of the things you can control or influence inside of it and all of the things you cannot outside of it. Remind yourself that you can care about externalities – your work, your team, your family – without worrying about them.

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Pressure is not stress. But the former is converted to the latter when you add one ingredient: rumination, the tendency to keep rethinking past or future events, while attaching negative emotion to those thoughts. Of course, leaders must practice reflection – planning for the future or reviewing past lessons – but this is an analytical, short-term process, with positive fallout. Rumination is ongoing and destructive, diminishing your health, productivity, and well-being. Chronic worriers show increased incidence of coronary problems and suppressed immune functioning. Dwelling on the past or the future also takes us away from the present, rendering us unable to complete the work currently on our plates. If you ask ruminators how they are feeling, none will say “happy.” Most feel miserable.

To break this stress-inducing habit, Derek and I recommend four steps:

Wake up. People spend most of their day in a state called “waking sleep.” This is when you pull into the office parking lot but can’t remember the drive there, or when someone in a meeting asks for your opinion but you’ve missed the last few minutes of conversation. Since

Put things in perspective. Ruminators tend to catastrophize, but resilient leaders keep things in perspective for themselves and their teams. We tell people to try three techniques: contrasting (comparing a past stress to the current one, i.e., a major illness versus a missed sale), questioning (asking yourself “How much will this matter in three years’ time?” and “What’s the worst that could happen?” and “How would I survive it?”) and reframing (looking at your challenge from a new angle: “What’s an opportunity in this situation I haven’t yet seen?” or even “What’s funny about this situation?”)

Let go. The final step is often the hardest. If it was easy to let it go, we would have done it already. We find that three techniques help. The first is acceptance: Acknowledge that whether you like the situation or not, it is the way it is. The second is learning the lesson. Your brain will review events until it feels you’ve gained something from them, so ask yourself, “What have I learned from this experience?” The third is action. Sometimes the real solution is not to relax, but to do something about your situation. Ask yourself, “What action is required here?”

While struggling with cancer, it took me a couple of years to train myself to follow these steps. But ultimately it worked. My stress levels went down, my health improved, and my career took off. More heartening, I discovered that everything Derek had taught me could be taught to others, with similar results.



Nicholas Petrie is a senior faculty member at the Center for Creative Leadership and the lead researcher and creator of its Change Equation, which shows leaders how to change in ways that minimize stress and maximize results. He works with CEOs and their teams to create resilience strategies for organization.

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Mike Saraceno 2 years ago

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