



POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Turning ongoing struggle into positive change

A SEASON OF CHANGE

As we near the end of the calendar year, with many countries around the world facing into new spikes and corresponding restrictions, the realisation is dawning that we are facing into yet another season of change. Unfortunately, this is not a change for good. For those in the northern hemisphere, rather than returning from a summer period rejuvenated, people are instead feeling a bleakness as thoughts of a long and lonely winter loom. Plans to return to the office are delayed, forcing people to come to terms with ongoing remote working and disrupted working patterns.

The stakes are high. From a psychological perspective, many people were feeling they had successfully navigated through a significant disruption. It has been a journey. We worked through the shock of unexpected change, to make sense of a fundamentally different world and reach a level of acceptance of a new normal. Now we find ourselves pulled back into earlier phases of grief, anger and sadness. For many the regression back into lockdowns represents a new phase of trauma, with heightened feelings of despair. Putting our heads down, trying to push through hoping things will return to some form of normality, is not an option. To do so is to underestimate the longevity of Covid disruption. If you haven't already reset your goals and habits - now is the time to take stock, capture your lessons learned and set new priorities and routines to adapt in a different world.



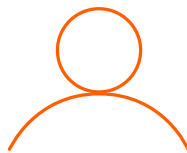
POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Post-traumatic growth has been defined as “positive psychological change experienced as a result of a struggle with highly challenging life circumstances”. Research into people who experience positive change after traumatic accidents, medical events or significant bereavements shows that growth can lead to positive shifts in relationships, a clearer sense of purpose or personal strengths, and changes in priorities and values. The starting point is to acknowledge that the old normal is no longer an option and be open to changing how you get your needs met and live your values.

You may be wondering if the disruption you have experienced would be considered a trauma. The enormity of the unforeseen change, the long-lasting nature, and the multiple threats to what we value in life is traumatic. You may be questioning whether now is a time for growth, when most days feel like a struggle. Whilst the disruption from the Covid pandemic is by no

means over, the trauma an individual experiences from an event is not isolated to the event itself. For many there is an ongoing period of difficulty or discomfort, and that is opportunity to use the event for personal growth. In living through ongoing disruption of a pandemic, we do not need to wait until the disruption dissipates to make changes – indeed that could be too late.

Trauma is a trigger to question our deeply held beliefs and challenge our assumptions. If we do so with curiosity, it can help us to gain more balanced perspective and appreciation. Such soul-searching can be powerful and life-changing, helping to surface new possibilities and goals. We are presented with an opportunity to re-set ourselves into some more effective and permanent disciplines. This is not about blindly putting a rosy tint or shutting down what is fundamentally challenging. Rather it is about acknowledging what is uncomfortable or what has become an everyday struggle – to identify changes in the way we choose to respond, that grow us into a more resilient person and leader. You cannot support growth in others without starting with yourself.

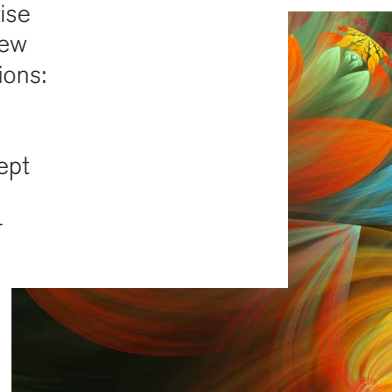


PERSONAL GROWTH

Start with the basics

To turn our struggles into growth opportunities, we need to have good foundations. We are bombarded with well-being advice, but it can feel overwhelming to prioritise what is good for us, when we are presented with new choice points. Here are three fundamental foundations:

- 1 **Good days and bad days.** As we live through ongoing uncertainty, we need to accept that we will have good and bad days. A local outbreak is likely to trigger anxiety, despair or



fear. These fluctuations will be a part of our life for some time now. It is okay to feel distressed AND we need to choose to move on from that feeling after connecting with it. This is where your support network comes in. Sharing our fears and feelings with others helps you to process your reactions to unexpected change.



LEADERSHIP GROWTH

2 Prioritise positive relationships. Consider your support network and reach out to those who you know are good for you. It can be tempting to reach out to those who we know might wallow in our worries with us— don't until you have done your own work, they will just exacerbate your concerns. Those who have experienced post traumatic growth learn to prioritise relationships that fill them up, not deplete them. Yes, you need people to empathise with you and connect with your emotions, but you need people who support you to move through the emotion. This enables you to reach acceptance of what you cannot control and identify decision points within your control. Reach out to those who need your support, when you are in the right space to offer them what they need.

3 Give yourself back choice. We cannot change the environment that Covid has created, but we can change how we personally respond. When a lot of our choice points are taken away from us, it is easy to slip into a demotivated, disengaged state. Those who grow from trauma recognise that they cannot change their circumstances, but instead focus on the choices they do have. Well-being is a good place to start, as new, tight restrictions may have taken away your preferred form of exercise. Don't rob yourself of the choice to replace that with something at home. It may not be your ideal activity, but something is better than nothing. Don't wait for some form of old normality to return – timelines are too unpredictable to wait for a time to be a healthier you.

New possibilities

Uncertainty can lead us to cling on to what we know, and yet this ongoing disruption shows that we cannot recreate pre-Covid life. To move forward when so much of the future is unknown, we need to focus on the things that really matter to us, in work and in life. Take time to discuss with family or friends what you value and explore with them how you can get those values met in this period of changing circumstances. It may be finding a new way to express your creativity. For those dealing with job loss, it may be taking a new path in your career by applying your skills to a related field or thinking of your skills as ingredients to create a new recipe, to change the focus of how you bring your different capabilities together.

Revisit team relationships

No one grows by going it alone. Team relationships enable growth by normalising challenges, providing a space to explore alternative responses to unexpected change. This is particularly important when many of our choices have been taken away from us. Reinforcing a sense of belonging and continuing to create connectedness provides people with a unit of stability in an ever-changing world. Don't underestimate the virtual home you can give people as part of your team's identity. Encourage your people to coach each other when they are feeling overwhelmed. Once you've acknowledged their concerns, simple coaching questions such as "what is another way of looking at this problem?" or "what is the opportunity that lies within the challenge?" can prompt learning and evolution. You can serve your team members well by validating their emotions and then redirect their focus to what they can do about it.

Embrace your vulnerability

Those who have experienced post traumatic growth know that it requires vulnerability to reach a level of acceptance before you can adapt to the changes forced upon you. This requires deliberate reflection around learnings as to what was important to you pre-disruption, what remains important, and what has shifted. Making meaning of a traumatic time helps us to shift the stories we tell ourselves about the impact events have had on us. We can empower ourselves by noting where we have grown, what values have come into sharper focus and where we've made different choices to be able to move forward. For leaders, role modelling this in terms of sharing your learnings encourages others to shift focus away from the uncontrollable and learn how to turn challenge into growth.

Coach new perspectives

Job insecurity and virtual groundhog days can make it difficult for your team members to spot opportunities to learn or make a professional change. Coach them to identify projects or enterprise wide initiatives that provide opportunities to continue to grow their skill set through different experiences, different stakeholders, or different problems to solve. Whilst constant change in our environment can be unsettling it also presents new, unexpected opportunities for professional growth. However, rather than adding to their commitments, help them to identify what could be de-prioritised as a result of the changing context.

Give yourself a break

Finally, in a world of instant gratification, we put unrealistic demands on ourselves to quickly transform. Transformation is built on new habits. How often have you decided on a new goal or habit, but then given up if you didn't get it right in the first week of making a change? Creating new habits in response to an unwanted change is not easy. Making good choices until they become habit takes effort, so don't feel pressure to take on every piece of advice, that would just be overwhelming. Choose one or two points that have resonated for you and tell someone who will support you in seeing it through.



We still do not really know what lies ahead of us, so rather than putting our heads down in the hope of a return to something better, we need to make decisions now that are self-sustaining. This is a period of our life that will be etched in our memories, but we have the opportunity to make our own meaning out of it.

LEARN MORE

YSC offers a range of Leadership Resilience interventions to help leaders and their teams maintain momentum and continue to have impact

Email info@ysc.com to find out how we can support your leadership teams.

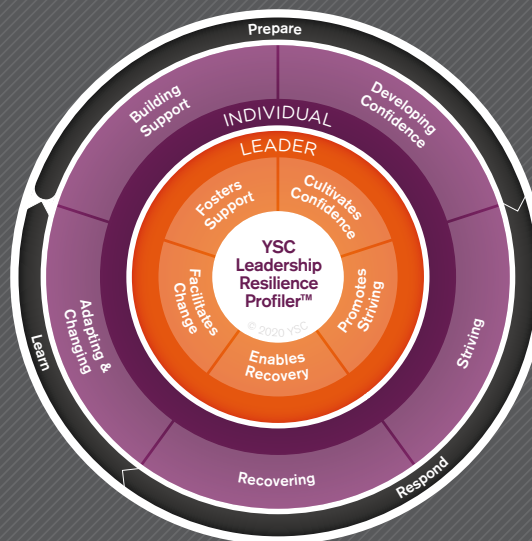
YSC.COM

THE YSC MODEL OF LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE™

By combining academic research from psychology and organizational change with real world client insights, YSC has developed a Model of Leadership Resilience that helps businesses identify the levels of resilience in their leaders, and helps leaders build these resilience levels in both themselves and their people.

YSC's Model of Leadership Resilience underpins our online profiler; a diagnostic tool which provides personalized insights and development tips, followed by individual feedback sessions.

[Click here](#) to find out more about our leadership resilience services.



RESILIENCE IS THE ABILITY TO GROW, ADAPT AND PERFORM THROUGH TIMES OF CHANGE AND CHALLENGE.

LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE IS A COLLECTIVE RESOURCE THAT LEADERS CAN DEVELOP BOTH FOR THEMSELVES AND THOSE AROUND THEM.