



ELENA AGUILAR

Author of *The Art of Coaching*

Onward

*Cultivating
Emotional Resilience
in Educators*

 JOSSEY-BASS®

“*Onward* reveals Elena Aguilar’s wisdom and humanity in helping educators find the power within themselves to realize their aspirations, despite the pervasive challenges. It is truly an amazing book, full of brilliant strategies and advice and rooted in her own vulnerable, honest, beautiful experience and stories. Anyone who makes the time to read and sit with this incredible resource will be stronger, happier, and better for it, and, I predict, forever grateful.”

—*Wendy Kopp, founder, Teach For America; CEO, Teach For All*

“*Onward* will change your life! Elena Aguilar provides a thoughtful, moving, and timely framework for how to increase the resilience of the adults who serve our students. It provides a clear path using science, research, and the compelling experiences of one who has been down this path herself. This book is a gift to every teacher, from novice to veteran, and should be required reading for anyone in school leadership.”

—*Ron Severson, superintendent of the Roseville (CA)
Joint Union High School District*

“Elena Aguilar offers a hopeful message to stressed-out educators—resilience is something that you *can* cultivate through your habits and dispositions. There is no magic wand to sweep away all stress and weariness, but this book offers good guidance for fostering a sustainable approach to the meaningful but arduous work of educating the young minds entrusted to our care.”

—*Megan Tschannen-Moran, professor of educational policy, planning, and
leadership, William & Mary School of Education*

“Elena Aguilar’s writing is the antidote every teacher needs to fight burnout and meet challenging students with fresh set of eyes. *Onward* is empowering, specific, and makes it seem possible to bring your best self to the classroom every day. When you feel the need to hit the reset button, pick up this book!”

—*Celine Coggins, lecturer and entrepreneur-in-residence, Harvard Graduate
School of Education*

“I invite every educator to keep a copy of this book by your nightstand. Each month a new chapter provides you new opportunities for exploring how you will build your resilience and commitment to great teaching.”

—*Stephanie Hirsh, executive director, Learning Forward*

“*Onward* is not a feel-good, theoretical guide to enhancing resilience. It’s a tough, look-in-the-mirror-and-do-it set of practical strategies for all educators to be their personal and professional best in this inherently stressful profession.”

—*Colin Seale, founder and CEO, thinkLaw*

“Leaders, in schools big and small, will use this book every year! *Onward* guides you through the best strategies to bring out the leaders in your staff and students. It acknowledges the ebbs and flows of a school year and how to keep your organization and you moving forward!”

—*Michelle Carpenter, principal, Berney Elementary, Walla Walla, WA*

“We educators owe it to ourselves and our students to cultivate resilience so we can continue to inspire, teach, and lead. Read this book. Grow your resiliency. Stay in this work to transform education.”

—*Christine Carlson, instructional coach, KIPP Northeast Denver Middle School*

“*Onward* opens up the real conversation about *how* to support teachers and leaders. Each page addresses essential, but often overlooked, ways we can all thrive as educators. Every new teacher and administrator needs this book.”

—*Cheryl Lana Agrawal, San Mateo (CA) County Office of Education*

“We know that for teachers, symbolic violence within this work is a natural reaction to being silenced, but *Onward* helps us to create a world where there isn’t such a heavy weight behind us while at the same time cultivating the resistance needed for the freedoms within ourselves to be felt by the nature of our very own existence and relationship to resilience.”

—*Mario Benabe, STEM educator*



Onward

Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators

Elena Aguilar

J JOSSEY-BASS™
A Wiley Brand

Copyright © 2018 by Elena Aguilar. All rights reserved.

Published by Jossey-Bass

A Wiley Brand

One Montgomery Street, Suite 1000, San Francisco, CA 94104-4594—www.josseybass.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400, fax 978-646-8600, or on the Web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, 201-748-6011, fax 201-748-6008, or online at www.wiley.com/go/permissions.

Permission is given for individual classroom teachers to reproduce the pages and illustrations for classroom use. Reproduction of these materials for an entire school system is strictly forbidden.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. Readers should be aware that Internet Web sites offered as citations and/or sources for further information may have changed or disappeared between the time this was written and when it is read.

Jossey-Bass books and products are available through most bookstores. To contact Jossey-Bass directly call our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 800-956-7739, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3986, or fax 317-572-4002.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Many of the names of the educators that I reference throughout this book are indeed their real names. To the very best of my abilities, I've depicted them and shared their words with as much accuracy as possible. When appropriate, I've used pseudonyms. To protect privacy, I've also changed identity markers and some aspects of the narrative with the hopes that the people about whom I write will be unidentifiable.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Aguilar, Elena, 1969- author.

Title: Onward : cultivating emotional resilience in educators / by Elena Aguilar.

Description: San Francisco, CA : Jossey-Bass, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017057676 (print) | LCCN 2017061590 (ebook) | ISBN 9781119364924 (pdf) | ISBN 9781119364900 (epub) | ISBN 9781119364894 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Teachers--Psychology. | Teacher morale. | Educators. | Resilience (Personality trait)

Classification: LCC LB2840 (ebook) | LCC LB2840 .A38 2018 (print) | DDC 371.102--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017057676>

Cover image: © Erick Joyner / EyeEm / Getty Images

Cover design by Wiley

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

PB printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	1
Resilience: The What, Why, and How	2
What Informs This Book?	10
Who Is This Book For?	11
How Is This Book Organized?	12
An Invitation to a Journey	13
<i>Habits and Dispositions of Emotionally Resilient Educators</i>	15
<i>A Calendar of Learning</i>	17
<i>The Resilience Manifesto</i>	19
<i>1 Know Yourself: June</i>	21
Self-Knowledge Is True Power	22
Acknowledging Context: Dominant Culture	34
A Dive into Vulnerability	38
Disposition: Purposefulness	40
When the Earth Shakes Under Your Feet	42
<i>2 Understand Emotions: July</i>	45
What Are Emotions?	47
Understanding Emotional Intelligence	50
“I’m So Stressed and Overwhelmed”	54

This Body We Live In	56
A Dive into Anger	60
Disposition: Acceptance	64
Reclaim Your Right to Emotions	66
3 Tell Empowering Stories: August	69
<hr/>	
The Promise and Pitfalls of Storytelling	70
Digging to the Roots of Interpretation	72
Crafting New Stories	80
Storytelling for Collective Empowerment	83
Acknowledging Context: Organizational Narratives	86
A Dive into Love	88
Disposition: Optimism	90
Choose Your Stories with Care	92
4 Build Community: September	95
<hr/>	
Why Focus on Community Building?	96
Trust: The Foundation of a Healthy Community	100
How to Build Community	104
A Dive into Fear	119
Disposition: Empathy	121
Toward a Beloved Community	122
5 Be Here Now: October	125
<hr/>	
Mindfulness: What, How, and Why	126
Meditation Changes Your Brain, Body, and Classroom	131
Mindfulness as a Tool for Cultural Competence	134
A Dive into Joy	140
Disposition: Humor	143
Those 65,000 Daily Thoughts	144
6 Take Care of Yourself: November	147
<hr/>	
When Disillusionment Sets In	148
To Hell with Martyrdom	153
What Your Body Desperately Needs	157
Learn to Say No	164
A Dive into Perfectionism	166

Disposition: Positive Self-Perception	169
Strive for Balance	170
7 Focus on the Bright Spots: December	173
<hr/>	
A Strengths-Based Approach	175
Why It's Hard to Focus on the Bright Spots	178
Training the Brain	181
Acknowledging Context: Leadership Development Matters	187
A Dive into Sadness	188
Disposition: Empowerment	191
Look for the Light	194
8 Cultivate Compassion: January	197
<hr/>	
What Compassion Offers	199
Self-Compassion	204
Compassion Fatigue	209
Forgiving Yourself and Others	211
A Dive into Envy	214
Disposition: Perspective	215
Love Is the Only Way	217
9 Be a Learner: February	221
<hr/>	
Learn About Learning So That You Can Learn	223
Sad Sundays and How to Stop Having Them	234
Acknowledging Context: On the Conditions for Learning	239
A Dive into Shame	242
Disposition: Curiosity	243
A Beginner's Mind	244
10 Play and Create: March	247
<hr/>	
Why We Need to Play Every Day	249
Art: Where Play Can Take Us	255
Creativity as a Habit and Disposition	258
A Dive into Flow	261
Disposition: Courage	262
The Healing Salves	264

<i>11 Ride the Waves of Change: April</i>	267
Change Is Here to Stay	268
How to Deal with Unwanted Change	272
The Secret to Leading Change	278
Acknowledging Context: When Do We Fight the Good Fight?	283
A Dive into Patience	284
Disposition: Perseverance	286
Waves Can Be Fun	287
<i>12 Celebrate and Appreciate: May</i>	289
The Benefits of Appreciation	291
How to Practice Gratitude	293
It's Okay to Go	300
Acknowledging Context: Spirituality	301
A Dive into Awe and Wonder	306
Disposition: Trust	308
Underground Rivers	309
<i>Conclusion: Onward to Freedom</i>	311
On Freedom	311
Onward: The Movement	314
<i>Appendix A: The Habits and Dispositions of Resilient Educators: A Self-Assessment</i>	317
<i>Appendix B: How to Make Lasting Change</i>	323
<i>Appendix C: The Core Emotions</i>	329
<i>Appendix D: Depression and Anxiety Scales</i>	333
<i>Appendix E: Common Problematic Core Beliefs</i>	337
<i>Appendix F: Resources for Further Learning</i>	341
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	353
<i>About the Author</i>	357
<i>References</i>	359
<i>Index</i>	365



PREFACE

You're on a rugged trek in an arid land. Thirsty and dusty, you concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other. The heat makes your head pound, and you wonder whether you're lost. Just as you reach your limit, you come to a clearing. Hummingbirds appear, darting back and forth, dipping into and then emerging from what you see is a huge hole in the ground.

Stepping to the rim, you peer into a deep cave, at the bottom of which lies a pool of sublime turquoise water. Here, the foliage is lush and green, refreshing and inviting. An old wooden ladder beckons you, and you descend tentatively toward the pool.

Your apprehension begins to dissipate. The air is cool. You hear only water dripping off the ends of stalactites as your eyes adjust to the light. You drink from an underground stream that flows into the pool.

You wade in, submerge your body, and allow the translucent water to envelop you. As you float on your back, the layers of dust, exhaustion, and fear wash away.

Cradled by these blue-green spring waters, you know you can do anything. You will continue the trek, and, even though you'll face thirst and fatigue again, you'll be able to go on. You know now. You remember the way.



In Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, as well as in other parts of the world, just meters below ground lie *cenotes*, water holes formed millions of years ago by the collapse of limestone. That's the image on the cover of this book. These natural springs, filled by underground rivers and rainwater, have been a resource for people for thousands of years. The ancient Mayans built villages around these pools and believed them to be a portal to speak with the gods—*cenote* means “sacred well.”

Today, Mayans continue to care for these places and enjoy the relief of the waters in the long, hot days of summer.

When you float in a cenote, you feel—I can assure you—that anything is possible.

The cenote offers a beautiful metaphor for resilience. Within you and outside you is a wellspring of life-giving energy that you can access and cultivate. The cenote provides relief on a scorching day. It already exists. Our task is to find our way back to it, understand what it offers, care for it, and then float. Resilience is within us. Let's start the journey.

*In memory of my grandparents, Lil and Frank, who personified resilience,
fought the good fight, and loved me fiercely*

With our lives we make our answers all the time, to
this ravenous, beautiful, mutilated, gorgeous world.

VICTORIA SAFFORD

Resilience

Perseverance

Trust

KNOW YOURSELF

CELEBRATE + APPRECIATE

RIDE THE WAVES OF CHANGE

Purposefulness

UNDERSTAND EMOTIONS

Courage

Acceptance

TELL EMPOWERING STORIES

PLAY + CREATE

Optimism

Curiosity

BUILD COMMUNITY

BE A LEARNER

Empathy

Perspective

BE HERE NOW

CULTIVATE COMPASSION

Humor

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Positive
Self-Perception

Empowerment

FOCUS ON THE BRIGHT SPOTS

Onward!





INTRODUCTION

Imagine it's the end of a rainy Friday when kids didn't get time outside and you had to supervise indoor recess. You had only 10 minutes for lunch, during which you inhaled a bag of chips and a soda; and during the final few minutes of cleanup, a student who often pushes your buttons says something disrespectful to you. You had only asked the student to pick up a piece of trash. Other kids giggle and watch to see what you'll do.

Freeze this scene.

This moment between something that happens and how we respond is what this book is about. This is the moment when we cultivate resilience. This is the moment that is referenced in this quote (erroneously attributed to Viktor Frankl but actually of unknown origin): "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

Educators encounter hundreds of moments like these every day. We are challenged over and over and over by things that students do, or the unplanned fire drill, or the announcement of a mandatory meeting on Wednesday afternoon, or an upset parent showing up at our door five minutes before school starts, or the broken copy machine, or a request that we cover someone else's class during our prep because their sub didn't show, or any number of other things. Alone, these are minor inconveniences, but the sum total of these moments feels exhausting, depletes our resilience, and contributes to burnout. There is no moment more important for educators to attend to than this one between stimulus and response. If we slow down and examine these moments, if we cultivate new responses, we might just transform our schools into places where we all thrive.

Change is the only thing we can count on. It will rain when we wish it wouldn't, kids will say obnoxious things when we're exhausted, leaders will come

and go. However, we have tremendous power in *how we interpret* what happens and, therefore, in how we respond to big and little incidents that we didn't anticipate, don't want, or don't like. The opportunity for resilience originates in how we make sense of the things that happen, because interpretation dictates actions. There are many ways to interpret a student's obnoxious comment at the end of a rainy Friday, and each of those interpretations will lead us to act in a different way. Each of those actions will have intended and unintended consequences, ripples of impact on ourselves, our class, and our relationship to that individual student. We can make a choice in these moments.

Let this sink in: We can pinpoint the exact moment when resilience can be cultivated. You can actually do something about how you experience every day; you don't have to be a victim of the turmoil and unpredictability of the world. Change is a given in life; how you respond is within your control.

I have no doubt that we all enter this field of work because we want to positively impact young people. The key to achieving our purpose lies in the moment between stimulus and response. We can meet our commitment to educational equity when we examine this moment and cultivate behaviors different than those in which we habitually engage. By cultivating resilience, we can fulfill the intentions that brought us into this profession. In addition, with this knowledge, we can do something about the exodus of teachers who quit because of burnout. We can offer our students more stability and continuity, as well as role models for managing the inevitable challenges of life.

Resilience: The What, Why, and How

Simply put, resilience is how we weather the storms in our lives and rebound after something difficult. The most important thing to know is that you can increase your resilience; it's a set of adaptive behaviors. In this book, I hope to guide you in a journey to discover the resilience that already exists within you, and to discover many ways to cultivate your resilience.

Resilience is in great part about our attitude and behaviors; that's what we'll focus on in this book. However, it's also important to acknowledge that our ability to be resilient is also connected to our circumstances, which we may have only limited ability to influence. Furthermore, researchers have found that there are neurobiological underpinnings of emotional resilience (Osório, Probert, Jones, Young, and Robbins, 2017). This research seeks to understand why there's such variation in the way people respond to adversity: Some people overcome unbelievable

hardship, whereas others' lives are completely derailed by intense levels of stress. Various mechanisms in our bodies, and specifically our brains, work in concert to make us more or less stress resilient across our life span. Our genetic makeup may play a role: We may actually be born with a set amount of resilience. The emerging field of epigenetics is exploring this question of how stressors that our ancestors experienced might impact our level of resilience.

Although this research is interesting and someday may point to very useful implications, we'll focus on this fact: A substantial amount of our ability to be resilient is fostered in our daily habits. This is good news. Here's an expanded definition of resilience, which forms that basis for this book. Resilience is

- A *way of being* that allows us to bounce back quickly from adversity, and stronger than before, so that we can fulfill our purpose in life.
- An adaptive, dynamic process that includes an individual's interactions over time in a complex environment. Context plays a role; resilience is not simply a function of one individual's behavior. Who we are and where we are impact our ability to cultivate resilience.
- Cultivated through engaging in specific habits and by fostering specific dispositions.
- What enables us to thrive, not just survive.

Why We Must Focus on Resilience

Schools are stressful places. Regardless of whether you teach in an established, well-resourced private or suburban school or in an underfunded school in an underserved community, teaching is emotional work and is inherently stressful. In part, this is the nature of being in a helping profession and serving young people in complex organizations. Healthy stress can be okay; it can challenge us and help us develop. However, in many of our schools, healthy stress is frequently displaced by toxic stress. Toxic stress occurs when demands consistently outpace our ability to cope. Toxic stress first manifests as decreased productivity, and escalates to more serious symptoms such as anxiety, dissociation, frustration, and, eventually, burn-out. Roughly half a million US teachers leave the profession each year—a turnover rate of over 20% (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014).

School leaders—both site leaders and central office leaders—must focus on boosting the resilience of staff as a lever for school transformation. Teacher attrition among first-year teachers has increased about 40% in the past two decades (Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey, 2014). A range of factors, such as morale,

accountability expectations, and salaries, certainly contribute to the attrition problems, but stress and poor management of stressors are also rated as a top reason why teachers leave the profession (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Burnout is physical and emotional fatigue—and surely we can do something about that. This rate is much higher in urban areas, in secondary classrooms, and in hard-to-staff content areas such as special education, math, science, and foreign languages (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017). It is estimated that teacher turnover costs school districts upwards of \$2.2 billion per year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014) and the cost of replacing a teacher in an urban district exceeds \$20,000 per teacher (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017). For site administrators, turnover rates may be comparable, particularly in urban areas, but the data is not systematically collected as it is for teacher attrition.

Lack of resilience, therefore, has a financial cost and contributes to staff instability, which in turn negatively impacts student learning and experience. High turnover rates at schools make it hard to accumulate professional capital, hinder the implementation of programs, contribute to low levels of trust among stakeholders, and make staff and student culture fragile. It would simply make good sense, from a financial perspective, to focus on increasing staff resilience.

The end goal, of course, is not just to retain warm adult bodies in classrooms but to meet the needs of our students. Kids need passionate, effective, committed educators. In order to retain such people, school leaders need to provide teachers with resources to meet the challenges they'll encounter in their work so that they can learn from those challenges, surmount them, and fulfill their purpose. And our purpose is to ensure that we are working in, teaching in, and leading organizations *where every single child thrives*—academically, socially, and emotionally. We must cultivate resilience so that all children feel that they belong to a resilient community, so that all children graduate and are eligible for the college or career of their choice, and so that all children have an expansive tool set to contribute to our society.

Over the last decade or two, in many schools across the United States and in other countries, there has been increased attention to the social and emotional learning (SEL) needs of children. Curricula and standards have been developed, resources have been allocated to SEL programs, and staff have been trained. This is a tremendous advancement in acknowledging children as complex, multifaceted beings, and it is our responsibility, as adults committed to guiding children in acquiring the massive set of skills they'll need in order to have productive lives, to attend to children's social and emotional skills.

It's now time to look at teachers and all the adults working in and with schools through this same lens—as people whose learning needs include the social and

emotional realm of existence. In the majority of schools, what's needed isn't more professional development on deconstructing standards or academic discourse or using data to drive instruction. What's needed is time, space, and attention to managing stress and cultivating resilience. Whether you're a teacher reading this intent on boosting your capacities in these areas or you're a positional leader concerned about the flood of teachers leaving your schools, this book, and the companion workbook, offer a way to begin this learning. We must focus on cultivating our own resilience because it'll help us manage physical and emotional stressors, enjoy life more, and fulfill our purpose as educators.

The Three Conversations We Must Have

There are three conversations in which we must simultaneously engage to consider how cultivating resilience can transform our schools. These three, depicted in Figure I.1, are

1. **Individual resilience.** We can do a lot to boost our own individual resilience, improve our well-being, and prevent burnout. Ultimately, this is what we have the most influence and control over: What we think, how we engage with our emotions, and the actions we take every day to cultivate resilience. It is incumbent on each of us to attend to our resilience.
2. **Organizational conditions.** Focusing on individual well-being and action is not enough. If the conditions and context in which teachers work are suboptimal, it is not enough to tell teachers to sleep more, check their attitude, and be grateful. Conditions in many organizations don't foster well-being. These

Figure I.1 Three Conversations We Need to Have to Transform Schools



include the adult culture, the strength of leadership, and basic operational routines and systems. To address burnout and turnover, leaders in organizations must take responsibility for substantially improving the conditions in which people work. Until then, we'll still see teachers leaving in droves—even those with high levels of individual resilience.

3. **Systemic conditions.** We must address the macro, political, and economic context of our education system. Teachers must be paid more, and they must be treated as people who can think and who can learn. Teacher and administrator preparation must improve. We must address the racism, classism, and sexism that exists in our institutions, including in our schools. We'll need to talk about testing and publishing scores and performance pay. Until we dig down to the structural and systemic roots of the dysfunctions in our education system, we'll still see high levels of teacher turnover. This may open a Pandora's box, because we'll need to talk about capitalism and the legacy of colonialism and property taxes and who votes and for whom we vote. We'll need to talk about patriarchy and the dehumanization of some groups of people. We must have these conversations, however; our resilience and well-being are connected to them. And if our true goal is school transformation, we'll need to have them.

Here's my theory of action: If we boost our individual resilience, then we will have more energy to address organizational and systemic conditions—to elect officials who will fund public education, organize against policies that dehumanize educators, and push back on punitive assessment policies and scripted curriculum that turn teachers into robots and students into depositories to be filled. With more energy and more resilience, we can build and strengthen the kinds of communities in which we can thrive, where we can engage in professional development that allows us to reflect on our own biases, and where we can observe and learn from each other.

I wrote this book, and *The Onward Workbook*, to begin addressing the first of these conversations: To offer strategies to boost our individual resilience. But I know that this book will contribute to the second and third conversations, because in acquiring the individual strategies, resilient educators can then transform their entire classroom as a subset of society, their school as a larger subset, and even the larger school district and system. Resilient educators may also have the energy to engage in conversation about the macro context and to take action to change it.

In order to create the just and equitable society that I know so many of us yearn for, we need tremendous reserves of resilience. We must change the macro conditions in which we live and work, and to do that, we'll need all the physical and

emotional resources we can muster. As Frederick Douglass said, “Power concedes nothing without demand,” and we’ll need a lot of energy to make our demands.

A Conceptual Framework for Resilience

This book is anchored in a four-part conceptual framework, based on the key components of resilience and how it is developed. The four parts are *who we are*, *where we are*, *what we do*, and *how we are*. Figure I.2 represents this framework.

Figure I.2 The Resilience Pie



● What you can most influence; the content of ONWARD.

Who We Are: What We Start With

A great deal of who we are is somewhat fixed in our genetics, personality, identities, and so on. However, we can cultivate resilience through deep understanding of these dimensions of who we are—which can also help us understand where we can influence or even change aspects of ourselves that we consider fixed. Who we are includes

- Genetics
- Personality traits
- Values and beliefs
- Aptitudes and strengths
- Sociopolitical identities (including gender, race, ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status)
- Our psyche (including the physiological components of emotion)

Where We Are: Context Matters

Context matters, even though we may have limited ability to change or impact it. Context includes

- Circumstances and situation
- Sociopolitical, cultural, and economic context
- Stage of life and phase of career

Who we are intersects in a number of ways with where we are, in time and space. Our context includes personal life circumstances, such as whether we are parents caring for young children or are living far from home. In addition, there's professional context, which includes the nature of and challenges in the district, school, or organization in which we work. The context for our resilience is different if we work in a small, suburban, well-resourced school that's had the same effective principal for 14 years, as opposed to, for example, a large, urban, underfunded high school that sees new administrators every year. Context matters.

The sociopolitical, cultural, and economic context in which we all work affects our resilience. Context is the school's funding, education policy, and shifting demographics. The social, cultural, political, and economic systems in which we live also deeply influence our beliefs and ways of thinking. We must recognize and name these; otherwise they exist in the shadows, from which they wield too much control.

Finally, context is career stage. At different stages, we deal with different factors that affect our resilience: New teachers struggle with feeling effective, for example, whereas experienced teachers struggle more with challenges of motivation

and commitment (Day, Sammons, and Gu, 2008). Context matters, and we'll keep it within our peripheral vision in order to clarify our sphere of influence and hone our awareness of our thoughts and feelings.

What We Do: The Habits of Resilient Educators

Habits and behaviors are the third component of this framework—and this is what *Onward* focuses on. This is where resilience can be intentionally, strategically, methodically, and systematically cultivated. I have identified 12 habits in my research that are the highest leverage in building resilience in educators. They form the basis for this book and its companion, *The Onward Workbook*. The Habits and Dispositions of Resilient Educators, following this introduction, summarizes the 12 habits of resilient educators.

How We Are: The Dispositions of Resilient Educators

Think about people you know who have faced adversity and continue to move forward in life, pursuing their dreams and passions. How would you describe these people's attitude and character? Optimistic? Tenacious? Humorous? These are *dispositions*. A disposition is

- A descriptor of someone's temperament, character, constitution, attitude, mindset, or mood
- A way of being
- Demonstrated through a behavior or a habit
- A reflection of a person's beliefs and thinking

Dispositions are not fixed; they can be learned. We can learn to be more optimistic. Habits pave the way for acquiring new dispositions. That's why this book emphasizes the *habits* that build resilience and less so the dispositions. Practicing the habits, ideally on a daily basis, helps us develop resilient dispositions.

Researchers from various fields have identified many dispositions of resilient people. I've sorted through those findings and grouped the dispositions into those that are most relevant to the context of education and most evident in resilient educators.

You can see the 12 dispositions in *The Habits and Dispositions of Resilient Educators*, which follows this introduction. How do you think your days in the classroom might be different if your mood and temperament reflected these dispositions? How might your experience be different if your principal demonstrated the majority of these dispositions? If your superintendent did? The dispositions of the resilient can be strengthened by engaging in the habits described in this book and through the exercises in *The Onward Workbook*.

What Informs This Book?

I've been interested in resilience since I was eight, when my mother married a Chilean exile who had been imprisoned and tortured in his country under General Pinochet. The community in which I was raised included South African freedom fighters, exiled South American teachers, and aging Jewish immigrants who had experienced anti-Semitism in more than one place in the world. I learned of more details about their experiences than may have been appropriate for a child. However, I also watched these people sing, celebrate, dance, and love in a way that embodied *joie de vivre*. They had a selfless and unique sense of humor that they used as a weapon against the suffering they had experienced, and I saw them build meaningful lives for themselves, form communities, and fiercely charge onward to change the world. They didn't see themselves as victims, and the struggles they'd endured didn't end their lives.

I've long been fascinated by how people have not only survived adversity but emerged as stronger, more compassionate and resolved people with energy and commitment to transform society. In addition, like all of us, I've had my share of personal hardships, which include being the child of divorced parents, being an immigrant, and losing my mother to cancer. These personal experiences of adversity also inform this book.

This is a book about cultivating resilience *in educators*, and although all of the habits described here are relevant to building resilience in anyone, and any reader could benefit from the contents of this book, I write specifically for those in the field of education. There are particular implications for resilience building when working in the field of service, spending your days with children, on a school-year calendar, and in complex and dynamic (and often dysfunctional) systems. This book addresses those particularities.

The 25 years I've spent working in education are the foundation for this book. These years include many in the classroom in the Oakland (California) Unified School District, as well as in other roles in this district. My experience over the last decade as an instructional and leadership coach, a trainer of coaches, and an author of two books about coaching and team development (*The Art of Coaching* and *The Art of Coaching Teams*) informs how I've chosen to write this book. Coaching is, at its essence, about helping people change habits and strengthen dispositions. You may not notice all my "coaching moves," but in this book and *The Onward Workbook*, I employ my skills as a coach to facilitate growth.

Personal and professional curiosity led me to research emotional resilience, psychology, systems thinking, and change management. I've scoured literature from the fields of positive psychology and neurobiology, listened to experts and

The Onward Workbook

The Onward Workbook contains some thirty activities for each chapter to help you explore the concepts in this book and put them into practice. My vision is that you'll engage in an activity every day, because resilience is cultivated one day at a time.

The workbook contains the questions I'd ask you if I was coaching you or facilitating your team's weekly meetings. It will guide you to practice, internalize, and apply these resilience-boosting habits. I hope that you'll read a chapter of this book and then reach for the workbook.

sages speak on mindfulness and Eastern philosophy, and devoured self-help books for insights and instructions on how to cultivate resilience. I've also read everything I could find specifically on resilience in teachers.

The strategies in this book and *The Onward Workbook* have been personally tried and tested in schools, offices, and training centers across the United States. I've spent a decade piloting them with individual teachers and leaders and in group settings with teams of educators, and now they're ready for you.

Who Is This Book For?

Whether you're in your 1st or 15th or 30th year of teaching, this book is for you. Life brings constant change and challenges, and I haven't yet met anyone who feels as though he or she couldn't use more tools to manage the ups and downs. New and novice teachers were front and foremost on my mind as I wrote this book, as well as educators who embark on new endeavors—be that starting a school, teaching a new grade level or subject, or moving into a new role. Moments of change bring increased stressors, calling us to intentionally boost our resilience.

If you picked up this book because you are concerned about the well-being and attrition of teachers from your school or district, I'm thrilled. I hope that this book will end up in the hands of those who can make decisions and who coach, supervise, and lead others, and I hope you'll be convinced to cultivate the resilience of your staff. If you are reading this book intent on boosting the resilience of your coachees, mentees, or staff, you will gain a lot of skills and knowledge to do so. However, also know that you'll need to explore this topic and experience the

strategies personally in order to help others. To lead transformational efforts, begin by attending to your own transformation.

This book, along with the accompanying workbook, is designed as a curriculum for professional development for a school staff or a central office team, for coaches and site administrators—essentially, for any group that operates in or with our education system. I envision groups gathering for weekly or monthly professional development (PD) sessions, taking up the habit of the month and engaging in the workbook activities together. I hope that this book might help leaders reenvision PD—how, where, when, and why we do it.

Specifically for Leaders

I'm committed to helping you build your resilience and the resilience of others. Toward that end, you'll notice sections of this book titled "Implications for Leaders," which provide strategies and tips for implementing these ideas. My advice and suggestions for you are informed by my years of coaching leaders and my understanding of your role and context.

How Is This Book Organized?

Here's a brief overview of the structure of chapters.

Contents

Each chapter focuses on a habit and how it builds resilience. It contains the following sections:

- A "dive into an emotion," which explores a specific emotion, such as anger or shame, and how it is connected to that chapter's habit.
- "Dispositions," which discusses 1 of the 12 dispositions and how it connects to the habit of the month.

Some chapters have a section called "Acknowledging Context," in which our social, political, historic, cultural context is recognized, and the connections are drawn between the context and our work in schools.

The content of this entire book is about making big and little changes in your behaviors, habits, and routines. Appendix B, *How to Make Lasting Change*, offers a primer for how to effectively and even painlessly build and maintain new habits.

You might want to read that before you continue, or explore it later. It's treated as an appendix so that you can easily find it and frequently reference it.

Sequence

I've sequenced the habits of resilience to build on each other and map onto the rhythms of the school year. *Onward* could be read all at once, but the strategies in *The Onward Workbook* will be internalized best if they are digested, discussed, and practiced over the course of a year.

Each habit correlates to the month that best aligns to that particular theme. Ideally you could begin your study of this book in June, when you can focus on the habit of self-knowledge. In November, when most educators are exhausted from the launch of the school year, *Onward* offers a chapter on self-care, and then in May, a chapter on celebration—obviously an appropriate topic for the end of the school year. A Calendar of Learning, a table that follows this introduction, connects each habit to a month.

The first three chapters of this book should be read in order. They offer foundational approaches for building resilience. After that, if you want to jump to Chapter 9 because that's the one you feel would help you the most, or because it maps onto the current month, then go ahead! Appendix A, The Habits and Dispositions of Resilient Educators: A Self-Assessment, can help you make decisions about the order in which you might read this book.

An Invitation to a Journey

Resilience is not a magical elixir that will eliminate *all* of the physical, emotional, or cognitive demands of teaching, but resilience can substantially and dramatically increase our ability to manage the daily stressors and rebound from inevitable setbacks. Resilience allows us to listen to students and their families and take in painful information, because resilience ensures that we can keep our hearts open to what we see and hear. Resilience makes us confident in our ability to manage our own, and others', intense emotions. Resilience also enables us to have difficult conversations—and if we aren't having difficult conversations in our efforts to transform schools, we're probably not making meaningful progress. Resilience will bring communities and educators out of our silos and into healthy camaraderie. As we strengthen our resilience, we'll have more energy to direct toward participating in transformational school change.

With this book, I'm inviting you to join a movement toward self-knowledge, understanding, and acceptance; toward embracing emotions and creating space for them in our public, professional spaces; and toward authentic community among adults, between adults and children, and for youth, so that we may create spaces where young people can acquire the skills to thrive. I hope you will be a part of this movement. You can join others on the website, www.onwardthebook.com. The Resilience Manifesto, which follows this introduction, offers a platform for this movement.

And now, let's start our journey. Cultivating resilience is easier than you might think. Within you, you already have a spring to drink from and rest in—your own internal *cenote*. You are already resilient. In this book, and in *The Onward Workbook*, I hope to guide you back to this pool of strength and resources, help you find ways to fill it, and offer new ideas for how you might rest in it more often. And so onward, ever onward, because really, what other option do we have?

For online resources please visit www.onwardthebook.com.

The Habits and Dispositions of Emotionally Resilient Educators

Chapter Month	HABIT <i>Your behaviors</i>	DISPOSITION <i>Your attitude, character, or way of being</i>
1 June	Know Yourself	Purposefulness
	When you know yourself well—when you understand your emotions, social identities, core values, and personality—you gain clarity on your purpose in life and in work. Being anchored in purpose makes you able to deal with setbacks and challenges.	
2 July	Understand Emotions	Acceptance
	Understanding emotions—accepting them and having strategies to respond to them—is essential to cultivate resilience. With an understanding of emotions, you can accept their existence, recognize where you can influence a situation, and let go of what is outside your control.	
3 August	Tell Empowering Stories	Optimism
	How you interpret and make sense of events is a juncture point where emotional resilience increases or depletes. You make the choice about what story to tell. When you tell empowering stories, your optimism may expand, and optimism is a key trait of resilient people.	
4 September	Build Community	Empathy
	We are social beings, and we need each other to thrive. A strong, healthy community can bolster us through challenging moments and bring joy to our lives. When we build community, we can build empathy for each other; and building empathy for each other helps us build community.	
5 October	Be Here Now	Humor
	Learning to be in the present moment, without judging it, boosts our resilience. It can allow us to feel accepting and clearheaded about our options for response. When we're fully present, we're more likely to find appropriate levity in moments of challenge and to relieve stress by finding humor in a situation.	
6 November	Take Care of Yourself	Positive Self-Perception
	Physical self-care and well-being are foundational for many other habits. When your body is cared for, you're better able to deal with emotions. Resilient people have a healthy self-perception, are committed to taking care of themselves, and accept themselves more or less as they are.	

Chapter Month	HABIT <i>Your behaviors</i>	DISPOSITION <i>Your attitude, character, or way of being</i>
7 December	Focus on the Bright Spots	Empowerment
	We can hone our attention to focus on our strengths, assets, and skills. This helps us generally feel better and enables us to respond to challenges more effectively. Focusing on strengths also boosts our levels of self-efficacy, and we feel more empowered to influence our surroundings.	
8 January	Cultivate Compassion	Perspective
	Compassion for ourselves, as well as for others, helps us deal with the interpersonal challenges we face on a daily basis. Perspective allows us to recognize the complexity of a situation. Perspective allows us to empathize with others, see the long view, extricate ourselves from the drama of a moment, and identify a wider range of responses to an event.	
9 February	Be a Learner	Curiosity
	If we see challenges as opportunities for learning, if we engage our curiosity whenever we're presented with an obstacle, we're more likely to find solutions. This habit and disposition help us not just survive adversity but thrive in the aftermath.	
10 March	Play and Create	Courage
	Creativity and play unlock inner resources for dealing with stress, solving problems, and enjoying life. When we are creative, we are resourceful, and we problem-solve in new and original ways, which fuels our courage. Our thinking expands, and our connection with ourselves and others deepens.	
11 April	Ride the Waves of Change	Perseverance
	Change is one thing we can count on, and when we encounter it, we can harness our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual energies, and direct them where they will make the biggest difference. Perseverance, patience, and courage help us manage change.	
12 May	Celebrate and Appreciate	Trust
	Individual and collective celebrations, as well as the practice of gratitude, is the capstone to the habits in this book. Even during hard moments, if we can shift into a stance of appreciation, we'll build our resilience. Appreciation cultivates our trust in ourselves, in a process, and perhaps in something greater, which helps us respond to the inevitable challenges of life.	