

POWER UP

The smart woman's
guide to unleashing
her potential



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Chapter 6

RESILIENCE

“You may tread me in the dirt but still, like dust,
I’ll rise.”

—MAYA ANGELOU

THE POWER OF RESILIENCE

Resilience, also known as inner strength, resolve or grit, plays a vital role in our ability to Power Up again and again, throughout our professional and personal lives. Resilience is what we rely on when there are more bumps in the road than smooth bits. We can all play our ‘A’ game on our best days, but how do we perform when the wheels are

threatening to fall off? Can we withstand pressure, criticism and the inevitable knocks that come with success and live to fight another day? This is a quality to nurture and cherish because there's nothing more powerful than a strong and resilient woman.

Resilience in action

It's ironic that I find myself writing about resilience at the end of one of the most challenging times of my life. Last year, I lost my dad. It's only just beginning to dawn on me what a huge deal this has been. Coping with grief and a sense of loss while supporting others through theirs has seen me burying myself in work to avoid dealing with it. But, of course, some levels of pain can't be ignored. It turns out that the whole world tilts on its axis when one of your most significant anchors is snatched away. And it's at times like this that we really learn about ourselves and how resilient we are.

These are the times in all our lives when we have to dig deep and look within for resolve and strength. I like to think that my major challenges have made me a tough cookie. But they've also made me, at times, brittle and unreachable to the world around me. I've just thought 'look at me with my first-world problems' – with so much anguish in the world, in the hierarchy of suffering, who was I to make a fuss? And perhaps those early experiences of feeling lost and voiceless gave me the sense that I had to soldier on alone, and just, well, toughen up.

And therefore, in grief this past year, my inclination has been to shut down and turn inwards, rather than open up to those who can support me. But I've discovered that this time I just can't do it alone. The fact is, losing my dad is on a whole

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other scale to all the other difficult things that have happened to me before. This tough cookie well and truly crumbled. And it's impossible, when crumbling, to shut down and build resources from within, as I normally would. I've had to accept help and support from outside.

I know now it's far more difficult to deal with challenges when you're the lone wolf who doesn't seek help. And that when you join the pack, open up to people, share some of your vulnerabilities and insecurities and ask for support and advice, the world gets warmer. Your openness acts like a magnet and likeminded people are moved to help you. As a result, you move through suffering far more smoothly.

This year has encapsulated resilience for me. I don't think we ever become fully resilient, but through building strategies to get through difficult times, I've learnt how to 'live with' difficult feelings, and become more adept at rolling with the punches and drawn strength from that.

How does Resilience relate to Power Up?

So why is developing resilience so important for powering up? Aside from our conditioning that we should put the whole world before us on our list of priorities, our heightened powers of intuition and superior levels of emotional intelligence mean that we women pick up on subtle cues far more than men. We feel things more deeply and read much more into them than our male counterparts. This can pick away at our strength, undermine our resilience and sap our energy so that it's harder to just get on with the day.

It's this mindset that can make you feel like a failure when you come out of a meeting without landing a single point.

In your head you're either bad or brilliant – you can't be in between, or just having an off day, or have nothing particular to say on that subject, or only be there to listen. If you're insecure, you may interpret this as a failure on your part, when most men wouldn't think twice about putting on a similar performance and deeming it a success.

Some women can be extremely sensitive, hold onto harsh words and cruel actions far longer than men. We can blow these things up out of all proportion. We find it difficult to let go of stuff. Those hot, tear-igniting feelings of being misunderstood, not being heard or respected, of being misjudged, of not being enough –which can linger and erode our self-esteem. They can be so powerful that they can tarnish our resilience and get in the way of our fulfilling our potential. Because in this frame of mind we're just hearing the bad stuff, not the good, and we come out feeling we haven't done ourselves justice – or that we are rubbish anyway. As a result, we may shy away from assertively expressing our knowledge for fear of being shot down, or simply disagreed with. We instinctively avoid forming new relationships because we're fearful of rejection. We steer clear of experiences that will draw attention to ourselves because we don't want to look stupid or out of place.

When resilience is compromised it negatively impacts on all the other sources of power in the Power Up Model®. This becomes a negative spiral because if we don't put ourselves out there in these ways, we become less adept at doing so, which will make us even less resilient because we'll be in fewer situations where we have to toughen up and 'bring it'. We need to learn this because colleagues are not always nice, the world isn't always fair and it pays to know how to roll with the punches. So what do we need to do?

When faced with a challenge, we can either let it consume us, let it hold us back or, alternatively, we can find a way to overcome our feelings of self-doubt by keeping things in perspective and developing strategies to overcome them.

To be crystal clear, this isn't about 'putting on our big girl pants' (an expression I despise as much as telling a man to 'grow a pair'). This is about learning how to maintain our power, even in the face of adversity. If you do yoga, think 'warrior pose' (as opposed to 'worrier pose'!): standing strong, arms outstretched, feet planted, looking in the direction of your outstretched hand. You feel that unwavering power, not just when things are bad but all the time. Like a centurion whose strength is maintained through war and peace, our weapons are not our sword and shield, but our own inner strength. Our resilience.

Why do we need it?

How do you respond to setbacks, failure and negative feedback? Do you allow them to paralyse or overwhelm you? Or do you spring back? Perhaps it depends on the circumstances? Maybe a couple of knockbacks are do-able, but the relentless drip-drip is what threatens to drive you over the edge?

Resilience increases your sense of self-worth. Not only that, it will help you to identify those moments when life threatens to topple you and give you the foresight, strength and confidence to do something about it.

Before I launched my business, I had a leadership role in a global communications firm. Although my main driver to leave was because I wanted to do something different, the relentless juggle of global travel (which may sound glamorous



but so wasn't!), sorting out childcare and pretending to clients that I didn't have a home life definitely had a negative impact and, in the end, wasn't sustainable for me.

I remember very clearly the moment I decided enough was enough. Sitting on a plane bound for Chicago, with crippling cystitis because I'd sacrificed time on the loo for time at my laptop, I realised that however strong I was, for me, at that time in my life, I needed something else. It had got to the point where my work commitments had chipped away at my resilience to the extent that it was affecting my physical and mental health. The balance had tipped too far in favour of my career and everything was suffering as a result.

I've lost count of the number of female colleagues who left the industry for similar reasons, either choosing a simpler life at home, setting up their own businesses or becoming consultants. And although companies are waking up to the specific

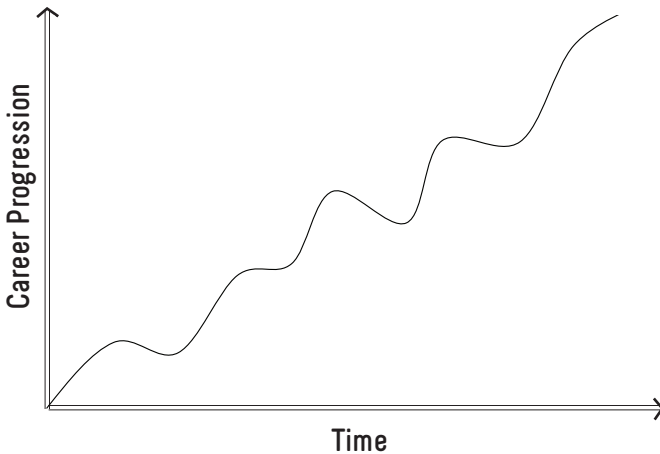
challenges faced by women as they juggle their various work and home responsibilities, they're not changing fast enough.

What gets in the way?

As we navigate our way through life, there are times when our sense of self can be knocked sideways and our resilience compromised as a result. How many of these do you recognise, or have you observed in others?

1. Career roadblocks

Women face significant roadblocks throughout their career which can threaten to derail them, so much so that many give up on the journey altogether. Very few careers can be represented by a smooth upward curve trajectory, but the roadblocks and milestones many women experience can make for a very bumpy ride indeed! We go into common career challenges in detail in Chapter 2 so you might want to revisit the list and consider how they might negatively affect your resilience.



2. Events outside our control

However prepared we are, there will be times when the proverbial hits the fan and we come out badly through no fault of our own: redundancy, company buy-outs, downsizing, your industry declining. There are other times when you've put your heart and soul into a longed-for opportunity, maybe a job application or hoped-for promotion, and it didn't go your way. Or times when you've been criticised, side-lined or let down at work, or even publicly ridiculed. As you think about your own career, it helps to acknowledge that these challenges will be an inevitable part of your history and to think about what you can do to stay strong. This isn't only about how you feel about yourself during these times, it's how your organisation responds to you. In some cases, you'll have to be extra tough and fight extra hard to secure opportunities; for example, if your work status has changed, you may be battling against the perception that you will be less able to deliver than before.

3. Everyday knocks

As well as career roadblocks, there are other more day-to-day setbacks which may not seem like a big deal in isolation but when repeated over time, can build up to become the straw that broke the camel's back. I've found with my coaching clients that it can sometimes be those little things which consistently bring you down that can have an extremely negative impact on their general wellbeing and motivation at work. These include:

- **Treatment by others:** harsh words, strange looks, abrasive attitudes and being taken for granted may be figments of our imagination. The person in ques-

tion may just be having a bad day, you may just have caught them with a scowl on their face or they may be thinking about something else entirely. Whatever the reason, when we lack resilience, we blow it up into something else, or worry that they may genuinely have a point.

■ **Minor slip-ups:** from using the wrong word to going into too much or too little detail, to losing your place in a presentation, to saying something that didn't go down well in a meeting or having someone react negatively to a piece of feedback. If we lack resilience and get drawn into overthinking, these little slips that may not be picked up on by others and certainly don't reflect our lack of ability, can blow up in our minds into a major source of worry. This is when we can often over-read people's reactions and interpret everything as a negative.

■ **Dealing with difficult situations/people:** giving someone bad news or delivering negative feedback are conversations that you avoid if you lack resilience because you simply don't have the strength to deal with the fallout. Unfortunately, these issues can escalate until you've got a major problem on your hands. Making someone redundant or handling a disciplinary are challenging conversations which can be very difficult to let go of at the end of the working day if you don't feel resilient. They can seriously tarnish your equilibrium if you're not careful so it's essential to know how to handle them and get the support you need.

4. Unhelpful thinking

Aside from the external challenges, we can compromise our own resilience through unhelpful thinking patterns which often become more extreme when we're unwell or feeling under pressure.

■ **Comparison and competition:** when comparing ourselves with others, we often put ourselves in a lower position than them. We might think of ourselves as less experienced, less articulate, less confident, less attractive. This can be futile and damaging. Or we may put ourselves above them and think of ourselves as superior in some way, which can come across as arrogant and brittle. So comparison is not great – but neither is competition.

I often find that when people join an organisation they ask themselves, “What do I need to do to get on?” or “Who do I need to prove myself against?” They then identify those who appear to be the most successful and decide to either compete with or emulate them. Why compete with others? It may mean you ‘win’ a new opportunity, but because it often requires you exerting power over others, it can end up as a pyrrhic victory because they end up resenting you or shutting you out.

A more constructive approach is to look inward and focus attention on who you are and where you want to go. Rather than obsessing over someone else's promotion or the award they've just won, find ways to redirect your energy to your own path. When you choose to believe there is room for everybody, you don't waste as much energy worrying how you're going to win over other

people or how they're leaving you behind. Power should be about how you propel yourself forward, regardless of where the others are. They may be on different paths, this is about travelling along yours. And just because they're good doesn't mean you're less good.

■ **Perfectionism:** often fuelled by comparison, constantly seeking perfection can negatively impact on your resilience because, like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, it's unachievable. Although a large percentage of my high-achieving clients are perfectionists, I am careful to point out that if unbridled, it can be a risk factor for a range of mental health conditions, including obsessive-compulsive disorder, eating disorders, social anxiety and workaholism, as well as physical problems like chronic stress and heart disease.

Speaking as a recovering perfectionist, it can be a powerful driver if applied to selected areas of your life – maybe you are on a quest to bake the perfect chocolate cheesecake or develop a best-in-class product. However, it can become destructive when applied to everything. It is time-consuming and energy-sapping, hinders productivity and fuels self-loathing because nothing is ever good enough.

To counter perfectionism, my advice to clients is to differentiate between 'gold-plated, Rolls-Royce projects' and those that will pootle along nicely as a 'Mini Metro', so you can direct your perfectionism at the things that matter, not every single item on your to-do list, and in general, care less about being perfect, and more about getting the job done.

■ **Self-sabotaging:** linked to perfectionism, self-sabotage is another powerful factor which can seriously undermine our confidence and erode our resilience. This is where we consciously or subconsciously create problems in our lives that interfere with our long-standing goals. According to business psychologist and founder of the Tame Your Inner Critic programme, Jess Baker: “Underlying all self-sabotaging behaviours are self-critical thoughts like ‘I don’t deserve good things’ or ‘I am not good enough’ or ‘I’ll only mess it up’. These negative judgements are usually unconscious, irrational, and often based on something someone said that our brain has latched onto it as if it were true.” To override self-sabotaging behaviour, Jess recommends firstly, noticing that you’re doing it; secondly, talking to someone about it; and thirdly, ‘reframing’ the negative beliefs about the situation to something more practical. For example, if you catch yourself having a self-sabotaging thought like: ‘If I make one mistake in that presentation I’ll be fired!’ you could reframe it to: ‘I’ll give it my best shot, practice in advance, and if I make any mistakes, I will learn from them’.

5. Identity changes

Managing your mindset can be particularly challenging during times when your identity is shifting or in a state of flux, including happy life events where you start to question, “Who am I now?” And so to improve your resilience, it makes sense to be aware of all the potential challenges and shifts in identity you’ll face, and think about how you’ll harness power in all its forms to positively evolve through them.

EXERCISE 1:

STAYING RESILIENT THROUGH IDENTITY CHANGES

Take a look at the life events described below, whether you've been through them already or have some of them on your horizon. Consider how these events could affect your sense of identity and how this might compromise your resilience. Knowledge is power and the more you can predict and pre-empt these life changes, the more you'll be able to enjoy the happy ones and live with the negative ones.

■ **Marriage:** getting married may fill you with joy, but it can also make you feel differently about yourself and how you're treated – where once you were an independent single woman, a free agent, you may find yourself thinking, “Oh, I'm just an old married lady now.” Being someone's wife (a wife!), a Mrs, and agonising over whether to take your new husband's name, keep your own or go double-barrelled – these can all affect your sense of self.

■ **Motherhood:** although a wonderful, life-affirming gift, having babies can be overwhelming. You may have been used to planning and controlling everything, but conception can't be guaranteed when it suits you (if at all). There's no volume button on a screaming newborn and no amount of planning can get your cranky offspring off to sleep at the required time. There's also the loss of identity after having kids. You're no longer a career girl, but a mum. You're responsible where before you could be entirely irresponsible. Your body's changed, so you may feel you're no longer sexy and glam, just a pram pusher.

■ **Sickness and bereavement:** prolonged periods of worry and responsibility in the light of a family member's ill health can leave you fretting over how you're going to fit visits and health appointments in alongside work, family and home. Spending so much time caring for someone can take its toll on our self-worth and mental wellbeing no matter how badly we want to look after them. And our own health can suffer, especially in the case of serious, long-term, chronic conditions. The loss of a friend or loved one can shake us to our very core, especially if they make up part of our system of 'anchors'. At its worst, grief can leave us feeling uncertain of who we are and how we can carry on.

■ **Changing work status:** we may go from full-time to part-time, from employee to self-employed and struggle with the change of status. Promotion can thrust us into an unwelcome spin of self-doubt and imposter syndrome – "Oh, so I'm supposed to be in charge now?"

And so many aspects of being an employee can knock your inner confidence – missed promotions, appraisals, difficult colleagues, negative feedback, the project/presentation/call/meeting that went wrong... Equally, we may struggle to rediscover our confidence after a career break to raise children or may have multiple 'careers' and ventures all jostling for our attention, all performing at different levels, meaning our self-esteem can rise and fall depending on the day.

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WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is defined as the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or the ability of a substance to spring back into shape. If we think about it from the perspective of physics, resilience is an object's ability to withstand pressure from an outside force. Glass is less likely to shatter if the load is spread across the surface, rather than concentrated in one place. In human terms, we might spread the load of an outside pressure or blow by talking to people (a problem shared is a problem halved) or seeing the bigger picture. Skyscrapers are built with foundations that move, rather than being rigid, which stop them collapsing in an earthquake. This translates into our ability to be flexible in the face of adversity and adapt our approach when required.

Personal resilience is about toughening up; for example, standing up for yourself when you need to, walking knowingly into conflict and speaking your truth, even though you know it will hurt, and dealing with the consequences. But it's not just about being tough, having a shield or letting things bounce off you. It's also about having the mental and emotional tools to help you ride through challenging times. It's about knowing it's OK to falter and that it's possible to live with difficulty and still flourish.

Resilience is a secret weapon in the fight for power. It isn't about not falling down, it's about getting back up after you've fallen. It's about knowing that when wounded, you will heal; when at a low ebb, you will find the strength to Power Up and that when there's a storm, you will yield to its force knowing that when it's passed you'll rise again.

When you know you have resilience as a back-up power source, you're much more willing to take risks and live life fully than if you're scared of what might happen and hide in the shadows of life.

Where does it come from?

Resilience comes from our ability to manage our physical and mental state to make the best of situations, whatever they may be. We are naturally conditioned for resilience and we become most aware of its power when it is tested to its limits.

Our body's natural response

We are, of course, built to respond to threats. Our body knows just what to do when we meet a sabre-toothed tiger – or the modern-day equivalent, an aggressive colleague or a nasty deadline. Says Dr Lynda Shaw, author of *Your Brain Is Boss*: “When we are in a stressful situation, the brain secretes the hormone adrenaline which makes us run or get ready to compete, turning off some areas of the bodily systems which are not immediately needed to help us deal with the stressful situation. The cortisol pathway can also be activated. Exposure to cortisol in small amounts is actually good for us; it helps us survive, keeps us on our toes and helps us stay alert.” It therefore follows that being in stressful situations can actually be good for us, as long as we see the situation positively and react accordingly.

Freedom to choose

Viktor Frankl's 1946 book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he chronicles his experiences as a prisoner in Nazi

concentration camps during World War II, talks about how, as humans, we have the privilege to be able to choose our thoughts and feelings in response to anything that happens to us: the epitome of resilience. We all have a choice: we can catastrophise, and our lives can stop in the face of trouble, or we can move through it. When I find myself stressing over something that's happened or worrying about something coming up, I remind myself that, by comparison to many, I have had an incredibly fortunate life and remind myself of Frankl's quote, which has had a profound effect on how I manage my emotional state.

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

– ‘MAN’S SEARCH FOR MEANING’, VIKTOR E. FRANKL

Not sweating the small stuff

A friend used to date a man whose response to any adversity was to catastrophise. He just wasn't chilled about anything. If he spilt his coffee on the rug, it was the end of the world, with lots of swearing and drama. If he missed his bus, cue a big strop that everyone else had to hear. He would blame other people, panic about the consequences and throw his toys out of the pram. Needless to say, the relationship didn't last long, but my friend learnt a valuable lesson. “Accidents happen, buses get missed. If you let it get to you like my ex did, your whole life becomes a crisis, which means when something

really bad happens you just go to pieces. You just have to have some perspective when things don't go your way, deal with the fallout, learn from it and move on." As Rudyard Kipling said in his famous poem, if we can 'keep our heads while all about us are losing theirs' we will have greater resilience.

Persistence

The ability to keep going after a setback rather than giving up will serve you so many times in your life and career – as it served Steph. She was in one of my Mastermind groups years ago and having worked so hard for many years to design a piece of software, was on the brink of giving up. She admitted to having a history of giving up at the last minute, but this time, we urged her to stand firm. Luckily, she listened because she's gone on to sell the product across the whole of the Middle East and to speak on stages worldwide about her new technology. As Steph's story shows, when you're at the point of giving up, that's when you need to stand firm and attack with renewed force.

The same goes for athletes and all professional sportsmen and women. Finding the strength and will to carry on, day after day, is crucial to their success. It's when you're on the floor eating mud, totally spent, that you have to somehow stand up and carry on.

"With a defeat, when you lose, you get up, you make it better, you try again. That's what I do in life, when I get down, when I get sick, I don't want to just stop. I keep going and I try to do more."

–SERENA WILLIAMS

Losing the curse of perfectionism

Developing your resilience also comes from overcoming the ‘good girl’ curse of perfectionism. If we can get comfortable with being a bit messy and learn to love, rather than hide our weaknesses, trusting our own voice rather than doubting whether what we’re saying is ‘right’, we can start to make friends with our own imposter syndrome and even use it to our advantage. Because no one has all the answers, no one is perfect, and embracing our flaws can be truly liberating. It’s at those times when you’re on the cusp of personal change and things are feeling harder than ever before that your true resilient character emerges. If you welcome your imperfections and learn to be kind to yourself through difficult times, you will progress even more.

Understand the role of vulnerability and detachment

So what do we do when we are at a low ebb? How do we find the strength and courage to show up and give our all when our self-belief and sense of purpose has a wobble?

I’ve often felt conflicted by the notion that ‘in vulnerability there is strength,’ which is espoused by the academic and thought leader Brené Brown. My conflict has been that if people are looking to us to be strong, how are we going to be believable if we’re sharing our vulnerability? And yet, I’ve come to realise that being a rounded human being, complete with vulnerabilities, has a huge impact on how you deal with difficult things and how people relate to us. Because we all go through challenging periods when we go wobbly and suffer emotionally; it’s just humanity and doesn’t make us any less strong.

My own experience of this in the last few months has been an eye-opener. Because when I've felt my own strength weakening in the face of my own grief-related emotional challenges, what I've really needed is comfort from others and to understand what other people value in me. If people are used to you being invincible and not needing support, they won't necessarily offer it. So we need to learn how to ask for feedback, compliments or affirmations because sometimes we really need to hear them. And if we never show our vulnerable side, people think we're so strong that they don't bother to tell us how great they think we are.

People who are ruthlessly sure of themselves are just unbearable, and we tend to view them with distrust. Whereas being able to get under the skin of how people feel means you've been there yourself – and that makes you not only more effective, but also more admirable.

So the fact that I will have written this book during my most difficult year is a gift because it's meant digging very deep in order to acknowledge these things and frame them positively. It's enabled me to write about resilience in a totally real way.

HOW CAN YOU DEVELOP IT?

Having explored what resilience is, let's now look at how you can develop it so that you can access it to handle both the everyday knocks, as well as those times when the proverbial truly hits the fan.

We're going to use the analogy of a car journey. Whether you drive or not, you'll know that in order to arrive at your

destination, it's important to know where you're going and that you will need to vary your speed on the way there, from the exhilaration of the fast lane to the stop-start of a traffic jam.

Although I'm naturally impatient and want to get to places as quickly as possible, I know that being too hasty is dangerous for me and unnerving for others, so I have learnt to enjoy both the fast lane and pottering along in the slow. As with resilience, if you attack life at breakneck speed continually, you will eventually run out of fuel and burn out. And if you get immensely frustrated at traffic lights, the only person who'll blow a gasket is you.

There are four steps you can apply to make your journey through life as smooth as possible:

1. Planning your journey: taking control
2. Getting in the driving seat: choosing the right mindset
3. Ongoing maintenance: building resilience into your daily life
4. Knowing what to do when the wheels fall off: staying strong through adversity



★ Step 1: Planning your journey

Central to resilience is the unwavering knowledge that you know where you're going and are in control of how you're going to get there. If you don't have a destination point in mind, the chances are your car won't even leave the driveway.

Any personal growth carries within it the feeling of moving into uncharted territory, and because we've been programmed since cavemen times to stay safe, we can unconsciously sabotage our progress by avoiding what lies beyond our comfort zone, such as being brave and trying new things.

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Plans keep fear and worry at bay

Fear and worry can be very powerful blockers to taking action, and because they reside in our subconscious, they may be exerting a powerful effect without us even realising it.

When we lack resilience fear and worry can knock us off course.

This means that before you've even put your key in the ignition – by, for example, deciding to talk to your boss about a pay rise – your subconscious mind may be working overtime, conjuring up all the reasons why that's a bad idea – they'll think you're being too demanding, will say 'no' or realise they've been paying you too much – all of which may overpower your resolve and chip away at your resilience.

When you have a determined plan, you will feel in control and stronger. You will be able to override negative thoughts and design the life you want to lead rather than reacting to the one that's happening to you.

Map out your life

To override our natural instinct for self-preservation, the first step is to 'start with the end in mind', as Stephen Covey said in his book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effectively People*.

When I'm working with my coaching clients, the first question I ask them is: "What goals would you like to achieve from working together?" Although this is a pretty basic starting point, they're often so wrapped up in delivering their work projects that they haven't given it a second thought! Establishing what you want to achieve and setting the right goals to get there represents the 'Smart' in the title of this book. It

not only sends a powerful message to your brain that you're worth it, but also helps to give a 'point' to everything you do, enhancing your motivation and giving you the strength to power through challenges.

Once we've established the 'big' goals, I'll work with my clients to map out the day-to-day goals. This will often spill into work and personal life because one inevitably affects the other. If I'm working with a client who wants to do more public speaking, for example, we not only consider how they'll get more time on stage, but also the amount of travelling involved and how this will impact their home life. In my experience, it pays to be as specific as you can about how you spend your time, including the what, where, who, how and why. That way, you're more likely to get there and less likely to regret having taken the wrong path in retrospect.

A great example of the benefits of mapping out your life is financial planning, given that money worries are top of many people's list of things that keep them awake at night. According to Lisa Conway Hughes, Chartered Financial Advisor, founder of misslolly.com and author of *Money Lessons*: "The short-term consequences of good money habits are rewarding and hopefully liberating. However, the long-term impact of financial savviness is life-changing. It's the difference between living a life where you use money to achieve the things that are important to you and make you happy, rather than money dictating how you will live your life."

Predict the bumps and be flexible

As well as having a plan, it's important to predict the bumps in the road; as Mike Tyson said: "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face." Resilience is also about how

you prepare for and respond to knocks, or as the author of the Jack Reacher novels Lee Child put it: “Hope for the best, plan for the worst.”

Although it's important to have a plan, resilience is also about developing flexibility and recognising those times when you need to change your plans, revise your goals or choose a different direction altogether. For example, if, having spoken to your boss about a pay rise, it becomes clear that career progression won't be possible in your current role, the most resilient response is to look at alternative options.

And how about if the bumps are of your own making? Bringing your subconscious fears into your conscious mind and looking at them for what they are is a great way of mitigating negative thinking. A great children's book called *The Huge Bag of Worries* by Virginia Ironside features a girl who ends up lugging a huge bag of worries around until one day, when she meets an old lady who helps her sort her worries into groups. She ditches all those that belong to other people and notices how much less overwhelming each worry seems when brought out into the light of day.

Asking yourself, ‘What's the worst thing that could happen?’ is a great way to put your fears into perspective, but a better question to ask is, ‘What's the best thing that could happen?’ as it moves your thinking into a more resourceful, energised and resilient place.

CASE STUDY



Claire Norwood is a property developer. We met at a women's networking event, and she opened up about how she had struggled to find her way in the world, particularly since having a family, and how challenging she had found getting her voice heard. Her story is one of resilience and shows that reinvention can be possible after a career break. I went on to coach Claire, to help her become a speaker and share her inspirational story.

"I've never had a game plan. After doing a business degree, I fell into PR. From then on I just did whatever work came along. Then, by the time I'd met my husband, I had this romantic idea about making shoes, so I used my savings to train as a cobbler.

"Although I became quite well known and got my shoes on catwalks and in Vogue and Elle, I made no money at all. When our children came, I kind of bottled out of the whole career world and threw myself into giving my kids the best childhood ever. We moved to the country and for many years I was taken up with motherhood.

"Once the boys were in their teens, we moved back to London and I hit a wall. I needed to earn money to contribute to the family finances. Meanwhile, the boys needed me less and I missed my country friends. I felt like life was going on without

me. I couldn't stay in my small, domesticated world. It was now or never.

"So in my late 40s, I started retraining in property. It gave me a real sense of hope and excitement. After doing a course, I ended up working for one of the guys who taught it, and although I was paid next to nothing, it gave me the opportunity to reinvent myself. Here I was, a middle-aged intern, but being allowed to part-run a company, design a website, talk to clients, deal with solicitors, organise refurbishments and design interiors. And I loved it. I could see that there was a life out there for me and I had value – it gave my self-worth such a boost.

"Now, I have my own property development company and I love it. My role is all about solving problems and building relationships. I use my background of creativity, my life skills and my experience. And being older means I come with automatic credibility; because I've been around the block and done so many things, people listen to me.

"I've come into my own in my 50s. It's like, for the first time, I have power. I'm being acknowledged and noticed and respected. This is like round two of my life, and it's better than the first time by a long stretch.

"Antoinette was the first person to really listen to me, and to identify what lit me up. It was as if she'd given me permission to own my abilities, and honestly, I never looked back. That's

not to say it's been easy, but working with Antoinette gave me a glimpse into a world of possibility I never thought possible. Once you've visualised yourself being someone with a contribution to make, it's difficult to go back to your old, small self."

This interview appeared in full in www.audreyonline.co.uk, a website for women looking to reinvent their lives.

★ Step 2: Getting in the driving seat

Take responsibility

Having planned your journey, the next step to resilience is acknowledging that you are the one in charge of your own life. When you are in the driving seat, you are no longer passive but the one responsible for moving in the right direction. So, instead of moaning that your boss overworks you, you realise that you're allowing yourself to be overworked, either by saying 'yes' too often or not saying 'no' often enough. Approach your work in a different way and have the assertiveness and self-confidence to flag up when you're stacked. If you don't get the response you need, let the negative comments slide off you and remember, no one is forcing you to stay and you can always leave.

Our ability to 'go with' the challenges that life throws at us, rather than catastrophise, is key to power and success. Getting in the driving seat is a mixture of learning how to be hard, like a diamond, but also bouncy, like a ball.

Be diamond hard

Women often focus on likeability at the expense of respect. For many, it's more important to please people and make everything OK over their own needs and wants. Being diamond hard is about setting boundaries, disagreeing when you need to, giving challenging feedback and showing your grit and determination, even if that means displeasing some.

My personal trainer, Abbie Benjamins (AKA Abs Abbie) is a great example of diamond hard. She has no problem marking out her boundaries. When we're working out together in the gym, people will often unintentionally encroach on our space, attempt to set their mats out in readiness for the next class or come and ask her for advice on how to use the equipment. Instead of letting it go or pandering to their requests, she will state out loud, in no uncertain terms, what needs to happen. People sometimes react in a shocked or annoyed way because they're just not used to a young woman being that way, but she is unapologetic and they just do what they're told!

A great technique here is to literally imagine yourself surrounded by a protective coating which will allow you to be and say whatever you want. One of my coaching clients runs a virtual assistant business and was finding it difficult to negotiate higher fees for projects that went over budget. When I asked her how she saw her role, she described herself as a guide dog, which reflected her responsibilities but limited her ability to push back. She now imagines herself surrounded by a protective orange glow whenever she goes into negotiations and has been far more successful with fee generation as a result. For more advice on how to communicate with power, take a look at the *Assertiveness* chapter.

Don't let other people's comments throw you off

Resilience is also how you choose to respond to other people's comments, whether they are well-intentioned or not. As a speaker, I'm regularly offered feedback – some of which I'll value, some not – and I've learnt to look objectively at the person and consider whether they represent similar values to me or have the skills to make their comments worthy of listening to, or not. This is about being open to feedback, but not allowing the sharp claws of criticism to cut so deeply that they draw blood. So when someone makes a comment about you, take what they say seriously, but don't take their views so much to heart that they knock you off course. As well as imagining being as tough as a diamond, you can also imagine having a Teflon-coating, so that negative comments which don't serve you literally slide off.

Bounce back

To counterbalance being diamond hard, you must develop bouncebackability. Avoid thinking of yourself in the 'put upon' role, even in a jokey way, as this will cast you in a victim role and contain you there. Instead, remind yourself of all the times when you've recovered after a fall and the factors that helped get you back on your feet.

Think about how you hold yourself after a setback. The phrase 'you look like you're carrying the world on your shoulders' is telling and you can often spot people who are going through a hard time because their whole posture has collapsed in on itself, head bent, shoulders stooped and body closed in, as though reacting to a physical pressure or blow.

Poor posture will compromise your ability to take a deep breath and could even affect your mood. And what can happen with people who allow this posture to become their default is that their overall attitude to life follows suit and they become the kind of glass-completely-empty person who no longer notices the good stuff and only fixates on the bad.

“If there is tomorrow when we’re not together, there is something you must always remember... You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is, even if we’re apart, I’ll always be with you.”

– ‘WINNIE THE POOH’, A. A. MILNE

To cultivate bouncebackability, identify your mood boosters and make sure you access them regularly, particularly after a setback. Listen to music, dance, go for a windswept walk, get your hair done, buy a new top, reread old diaries, potter around in a junk shop, go to your favourite coffee shop or lie on the sofa watching reality TV – whatever. If it works for you and recharges and nourishes your soul – do it. Also, think about your posture. Make the effort to stand up tall, shoulders back, head up. Look up and out at the world rather than down at your feet – you’ll be amazed at what this fresh perspective brings.

Developing a strong network is also vital to bouncebackability. As I found in this last year of grief, it’s essential to have support when the chips are down. Having your own group

of cheerleaders – be they friends and family or a business network, a netball team you play with, your dog walking pals or a book club – will act as an emotional safety net, a bolster through tough times, as well as a way to laugh at the absurdity of life and work.

And when people ask how you are, rather than the usual bright and breezy “Fine!”, be real, soften up, let people in, and admit it when you’re finding things tough. At a particularly low point, asking a friend, “Can you help me understand what you value in me because I don’t know what that is anymore?” was one of the bravest things I’ve done. It was an important lesson because it forced me to be what I would have previously labelled self-absorbed and selfish, and taught me that being real and asking for what you need is a key part of resilience.

EXERCISE 2:

GETTING IN THE DRIVING SEAT

Two of the best ways to develop resilience are preparation and practice. This will not only power you up day to day, but also strengthen your ability to handle it when the going really gets tough.

1. Make a list of the situations in your life where you feel like you're compromising who you are and what you want to be doing.
2. Think about how you want to be in these situations and imagine a diamond-hard coating that will help you to toughen up and be that way. Think about what you will say and how people will respond.
3. Practice your diamond-hard approach on 'small' situations like correcting a friend or family member if you disagree with them and move up to more challenging situations like telling a colleague that you want them to stop bringing smelly food into the office. Reflect on how your diamond-hard approach is affecting your

resilience and what you will do to apply your techniques on other situations in your life. For more on powerful communication skills as a route to resilience, go to the Assertiveness chapter.

4. Identify three to five resilience cheerleaders who have your back and will support you through thick and thin. People love to be helpful but often need guidance on how. So if you're asking for help, be specific on what you need them to do.

★ Step 3: Ongoing maintenance

As well as having a map and being in the driving seat, to be resilient you'll need to look after the whole of you – you're not going to get very far in your journey through life if you haven't put fuel in the tank, topped up the water levels, charged the battery or checked the brakes.

How you show up on the outside reflects how you feel about yourself on the inside – they're symbiotic. If you are exhausted and look it, you will be telling the world you don't prioritise your own health and wellbeing.

So how can you make resilience part of your daily life?

Put the right fuel in

Getting the right fuel in is what will give you the energy for success. According to Mel Noakes, author of *The Little Book of Self Care*: "The way we nourish ourselves on a daily basis fundamentally impacts our lives. Nourishment comes in many forms from the words we say to ourselves, the food we put into our bodies, the amount of sleep we get, the way we move our bodies and the lifestyle and friends that influence us. If you continually put rubbish in, quite simply you get the same back out." According to Mel, looking after your physical health day to day means following the standard metrics, including aiming for 8 hours sleep, moving your body in any way that feels good, aiming for 2.5 hours of moderate physical activity every week, drinking adequate water (2 litres a day is the guide) and focusing on eating 'real food' rather than processed food wherever possible.

Don't run on empty

It's also invaluable to understand your peaks and troughs of energy throughout the day so that you can work with your body's natural rhythms, rather than against them. Unlike my husband, who needs three cups of strong coffee before he can have a conversation, I'm at my most productive first thing, which is why I've written most of this book before the rest of the family has even woken up. Likewise, while my husband can happily watch a movie until midnight, I will invariably be asleep on the sofa next to him, my energy fully spent. In this way, you can diarise work that requires concentration and creativity or those difficult tasks you've been putting off for times when your energy is at its peak. Leave the easier tasks for when your energy is at a lower ebb and give yourself a break when you need to.

As well as the daily peaks and troughs in energy, as women, we should not underestimate the impact that our monthly cycle can have on our energy and resilience levels. Dr Alison Grimston, functional medicine doctor and nutritional endocrinology practitioner, says: "It pays to learn to listen intuitively to our bodies. There may be times in our cycle when we need to rest more, or eat more cleanly, in order to be able to show up at work and be as productive as we would like. We often find that we need to slow down, particularly during a time of menstrual loss." Likewise, the menopause can also have a negative effect on our vitality. To counter this, she advises: "Pay attention to your work-life balance at this time, make as good food and lifestyle choices as you can, and if you are suffering, seek the help of a practitioner whom you feel you can trust."

Make time every day for the things that make you feel good

Developing daily resilience is also about treating yourself kindly and working out the things that make you feel secure within yourself. These things include self-care, friendship and making time to do things that give you pleasure. The cornerstones of resilience are personal, so what works for someone else may not work for you. How you spend your leisure time will have a huge impact on your resilience. Whether it's watching *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here*, going for a sparkly mani or getting up at 5am to go open-water swimming that gives you a sense of wellbeing, make time for it. This will add to your reserves to face another day when the chips are down.

It's important to build in daily habits that make you feel good, like going for a run, morning yoga, an afternoon cuppa or a mindfulness exercise just before bed. It's part of what's necessary to you in order to bolster your day-to-day resilience.

Limit the time spent on things that make you feel bad

As a counterpoint, be aware of what makes you feel bad or depleted and limit the time you spend doing that. Although hugely entertaining and a great way of staying connected with others, social media can massively eat into our precious time and chip away at our mental health, as we tend to negatively compare ourselves to others and feel rejected when our posts don't get the attention we were hoping for. Also, remind yourself that people show a curated version of their life on social media – the perfect family, home, holiday, lifestyle – and keep the 'warts and all' stuff hidden. This can

make you feel like a failure if your real life doesn't match up to their amazing-looking highly edited lives.

If you're not feeling particularly resilient, keep your digital consumption to a minimum, shore yourself up with a reminder of all the achievements you're most proud of and spend some IRL (In Real Life) time with the people who really love you – not 'friends' on Facebook.

Know your anchors

As well as daily rituals, having anchors in our life are a great way of withstanding adversity and building resilience. I'm talking about those go-to activities, people and places you can rely on to keep you grounded and stop you from feeling cast adrift. Knowing those things are always there for you when you need a boost will help you get through a bad day or week. I have a favourite walk, which I discovered just after I found out my dad was dying which I go on alone at least once a week, and there's a particular point, halfway across a field, which always reminds me of him and brings me back to myself. Your anchors might include spending time with significant people in your life, reading your favourite book in a luxurious bubble bath or visiting a particular place of meaning to you. Memories can also be anchors.

Identifying at least three things that are completely yours and that you don't share with others sends a powerful message to yourself that you matter and are worthy of being nurtured. They will also become your sanctuary when times are tough. Recalling a past experience and looking at how we overcame it can keep us solid and strong and steer us back on track when we need it.

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Stay balanced

For ongoing balance, comedy performer, MC and Speaker Mentor Emma Stroud recommends the Rainbow Diary technique to make sure you find equilibrium in your day-to-day life. Using a box of highlighter pens (or colour tabs if you use a computer diary) with seven colours representing the different aspects of your life – for example, family, relationship, exercise, self-care, fun, work and a hobby – go through your week ahead and highlight each activity planned. When you've finished, check if you have a good balance of colours. If any of them are missing – if, say, you've left no time for pink fun or yellow relationship, or all you can see is green for work, you can take action. A good week should have all the colours in balance.

EXERCISE 3:

BUILDING RESILIENCE INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE

Having explored a range of resilience techniques, let's take a look at how you can use them to build resilience into your daily life.

- Make a list of what energises and invigorates you: for example, exercise, food, music, films, favourite locations and make sure you diarise time to access them regularly.
- Note down what your body and mind need when your energy is at a low ebb and how you will be gentle with yourself, allowing your energy to replenish and recuperate ready for another day.
- Identify your resilience anchors, those people, places and things that keep you strong – and plan how you're going to make them a regular feature.

- Create an Energy Flow Graph, with your waking hours on the horizontal axis and a scale of 1 to 10 on the vertical axis for your energy levels. Mark up your levels of energy throughout a typical day, showing your peaks and troughs at different times. Consider how you can allocate time wisely to work with your natural rhythms.
- Create a Rainbow Diary in which you schedule your various activities – from things you *have* to do to things you *want* to do. Monitor which colours predominate, which are missing. Plan how you're going to create a multi-coloured life.

★ Step 4: Knowing what to do when the wheels fall off

Are you keeping an eye on you? And are you treating yourself with as much kindness as you would a friend?

Sometimes it's hard to notice when we're getting into a state of overwhelm because it can come on gradually or we become used to being in battle mode. Some of us are so driven and hard on ourselves that, even if we do notice we're heading for a crash, we ignore it.

As the fable goes, if you put a frog in a pan of cold water and gradually heat it up the frog will boil to death, whereas put it in the hot water and it will jump straight out. Preventing your frog from simmering is about continually checking in with yourself to ensure you're rolling with the punches – and if you aren't what are you going to do about it?

There are a number of powerful factors which can gnaw away at our resilience, many of which are self-created and, if left unchecked, can seriously impact on our ability to power up. We all have demons, whether it's our brain's habit of waking us up at 3am to remind us of our worst moments, the fact that we get The Fear every time we have more than two glasses of wine, or just a tendency to think 'I can't do this, I'm rubbish' whenever we face a challenging situation.

Speaker and resilience coach Pam Burrows talks about discovering your own 'Red Flags'; the clues that all is not well and you need to take action to avoid burnout. In her book, *Burnout Buster*, she describes thirty-three signs we sometimes spot but tend to ignore, like eating junk, too much coffee, loved ones telling you to slow down, or you saying things

like, “I’ve got to carry on because there’s no one else to do it!” Many of the women I work with have had a good handful of these red flags waving for years. Although each one may not seem that important, collectively they take their toll – I’ve seen this happen and unfortunately, it’s often only when the person reaches crisis point do they take action because they are forced to. The two crucial parts to this are noticing your red flags and acting quickly. Pam suggests reflecting on why you drive yourself too hard, spotting your red flags and then taking time out to get things into perspective.

Here are some proven strategies which will help you cope with those unwanted or unexpected challenges that life throws at you:

Coping strategies for when the going gets tough

1. **Breathe:** when we are stressed and tense our breathing becomes shallow, which only increases our anxiety, as it lowers oxygen levels in the blood, which the brain senses as stress – making us breathe even faster and shallower. Holistic practitioner Jo Tocher recommends taking five deep breaths: “Get in a comfortable position, then ground yourself by taking deep breaths through the nose, all the way from the stomach up into the top of the lungs, then releasing it all out in long slow breaths out.”
2. **Remember, this too shall pass:** a phrase that is believed to have originated in the writings of the medieval Persian Sufi poets can serve all of us when we are going through hell. Yes, it may be the worst thing

ever right now, but like all other major challenges, it won't last forever and you will survive. Emotions rarely remain at an intense level over a long period of time. Although you may feel engulfed by sadness, or wracked by grief, you can take comfort from the fact that the shape of your emotion will soon shift into something else if you encourage your mind to drift somewhere else.

3. **The rule of 10:** when you feel overwhelmed by a problem or adversity, get some perspective by applying the rule of 10, asking yourself: 'Will this matter in 10 years' time?' 'Will it matter in 10 months' time?' 'Will it matter in 10 weeks' time?' 'Will it matter in 10 days' time?' 'Will it matter in 10 hours' time?' 'Will it matter in 10 minutes' time?' What seems enormous in the heat of the moment can often show itself to be relatively minor – because emotions, like buses or clouds, tend to all arrive together, clouding our view.
4. **Mindfulness:** a concept that originated in Buddhist culture, mindfulness is increasingly being recognised for its health and wellbeing benefits, as well as its relevance in the workplace. Through connecting with all your senses, it enables you to empty your mind of thoughts and distractions and become attentive, focused and aware of the present. As well as being a great way of pulling your attention to the here and now, it's a useful technique for calming the mind, overcoming nerves and building concentration. As you apply mindfulness to all aspects of life, notice how it enhances your ability to stay calm, focus on the task in hand and connect more fully with others – and the impact it has on your resilience and inner power.

5. **Compartmentalising:** being able to park or compartmentalise difficult feelings so that we can perform effectively is an important part of being resilient. Think of the catastrophising ex-boyfriend and the way my friend learnt to take negative incidents in her stride, rather than picking up on his negative energy and throwing a strop. Or that colleague who's caring for a terminally ill relative but still manages to make everyone smile with their cheerful greetings at the start of every day. So you might have had a run-in with the office bully that morning, but if you let it ruin your day, it will stop you from performing at your best in the afternoon's meeting and take your attention from your to-do list, which will then increase your stress levels and productivity...

A key part of resilience is rethinking and reframing life's challenges. There are many ways to do this: such as using humour in adversity – think Twitter's response to President Trump's unpopular policies. You can also choose diminishing words to describe a situation in order to shape our experience of it – “well, that was a bit awks” – when describing that time you mistakenly said, “I love you” when saying goodbye to your boss. Or you could literally eject an uncomfortable feeling through making a comment or gesture like “bygones” or shaking out your hands or feet as though you were ridding yourself of something.

6. **Detaching:** this is the ability to remove yourself from what's happening as a coping mechanism, choosing when to get involved and when to steer clear. Finding ways to disassociate yourself from the emotion of a

situation, through distraction and keeping a sense of perspective can be an extremely powerful strategy when you need an increased dose of resilience. This can be particularly useful when you're under attack. When challenges arise, you just think, 'I don't need to hear/see this,' so in your head you just rise above it. The only danger with this skill of detachment is overdeveloping it, to the extent that you disassociate yourself from the pain or joy in your life and just become numb. This same is true when we numb out difficult feelings with drugs, food, alcohol or any other poison; yes, they may take the pain/boredom/frustration/unhappiness away for a short period of time but they will also cancel out our ability to feel the good stuff.

7. **Growing through change:** how we respond to major negative changes in our lives impacts enormously on our long-term resilience. In Sheryl's Sandberg's book, *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience and Finding Joy*, she explores her personal journey through grief after the death of her husband. "How you fail actually affects the speed and strength of recovery and growth. Resilience is about the choices we make in staying the course – and not being afraid to fail."

Author Sophie Sabbage has been living with incurable cancer, at the time of writing, for four years. In her book, *Lifeshocks*, she explores those very specific encounters with what we cannot control, predict or plan: 'There are moments in time when our internal perceptions are confronted by external events, when

CHAPTER 6

what is assumed, wished or imagined collides with what is...'. Through sharing her own deeply personal story, as well as other case studies, she reveals how these lifeshocks can bring healing, transformation and peace if we take the time to decipher their messages.

EXERCISE 4:

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness takes practice and becomes easier the more you do it. There are lots of apps available or you could try the steps below:

1. Start by removing all technological distractions from sight and earshot.
2. Take a couple of minutes to notice your breathing. Sense the air coming in and out of your body, watch your belly rise and fall.
3. Tune into all your senses. If you are sitting at your desk, what do you see around you, how does your body feel in the chair, what can you hear, smell and taste?
4. Take some time to just 'be'. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to your breath and the present.
5. Notice when you tend to zone out and practice bringing your awareness back to the here and now.
6. Observe the world around you without anticipation or judgement: listen with an open mind and allow a deeper wisdom to emerge.

RESILIENCE CONCLUSION

There will always be roadblocks in our way, some massive, some more day to day – they are unavoidable. As George Bernard Shaw said, “Life is not meant to be easy, my child; but take courage: it can be delightful.”

It’s the courage and optimism of the second part of this quote that tells us what we need to know about resilience. Facing challenges bravely and with positivity and knowing that there will be more tricky moments along the way is the best way to survive.

IN SUMMARY

- ★ Resilience is the ability to stay strong in the face of adversity, bounce back after setbacks and manage self-limiting beliefs, which can stop you from fulfilling your potential.
- ★ Developing resilience is about knowing how to maintain a healthy mind and body so that you can navigate the many roadblocks and challenges that threaten to push you off course.
- ★ Resilience can be compromised by career roadblocks, events outside of your control, everyday knocks, unhelpful thinking and identity changes.
- ★ Sometimes, it's hard to notice when we're getting into a state of overwhelm because it can come on gradually, or we become used to being in battle mode. Some of us are so driven and hard on ourselves that even if we do notice we're heading for a crash, we ignore it.
- ★ There are four strategies you can apply for resilience to make your journey through life as smooth as possible:
 - ***Planning your journey***: taking control of where you're going and how you're going to get there.

- ***Getting in the driving seat:*** choosing the right mindset and acknowledging that you're the one in control of your own life.
- ***Ongoing maintenance:*** building resilience into your daily life by putting the right fuel in, not running on empty and making time for the things you enjoy.
- ***Knowing what to do when the wheels fall off:*** knowing how to stay strong through adversity is about knowing the clues which tell you all is not well and taking action to avoid burnout.

"A timely and valuable new book that brings a fresh perspective to personal development. Using the tools and exercises will help you to unleash your power and be the driving force for your success."

Anna Parfitt, Head of HR, Oliver Bonas

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Antoinette Dale Henderson is an award-winning speaker, executive coach and founder of the Gravitas Programme, a leadership development course which has inspired thousands of managers, leaders and business owners to communicate with credibility and fulfil their career potential

