



A motto for the Year of the Virus

by Peter Buckley, Monday, June 1st 2020

Even before the pandemic hit, my motto for this year had been, "I'm not predicting anything."

It seems impossible to do these days. I never could have predicted that our country would be where we are — again, even before the pandemic. Now COVID-19 has taken the unfathomable to whole new levels.

So I'm not predicting anything. But I can say what I think we need to do and how we might move forward through this crisis.

First of all, it is painfully obvious that we need new leadership at the federal level, leadership focused on uniting the country, that respects science and truly prioritizes the well-being of people.

But beyond new leadership, we need a new perspective on how to live our lives. We need to understand how resilience works, on an individual, family, community, national and worldwide level.

The science of resilience — the ability to positively adapt to life experiences — is robust. There are decades of study on what builds resilience on each of the levels I've listed. And while I'm not predicting anything, I think it can be assumed, given what science tells us about climate change — as well as possible new pandemics — that our need for resilience will significantly increase over time.

Dr. Ann Masten from the University of Minnesota identifies three core protective systems of resilience: individual capabilities, attachment and belonging, and community culture/spirituality.

In the area of individual capabilities, we need to understand and strengthen our ability to self-regulate, to experience emotions such as fear or anxiety and be able to return to calmness. It is in our calm state of mind that we are able to access executive function, to analyze information and make intelligent decisions.

To face the challenges that science tells us are sure to come, we need to become masters of self-regulation. This is something that our society is not presently good at. Awareness of how our brains work and the basic tools for self-regulation, such as mindfulness, meditation and others, will be essential.

On something of a side note, one of the basic needs for self-regulation and resilience is safety. We have far too many families in our community and our country who lack anything close to financial security. Providing that security would go a long, long way toward increasing resilience. When I first heard Andrew Yang discuss the idea of universal basic income, I was somewhat taken aback by it. Now, particularly with the pandemic, I'm coming to believe that it is extremely important for us to figure out how to provide this.

Attachment and belonging build resilience for the simple fact that we are social beings. We have evolved as families and tribes, and humans who have been able to connect with each other, to collaborate with each other, have been those who have thrived. We need to consciously and continuously nurture positive relationships at the individual, family, community, national and international levels. The science of resilience teaches us that we actually do need each other.

Both of those first two core protective systems — individual capabilities, and attachment and belonging — play directly into the third core protective system of community culture/spirituality. A healthy, supportive, inclusive community promotes resilience at all levels. There have been some remarkable local examples of this in our region in the past few months.

Kids Unlimited, a charter school in Medford, has been feeding up to 1,400 young people twice a day, no questions asked. The United Way of Jackson County is raising funds and giving direct assistance to nonprofits and individuals. There are many more examples, much we can be proud of in our community, but we need to vastly increase and scale up our efforts.

There is an organization in Eugene called The Resource Innovation Group (www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org) that is leading an effort for International Transformational Resilience. I believe we have to be that ambitious. I encourage you to check this effort out.

Transformational resilience. I can't predict if we can accomplish it, but I believe we must try.

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