

Test your Boundaries: Intensity, Risk and Resilience!

There is a view that Resilience will only emerge if we are tested beyond our comfort zone. At times we are thrown into adversity or novelty. Today, we must volunteer for the experience. We will explore intense practices to test and build resilience of body, heart, mind and spirit.

This week was a wake-up! First, thanks to a group of New Zealand's elite coaches who shared their experiences in taking athletes to world-class victory. Second, thanks to my crew of ageing but remarkable surfski paddlers who test my edge on a regular basis.

Hypothesis: growth, development, and specifically our Resilience, can be skilfully accelerated and embedded by training at the limits of our tolerance for discomfort. In other words the intensity and risk found at the edge of our perceived abilities builds Resilience effectively.

Background: Human nature is to seek comfort. While much of our development will proceed naturally, certain capacities only emerge if we test and extend talent well beyond "comfortable". Flow is another approach to this. We know:

1. Physical capacity declines if not tested
2. Peak performance demands rigorous effort
3. Practicing emotion recognition and control at subconscious speeds develops a superskill
4. New brain cells generated in old age only survive if cognitively challenged
5. Spiritual aspirants who invest 10,000 plus hours in meditation have extraordinary brains and measurably positive impact on others.

Comfort and rest is essential but only if peppered with periods of intensity and risk when we push the envelope of FLOW. Here are some methods to test the hypothesis in building the resilience of your body, heart, mind and spirit. Many experience the payback as quick and memorable.

1. Physical Intensity

Recently added to the [ACSM guidelines](#), resistance training (working against loads that cause muscle failure) and speedwork (short bursts of max speed) are clearly embedded in prevention, fitness, elite training and anti-aging medicine.

Basic Training: make sure you develop adequate cardiovascular fitness, flexibility and technique before starting high intensity sessions. It is tempting to go too hard at first. This will cause injury and embed performance-limiting habits. New skills must be learned at lower intensity.

Intensity Tactics: 2 to 3 times per week give it everything – and more – in short bursts. Weights should cause fatigue before 12 repetitions. Speed work can be done running up hills, swimming, biking, paddling or in tennis. Sprint for 8 to 30 seconds for maximum effect, resting at least that time between each. Longer sprints can be used to build race endurance.

Benefits: you will feel this immediately with bursting energy, confidence (testosterone and growth hormone), belly fat loss, sleep improvement and vastly better metabolism.

2. Emotional Intensity

Most of us are lazy with our emotions – even those with brilliant natural talent. As discussed in the last newsletter, the first step is to bring your conscious attention vigorously onto what you are feeling. Once aware, the journey is thrilling.

Basic Training: learn the emotions by studying the facial movements, noticing their effects on your body and mind, and using visualisation to shift between emotions. Micro-expression training and emotion regulation are the key disciplines to master. This will take some time and effort, particularly when mastering EQ competencies. Slow down, practice, visualise and rehearse.

Intensity Tactics: emotion must be mastered under pressure. Increasing the speed of micro-expression training is a start. The goal is to get into testing environments. Debate, conflict, adventure sports and fierce conversations can take us into arousal and it is here we must practice awareness (thinking and talking about feelings) and mastery (regulating and transmuting emotion from destructive to constructive states). The key is to stay conscious of emotion (prefrontal brain) and keep the amygdala (reptilian brain) under control.

Benefits: many researchers believe this to be the single most potent factor in resilience. The confidence that comes from beating the negative emotions is huge and your relationships and leadership will flourish. Political correctness and excessive sensitivity has done immeasurable damage to acceptability of emotional intensity.

3. Cognitive Intensity

I recently reviewed an article showing how our thinking style matches brain structure - www.resiliencei.com/articles/Brain-science. It provides clues to how we build resilience at a cognitive level by training different forms of attention. Athletes call this attentional style. We are biased to our preferred style – particularly under pressure or risk. Focused attention can be extended with training such as meditation. Being able to switch focus quickly and using different perspectives on each situation develops flexibility.

Basic Training: review the concept referenced above, learning to recognise the difference between novelty seekers, persisters, reward dependents and harm avoiders. Understand your preferences and watch people who use different styles. Notice that each style has real strengths but when used in the wrong situation can limit us. Practice exploring situations from different perspectives. Imagine how others might view the same situation. Test each style for validity and fresh insights.

Intensity Tactics: sport is excellent practice.

<p>Novelty seeker Scan periphery Look for gaps Get excited Give it a go ...</p>	<p>Reward dependent How do I feel? Who is watching? Who will approve? What do they think?</p>
<p>Persister How to win? Who is weak? I can prevail Control process</p>	<p>Harm Avoider What is the risk? How far back? Risk mitigation Safe options</p>

Keep working your mind around the different styles and notice which ones come easily. Practice hard on those that evade you. Review perspectives with others and coaches. Then practice these styles in leadership, parenting and conflict management. Increase speed and risk! Know your strength and use it for advantage.

Benefits: Cognitive intensity is a path to more flexible and resilient choices that generate Flow. It allows you to explore and test difficult environments so that you can reduce risk.

Perhaps we are governed by “harm avoiders” and “reward dependents” who prefer compliance to safe, reliable, well tested rules. Be sure to keep your “novelty seeker” and “persister” alert and trained.

In summary, reaching beyond your comfort zone and testing your abilities in challenging situations can cultivate Resilience. It is essential to reduce intensity for learning new skills but real-time application requires rehearsal under “match-pressure.” You may like to reflect on what Spiritual Intensity would be for you.

References:
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