



Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators

By Elena Aguilar (Jossey-Bass, 2018)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book:

- ~ Educators experience hundreds of frustrating, provoking, and overwhelming moments every day: the broken copy machine, the upset parent, the last-minute request to cover a class.
- ~ To prevent burnout, this book helps educators develop the skills needed to become more resilient so they feel more fulfilled, remain in the job longer, and teach more effectively.

Why I chose this book:

As leaders, the emotional resilience of your teachers is a crucial issue. You can have the best curriculum, standards, and programs in place, but if your teachers are burning out, you can't follow through on anything. This book is a useful tool for any leader who wants to help educators develop the social-emotional skills necessary to not only survive, but thrive in schools.

The book introduces 12 habits educators need to be truly resilient (see below). Each chapter focuses on developing one of these habits per month. The ideas in the book easily translate into PD you can do with teachers, there is also an *Onward* workbook (with over 600 pages of activities) you can purchase, or there are always PD ideas from The Main Idea at the end of the summary! I deeply respect Elena Aguilar's work - see The Main Idea's summary of her other book, as well: *The Art of Coaching Teams*.

*****Email Jenn to sign up for a month-long challenge to practice mindfulness daily in March*****

The Scoop (In this summary you will learn...)

Chapter	HABIT – your behaviors	DISPOSITION – your way of being
1/June	KNOW YOURSELF Knowing our emotions, values, and personality...	PURPOSEFULNESS ...will give us purpose to guide you through setbacks.
2/July	UNDERSTAND EMOTIONS When we understand our own emotions and have strategies to respond to those emotions...	ACCEPTANCE ...we can know when to influence a situation and when it is outside of our control.
3/August	TELL EMPOWERING STORIES When we interpret events by telling empowering stories...	OPTIMISM ...our optimism will expand.
4/Sept	BUILD COMMUNITY When we build a strong, healthy community...	EMPATHY ...we develop empathy for each other.
5/October	BE HERE NOW When we're fully present, without judgment...	HUMOR ...we're more likely to find levity in challenging moments.
6/Nov	TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF When your body is well cared for...	POSITIVE SELF-PERCEPTION ...you can better deal with emotions and have a healthy self-perception.
7/Dec	FOCUS ON THE BRIGHT SPOTS When we focus on our strengths and assets...	EMPOWERMENT ...we feel more empowered to influence our surroundings.
8/January	CULTIVATE COMPASSION Compassion for ourselves and others...	PERSPECTIVE ...gives us the perspective to see the long view.
9/Feb	BE A LEARNER When we see challenges as opportunities for learning...	CURIOSITY ...then we can do more than survive adversity, we thrive!
10/March	PLAY AND CREATE When we play, our thinking expands...	COURAGE ...and this resourcefulness fuels our courage.
11/April	RIDE THE WAVES OF CHANGE Being able to handle inevitable change...	PERSEVERANCE ...strengthens our perseverance.
12/May	CELEBRATE AND APPRECIATE Practicing gratitude and appreciation...	TRUST ...builds trust in ourselves, a process, and something greater.

Introduction

Teachers are leaving the profession in droves. About 20% of teachers leave their jobs each year and for first-year teachers this rate is now up to 40%. This is not surprising; teaching is emotionally draining. Further, educators face stressful moments each day that test their resilience – from the broken-down copier to the last-minute request to cover a class. Whether teachers have the skills to respond to these daily frustrations may make the difference between remaining in the field or looking for another job. When educators don't have the resilience to respond to daily stressors, this takes a toll. Not only is teacher turnover expensive, but students suffer. They need committed, passionate, and present adults; an impossible ideal when teachers are simply struggling to get through the day.

In schools, there will always be change and disruption but *how* we respond to these incidents is something we can control. By helping teachers develop the skills to become more resilient, we can stem the tide of teacher burnout. Our resilience is about both our *attitude* and our *behavior*. Many factors contribute to our resilience, some of which we have no control over – our circumstances or our biology. However, research shows that a *substantial* part of how we respond to daily stimuli is the result of our *habits*. This means that resilience can be learned. We can intentionally cultivate the types of daily habits that will help us bounce back from setbacks.

This may sound familiar because over the past decade, more and more schools have started to pay attention to the social and emotional learning (SEL) needs of their *students*. We have realized that it's not enough to simply focus on the academic lives of students. As a result, a great deal of resources have been put into training, programs, and curricula to support the social-emotional development of students. It's time to provide the same type of support, and focus on the same type of skill-building for teachers. Rather than focus all professional development on standards or curricula, we need to teach educators how to better manage stress and develop resilience.

Researchers from numerous fields have identified the *dispositions* of highly resilient people. A disposition can be defined as someone's way of being or their temperament, attitude, character, or mindset. Aguilar researched resilience and grouped the dispositions she found into 12 categories related to the field of education. She then mapped these 12 dispositions to 12 habits that educators can intentionally cultivate in order to become resilient educators. Each chapter focuses on one habit and describes how it builds one particular disposition. The book is designed for professional learning with the goal of focusing on changing one habit each month, starting in June. Each habit that we successfully change will strengthen the accompanying disposition needed to become a resilient educator. The cover page has a chart with the 12 habits that lead to the 12 dispositions that are introduced in this book.

Chapter 1 – Know Yourself

1. Know Yourself	4. Build Community	7. Focus on the Bright Spots	10. Play and Create
2. Understand Emotions	5. Be Here Now	8. Cultivate Compassion	11. Ride the Waves of Change
3. Tell Empowering Stories	6. Take Care of Yourself	9. Be a Learner	12. Celebrate and Appreciate

Knowing yourself is foundational to all of the other habits in this book. When you know yourself well, you have a clear sense of purpose which helps you handle setbacks and adversity better. When you know yourself, you use this knowledge to guide decision making. You accept your traits and act in accordance with your values and beliefs. With this level of self-knowledge, you are equipped to handle hundreds of daily challenges without “taking it personally.” The more you are clear about who you are, the more you will be able to develop this important disposition – *purposefulness*. Below are different aspects of self to get to know:

The Elements of Self

- 1. Values** – One principal has a clear set of values – family, kindness, and equity – that guide all of his actions. Whether he's with an office worker, a student, or a boss, his interactions are all shaped by these three core values. A value is a deeply held belief that informs how we act. When we act in accordance with these beliefs we experience integrity. When we don't, we feel depleted.
- 2. Personality Type** – While your values may change over time, your *personality* stays mostly the same. Your personality encompasses your habits, traits, attitudes, thoughts, and preferences. Much of how we work and live is shaped by our personality. For example, how would you respond if the school changed its schedule the week before school starts? If you are going to support a new initiative, do you want to hear about the details or the big picture first? The way you answer questions like these has a lot to do with your personality. The more you understand your personality, the more likely it is you will be accepting of yourself. One simple way to learn about your personality type is by taking the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test (www.16personalities.com).
- 3. Sociopolitical Identities** – The social groups you belong to – gender, race, class, etc. – affect how you interact with students, how you experience stress, and more. Awareness of how these issues play out for you can help you better handle them.
- 4. Strengths and Aptitudes** – We are often quite aware of our weaknesses. However, if we cultivate an awareness of our strengths, we can use these to make better decisions and to strive to overcome the daily challenges we face at work.

The Disposition: Purposefulness

The big habit to focus on in this chapter is *Know Yourself*. The better you are able to know yourself – your values, personality type, sociopolitical identities, and your strengths – the clearer your purpose will become. Research shows that resilient people are extremely clear about their purpose. Understanding different aspects of yourself is the route to developing the disposition of *purposefulness*.

Chapter 2 – Understand Emotions

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When you understand your emotions and have strategies to address them, this leads to acceptance – an important part of resilience. Like many of us, Aguilar initially didn't think it was her job, as an instructional coach, to deal with emotions. She thought there was too much work to be done and people should just wipe away their tears and “deal with it.” But then she noticed that this prevented her from being effective as a leader, a coach, and simply a human being. Now that she has learned the skills to manage her own emotions and help others manage theirs, everyone benefits. This chapter helps you better understand emotions.

Understanding Emotions

An emotion is basically a reaction we have to an event. It happens as a result of how our mind interprets the event. Below is an overview of the six stages you typically go through when experiencing an emotion:

1. **Prompting event** – An event outside of you occurs – like the assistant principal conducts an unexpected fire drill.
2. **Interpretation** – Your mind makes sense of the event – you think this shows the AP is unaware of how hard a teacher's job is.
3. **Physical response** – The event and your interpretations lead to a physical response – in this case, you release stress hormones.
4. **Urge to act** – You feel the urge to respond even though you may not – here you might compose emails to the AP in your head.
5. **Action** – This is what you end up doing – on the way out you might slam a door or glare at the assistant principal.
6. **Aftereffects** – This emotion may affect future thoughts, emotions, behaviors, or your body. For example, the anger you feel toward the assistant principal may lead to anxiety about your job.

The more you become aware of the steps in this cycle, the more likely you will be to disrupt it. For example, if you become cognizant of when you hit the *interpretation* stage (2), as soon as you think, “The assistant principal is an inconsiderate jerk,” you might say to yourself, “Oh, I'm jumping to that interpretation.” When you become aware of exactly where you are in the cycle, you can take a few breaths and slow it down. This knowledge empowers you to feel in control of your emotions and ensure that the emotion remains temporary. It helps to understand that an emotion itself isn't good or bad, but how we *respond* to an emotion can be constructive or problematic. A basic tenet of this chapter is: *Change how you think about emotions and you'll change how you experience them.*

Understanding Emotional Intelligence

There has been a shift, more recently, in thinking about emotions. Rather than believing they have no place in the workplace, research has shown that emotional intelligence is a strong predictor of successful job performance. Top performers in a variety of fields almost all have highly developed emotional intelligence – something that makes sense given how many jobs involve relationships and communication. Developing emotional intelligence is essential in building your resilience. Daniel Goleman spearheaded our understanding of this term by breaking it into four component parts:

Self-awareness: The ability to recognize your own feelings

Self-management: The ability to respond appropriately to your feelings – includes skills like self-control and adaptability

Social awareness: The ability to recognize and understand the feelings of others

Social management: The ability to form healthy relationships, manage conflicts, collaborate, and build trust

In order to recognize your own feelings and the feelings of others, it helps to practice *naming* those feelings. In the appendix you will find Erin Olivo's list of hundreds of feelings organized into eight core emotions. Become familiar with the eight core emotions so you can identify variations of those feelings. The eight are: fear, anger, sadness, shame, jealousy, disgust, happiness, and love.

In addition to naming our emotions to cultivate awareness, it also helps to tune in to our bodies. Our bodies often offer helpful clues about our emotional state. For example, some strong emotions result in an increased heart rate, faster breathing, increased sweating, a rise in blood pressure, and stress hormones flooding our body. Our brain slows down and our ability to problem solve and make decisions is diminished. We often end up with headaches, insomnia, and indigestion. By slowing down, taking a few breaths, and doing a body scan (noticing each body part, one at a time), we can become aware of the clues our body is sending about our emotions.

The Disposition – Acceptance

When we fight against what is happening – we want things to be different, we want people to be different, we want ourselves to be different – this leads to suffering. Instead, if we slow down and become aware of our emotions, we will see that we have agency in how we respond to events and can identify what we can change and accept what we can't – a key ingredient in building resilience.

Chapter 3 – Tell Empowering Stories

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When you choose to interpret events by telling empowering stories, your *optimism* expands. Remember the stages of an emotion? After an event occurs, that's where *interpretation* comes in. This interpretation is the *story* we tell ourselves. When a student rolls her eyes at us we think, *She doesn't respect me*. This is a story that cuts into our resilience. While we might not be able to control the initial event, we have the power to decide how to interpret it. This is a prime example of how we can build our resilience – by slowing things down and changing our story. So, the next time your principal passes you in the hallway, rather than thinking, *What did I do wrong?* you can decide to think, *She must be busy*. Practice this skill throughout the day to boost resilience. See the differences below:

Event	Detrimental Response	More Resilient Response
A parent emails asking to meet.	<i>What did I do now?</i>	<i>I wonder what's going on? I hope everything is OK with his child – it will be good to find out what's going on.</i>
A student rolls her eyes.	<i>He's disrespectful and rude.</i>	<i>I wonder what's going on with him – I need to develop a better relationship with him.</i>

It's not so easy to jump to the more resilient response when something happens. Take a few deep breaths and allow yourself to have your emotions before jumping to conclusions and problem-solving mode. It helps to understand where some of those feelings are coming from. First, it is common to resort to **distorted thinking** – unhelpful patterns of thought. For example, we might fall prey to black-and-white thinking (*My principal never compliments me.*) Or we might overgeneralize – the copy machine breaks and you think everything has fallen apart. Maybe we have unrealistic expectations – *I'm not a perfectionist; I just have high standards*. Once you become aware of this type of distorted thinking, it becomes easier to disrupt it.

In addition to distorted thinking, our **core beliefs** also influence our interpretations. Core beliefs are deeply ingrained beliefs about ourselves. A common one is worthlessness. When Aguilar coached one teacher and heard her frequently respond to everyday problems with comments like, "I shouldn't be a teacher – I'm worthless!" she realized that the problem was with this teacher's *thoughts*. Other typical core beliefs are described in the appendix (like helplessness, perfectionism, and lack of trust). In addition to distorted thinking and core beliefs, **destructive dominant narratives** often play a role in our interpretations. Negative narratives about poor people, women, people with dark skin, and many other groups are prevalent. Becoming aware of these destructive stories and replacing them with more positive ones is liberating. Below are some suggestions for how to craft your own, new stories.

Crafting New Stories

Despite the fact that there are strong forces influencing our interpretations – distorted thinking, core beliefs, dominant narratives, and more – we *can* craft new stories. Below are three routines you can adopt to create new stories:

1. **Visualization:** Imagine what you would like to be true. You can close your eyes and imagine it, or draw or write it out.
2. **Affirmations:** It may sound corny, but there's science behind the power of saying positive thoughts to yourself. Choose a few short and positive messages to say to yourself like, "I'll get through this" or "I am enough. I do enough."
3. **Intention Setting:** By setting an intention before an activity, it prevents your mind from going down the wrong path. If you set an intention to listen during a meeting, rather than disputing what you're hearing, you'll remember, *My intention was to listen*.

The Disposition – Optimism

By cultivating the habit of telling empowering stories, you will develop more *optimism*. Resilient people are optimistic. Luckily this is a trait you can learn; it is not fixed. By seeing opportunity in adversity, you can learn to develop a realistic sense of optimism.

Chapter 4 – Build Community

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When we build a strong, healthy community, we develop empathy for each other. In Aguilar's first year of teaching she soon realized she was surrounded by cynical, burned-out teachers in the lunchroom. She decided, instead, to eat lunch with the speech therapist. This move provided her with the friendship and camaraderie she needed to build a community that would boost resilience that first year of teaching. Research shows that having social connections is a foundational human need. In one refugee camp, people withstood a week of hunger in exchange for being able to make a phone call home, choosing social connection over basic requirements like food.

In a school, a strong community is essential. When teachers find a strong community, *they don't leave it*. Teaching is one of the most isolating professions and time is tight in schools. But given that building community is a key part of resilience, it is well worth taking eight minutes out of a meeting for a team-building exercise or a few days out of the year for a staff overnight.

Trust: A Key Ingredient in Building Community

All healthy relationships rely on trust. This is why it is essential to develop trust when building a community. Individual trust can be defined as the confidence you have in someone's *competence* and *character*. We trust people who demonstrate the skills to complete a task and who actually follow through with what they say they will do. In a group, *relational trust* comes from interpersonal social

exchanges. Research shows that students thrive in schools with *high* relational trust. To build trust in a school community, we need to pay attention to four areas: respect, personal regard, competence, and integrity. Think about the trust you have in your colleagues:

Element of Trust	Questions we ask to determine if we trust a colleague...
<i>Respect</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we talk and listen authentically to each other? • Does she show respect for me and my ideas? • Do we interact in a kind way?
<i>Personal regard</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we care about each other professionally and personally? • Is she willing to go the extra mile?
<i>Competence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I believe in her ability and willingness to fulfill her responsibilities effectively?
<i>Personal integrity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does she do what she says she'll do? • Do I trust her to put the interests of students first?

How to Build Community

Sometimes people think all it takes to build community is a superficial activity completed at the beginning of the year. However, it takes time and skill to build community. This chapter introduces four high-leverage strategies that will help build community over time: 1) refine your communication skills, 2) learn from body language, 3) increase cultural competence, and 4) address conflict.

1. Refine Communication – *Listening* lies at the heart of healthy relationships. Become aware of how you listen. Do you listen so you can be the “fixer” who solves the problem? Do you listen just to get through it because of a sense that there is no time to listen? If you listen in these *constricted* ways, it is time to develop *expansive listening*, that is, listening that builds connection and community. Below are some suggestions to listen expansively. When you listen expansively, be sure to take deep breaths and speak slowly.

Expansive Ways of Listening	
<i>Listen...</i>	<i>Suggestions</i>
For the big picture	Listen for the whole – see the person and the situation embedded within the many moving pieces.
With love	Listen with an open heart, with the knowledge your heart will not break and can hold the pain. Be present with and understand the humanity of the person who speaks.
For pain	Without trying to fix – listen to hear the emotions under the story.
With humility	Listen with gratitude for the trust that has been bestowed on you.
With curiosity	Listen without an attachment to how you think things should be. Be willing to be surprised.
With compassion	Suspend judgment of yourself and others – appreciate that everyone makes choices based on their knowledge and skills and what makes sense for them.
For relationships	Listen to build healthy relationships with others who might be resources.
With hope	Listen with the belief that possibilities and outcomes exist that you may not yet be aware of.

2. Learn from Body Language – Nonverbal communication often says a lot more than our words. Some say that 65% of communication is received nonverbally from our posture, gestures, facial expression, and more. Body language is connected to building community because when a person’s words conflict with his body language, this diminishes trust.

3. Increase Cultural Competence – Cultural competence is our ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with others from different cultures or belief systems. It involves becoming aware of our own cultural identity, having knowledge of the role that culture plays in our interactions, and then skillfully managing difference. Regardless of background, we all have a responsibility to improve our cultural competence so we can build relationships and community.

4. Address Unhealthy Conflict – Unhealthy conflict, left to fester, can lead to a toxic school culture. It must be addressed. In cases where the issue is complex, you may need to invite an administrator or someone to help. On the other end of the spectrum are situations in which people are superficially nice, another unproductive response to conflict. To build community, it is essential to develop the skills to engage in *healthy* conflict. There are more details about this in Aguilar’s other book, *The Art of Coaching Teams*, and below are a few suggestions of the types of sentence stems that help in fostering healthy conflict:

- I have some concerns about that suggestion. Could you explain it more?
- I want to push back on that idea. I’ve noticed...
- I disagree about that, but I want to hear your thoughts...

As a leader, it falls to you to establish the conditions for trust and build community at your school. You have the opportunity to create low-risk opportunities for staff to get to know one another. You can be sure to listen to teacher discourse to determine whether staff are interacting respectfully. Furthermore, it is up to you to take the lead in shaping the culture at your school. This is particularly important if there is unhealthy conflict between staff members – you need to address it or seek support in addressing it.

Disposition: Empathy

In this case, building community and developing empathy are cyclical. When you build community, you develop empathy among members; when you develop empathy for people, this helps to build community. Without a doubt, empathy is a key to forming healthy relationships and community, and in schools with high levels of empathy, there is more resilience.

Chapter 5 – Be Here Now

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When we are fully present, we can find levity in challenging moments. This builds resilience. Aguilar describes the types of thoughts that prevented her from sleeping her first year of teaching – the mess that was left in her classroom, her first call to Child Protective Services for a child with bruises, her pile of unpaid bills at home. Despite having overwhelming feelings that year, she notes that the days she meditated she felt noticeably calmer. In this chapter, she tries her utmost to get you to meditate; ideally for 20 minutes a day.

What is Mindfulness?

Think back to the stages of an emotion. Rather than blindly following this path down a habitual route – snapping, blaming, getting upset – you have a choice to take a different path: mindfulness. This is when you bring *awareness* to your feelings, *accept* them, and then *intentionally* choose what to do next. Note that this is about more than just yourself. When you react negatively in the moment, it impacts your students. Mindfulness is like a pause button that gives you an opportunity to make another choice rather than hit “reply all” to an upsetting email. As Chapter 3 explained, many of our thoughts are distorted. Mindfulness is what gives us a moment to observe our thoughts before we send the girl who rolled her eyes at us directly to the office. In the moment, mindfulness may simply involve closing your eyes and taking a breath. To regularly practice mindfulness in the morning, you might set an intention (*Today my meditation will help me respond kindly to my students*), close your eyes, and count your breaths to 10 several times.

The Benefits of Mindfulness

While mindfulness has its roots in Eastern traditions, it has been practiced by Americans for decades. More recently, scientists have studied the impact of mindfulness on the brain. They have found that meditating can actually alter the brain; calms the part of the brain that is activated during fear; and arouses the part of the brain that is responsible for learning, memory, and decision making. Given how stressful it is to be an educator, a tool that creates a barrier against stress is invaluable. Here are a few nuggets from the research on mindfulness and education. Teachers who practice mindfulness:

- Experience lower levels of stress and burnout
- Have more emotionally supportive classrooms
- Report greater efficacy in their jobs
- Have more organized classrooms

Furthermore, our emotions are contagious, so if we are calm, there’s a greater likelihood that our students will be calm. Mindfulness also helps with many other issues from insomnia to depression to chronic pain. Overall, the benefits of mindfulness are abundant.

Disposition: Humor

Humor helps you to be here now. It prevents you from obsessing over the past or worrying about the future. Laughing with others breaks down barriers between us and gives us a common ground. Laughter fosters our immune system and builds our resilience. One day when Aguilar had just started teaching, the principal decided to visit right when paint had fallen all over the floor, a girl had run out of the room sobbing, and a bird had flown in through the window. She took in the moment and let out a laugh. Like other dispositions, you can bolster your humor – simply start looking for the humor in daily life and you will begin to notice and focus on it.

Chapter 6 – Take Care of Yourself

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When your body is well cared for, you’re better able to deal with emotions and have a healthy self-perception. Resilient people make sure that they take care of themselves. As Aguilar wrote to herself in her third year of teaching, “You can’t be patient and attentive with kids, and deliver carefully crafted, differentiated lessons, and keenly capture formative assessment observations if you’re congested, hungry, achy, weepy, phlegmy, jittery and have burning eyes from sleep deprivation.” If it’s clear that our physical state impacts our emotional state, why don’t we take better care of ourselves? Aguilar suggests it might be due to:

1. A **knowledge gap** – We don’t have the information to know what it would involve to take care of ourselves.
2. A **skill gap** – We don’t have the skills to take care of ourselves.
3. A **will gap** – We think we can get by with poor nutrition and little sleep so we don’t have the will to change.
4. An **emotional intelligence gap** – We don’t feel we deserve to take care of ourselves when there is so much work to do.

Given these four gaps, what would it take to actually start taking care of ourselves? Wouldn’t it be worth taking a month to focus on taking care of ourselves if it meant preventing sickness, feeling more content, and being better able to serve our students? First, know that people often experience several of these gaps at the same time. It helps to start with the gap that’s easiest to close. Some people need “permission” to focus on caring for themselves. Others need a “mandate” from someone they trust – a partner, a doctor, a boss, or a best friend. Below are some tips and information to help.

Martyrdom Gets in the Way of Self-Care

“I can’t take a day off! My classroom would crumble without me.” “I’m the first one here and the last to leave every day.” If you find yourself making statements like these, you might be somewhere on the martyr complex continuum. Martyrs certainly work hard, but this ends up being destructive when it comes to self-care. Martyrs often sacrifice themselves because they don’t set personal boundaries. It’s fine to work hard, but it can go too far and lead to burnout. In contrast, we must value a different type of teacher in our schools – one who is humble, effective, and leads a balanced life. Schools need role models of teachers and leaders who get enough sleep, eat dinner with their families, keep their bodies healthy, and are deeply skilled in providing an outstanding education.

What Your Body Needs

Sleep – If you’re feeling out of balance, start here. “Sleep is the most underrated health habit” according to Dr. Roizen. Sleep is a good place to start. Study after study shows it’s connected to so many aspects of self-care: improves long- and short-term memory, cleans toxic molecules out of your system, helps you make better decisions, supports mental and emotional stability, and more

Nutrition – You know your food affects your physical health, but do you know it also affects your mental health? Simply eating crap can lead to emotional distress. If you’re eating poorly each day for lunch, you might find you’re getting snappy with your students.

Exercise – It may be obvious that exercise helps your heart, bones, and lungs, but it also affects your mood and energy. Exercise has an impact on your cognitive abilities, how you age, your long-term memory and more. The human brain evolved at a time when humans walked 12 miles a day. Maybe you can’t do that, but you can put on your sneakers and move for 20 minutes!

Fun and Other Stuff – To fully take care of ourselves, we need to go beyond the basics. We need emotional and physical intimacy, we need time outside among the trees, and we need sunlight. Find ways to enjoy the body you’ve been given.

Learn to Say No and Avoid Perfectionism

In order to have time to do all the stuff above, we need to learn to say no. Many of us don’t say no out of a fear of not being liked or wanting to be wanted. But saying yes doesn’t necessarily change these feelings. To prioritize self-care, we need to learn to say no politely and thoughtfully. The next time someone asks you to do something, think about whether you really want to do it. Another drain on our time is *perfectionism*. Our sense of self-worth is often caught up in our pursuit of perfection. However, perfectionism is corrosive. There is no such thing as “perfect” and as humans, we grow a great deal from our mistakes. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be committed to quality or have a strong work ethic; it just means you shouldn’t take it as far as perfectionism.

Disposition: Positive Self-Perception

People who take care of themselves are better able to bounce back after setbacks. Valuing your body leads to valuing yourself. If you start taking care of your physical self, see what happens to your emotional state. You will likely start to value yourself more.

Chapter 7 – Focus on the Bright Spots

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When we focus on our strengths and assets, we feel more empowered to influence our surroundings. Focusing on what’s positive helps us to feel better which in turn allows us to handle challenges more effectively. Aguilar shares an example of coaching a midcareer teacher who was down on her teaching. Aguilar proposed the idea of observing this teacher for just 10 minutes each day and *only* commenting on the positive. After several weeks of providing this positive feedback, the teacher started noticing what she was doing well, and this gave her strength to address what wasn’t going well. When we want to make a change in our lives we often think we need to focus on what we’re doing *wrong* – eating potato chips, smoking, etc. Another approach to change is using a strengths-based approach, like the coaching example above. By focusing on the bright spots – positive moments – we see what’s working, we improve our self-confidence, and we develop the resilience to handle what comes our way.

Challenges of Focusing on the Bright Spots

It’s not always so easy to focus on the positives in our work or our lives. Some underlying reasons for this might be the following:

- 1) **Neurology** – Perhaps you’ve heard that humans have a “negativity bias.” Because our ancestors needed to spot danger quickly (and run from that saber-toothed tiger), humans perceive negative stimuli and store it in our brain within a tenth of a second whereas we need 12 whole seconds to take in a positive experience. Overcoming your brain’s negativity takes daily work!
- 2) **Culture** – In many workplaces, people value being critical – challenging an idea or pointing out flaws in a plan. Also, it is often culturally acceptable to complain. We need to be aware of this cultural tendency if we want to accentuate the positive.
- 3) **Emotions** – Many people don’t have the skillset to respond when they are angry, sad, or frustrated. This leads us to focus on our deficiencies – *I’m such a failure... Why am I so bad at X?*

How to Focus on the Bright Spots – Five Practices

Given the obstacles to overcome above, how *do* you focus your thoughts on the bright spots? Below are five practices to help:

- 1) **Setting Intentions** – This means thinking about how you want to show up – how you want to think and feel – in a certain situation. For example, before a meeting you might set an intention to be open to new ideas. You might even write this on the agenda. If you prime yourself to feel a certain way, your mind is more likely focus on it and follow through.
- 2) **Taking an Inquiry Stance** – If you observe without an agenda, but instead with an expansive view, you’ll be more likely to ask questions and be open to new possibilities.
- 3) **Engaging in Appreciative Inquiry** – The description above of the coach focusing on the positive shows how a strengths-based approach to change can help an *individual*. Appreciative inquiry is an approach to changing *organizations* that builds on what is already working. Rather than analyzing and solving existing problems, schools can **Define** the issue, **Discover** what already works, **Dream** about what could be, and **Design** and **Deliver** a plan that combines what is working with what could be.
- 4) **Dealing with Emotions** – If you don’t have the skills to deal with your fear, frustration, or anger, it’s hard to focus on the bright spots. One common strategy to help – RAIN: **Recognize** and name the emotion you are experiencing; **Accept** the emotion with self-compassion rather than criticism; **Investigate** what’s going on and what your underlying feelings might be; and **Nonidentification** reminds you that you are not your feelings and that your feelings are temporary. Now you can be at peace.
- 5) **Practicing Reflection** – By pausing and reflecting you gain clarity, understand your emotions, and build resilience. This is different from unhealthy *rumination*. In contrast, *reflection* builds insight into your behaviors and next actions.

Disposition: Empowerment

Once Aguilar worked with a teacher who said, “The only way I can deal with Michael is if the special ed aide is in the class with him every day.” While this teacher needed help with technical coaching, she needed help with her disposition - empowerment - even more.

Chapter 8 – Cultivate Compassion

1. Know Yourself	4. Build Community	7. Focus on the Bright Spots	10. Play and Create
2. Understand Emotions	5. Be Here Now	8. Cultivate Compassion	11. Ride the Waves of Change
3. Tell Empowering Stories	6. Take Care of Yourself	9. Be a Learner	12. Celebrate and Appreciate

Compassion for ourselves and others gives us the perspective to see the long view. When you can see the larger perspective, you can temporarily remove yourself from the drama of the moment and see alternative responses and options. Aguilar describes a teacher who was frustrated by the school’s administrators, “Their incompetence has unraveled the benefits of two weeks off.” This frustration was deeply impacting her. To boost her resilience, Aguilar helped her deepen her perspective, “Consider that everyone is doing the best they can. Based on their knowledge, skills, and experiences, they are making the best choices available to them.”

Four Benefits of Compassion

Imagine that compassion is like a muscle that you need to build. When you don’t, it becomes weak, and this often leaves you hurt and unbalanced just as your actual muscles affect your whole body. One simple way to practice compassion is to think about a person you want to develop compassion for, sit quietly, and silently send a message to the person, *I care about your suffering. May you be free from suffering.* You can do this anywhere, quickly and invisibly! Doing this regularly will help you enjoy the benefits of compassion:

1. **Compassion Makes us Healthier and Happier** – Compassion benefits your *body* because it reduces stress hormones and slows your heart rate. It also has the positive effect of lighting up the pleasure circuits in your brain.
2. **Compassion Primes the Mind for Collaboration** – To work well with a group, we need to trust teammates and feel connected. Compassion helps to release oxytocin which reduces cortisol, boosts trust, and helps us deal with the stress we may feel in groups.
3. **Compassion Makes Difficult Relationships a Bit Easier** – If you respond to a parent’s anger by focusing on how difficult this woman is, you’ll make things worse. By practicing compassion – recognizing that she’s afraid and anxious and opening your perspective – you might be able to build a connection, or at least prevent yourself from yelling back.
4. **Compassion Strengthens Communities** – The word *compassion* literally means “suffering with.” When you are stressed, remembering that many others are experiencing something similar can lessen your individual pain and remind you you’re not alone.

Self-Compassion and Forgiveness

Self-compassion is a key aspect of compassion. If you are continually self-critical and cut yourself down, you certainly undermine your resilience. Compassion for others begins with compassion for yourself. Self-compassion is not about letting yourself off the hook when you do something wrong. It’s about cultivating kindness toward yourself so you are in a stronger place to make improvements. To help you develop self-compassion, take a look at the three steps below:

- First, recognize your difficult emotions, *When my principal gave me critical feedback I felt embarrassed and angry.*
- Next, recognize that to err is human; we all make mistakes.
- Finally, talk to yourself as you would a best friend, dialing down the harsh judgment, *Hey, that wasn’t your best lesson, but that’s OK. Your principal knows that everyone has lessons that aren’t great. What might you do differently next time?*

Disposition: Perspective

Humans tend to be self-involved, seeing things based on our own desires, fears, and needs. When you zoom out and consider the emotions and experiences of others you broaden your perspective. This helps you to see the larger picture, understand what is outside of your control, and develop a sense of humility – all key aspects of resilience.

Chapter 9 – Be a Learner

1. Know Yourself	4. Build Community	7. Focus on the Bright Spots	10. Play and Create
2. Understand Emotions	5. Be Here Now	8. Cultivate Compassion	11. Ride the Waves of Change
3. Tell Empowering Stories	6. Take Care of Yourself	9. Be a Learner	12. Celebrate and Appreciate

If we see challenges as learning opportunities, then we can do more than survive adversity, we can thrive! Aguilar tells the story of Liz Simons, the coach who saved her when she was a teacher. How did Liz do this? Through her continual curiosity. When listening to Aguilar while they were debriefing, she exuded curiosity, “That’s *so* interesting!” and “Why do you suspect they’re doing that?” These questions opened a world of insights and possibilities. The coach also introduced Aguilar to action research (classroom inquiry) as a way to use curiosity to investigate solutions to problems in the classroom. As a result, Aguilar herself started to engage in inquiry and question-posing which helped her to become much more resilient.

Ways to Think About Learning

To help educators become more aware of what is involved in being a learner, Aguilar introduces several models for how people learn in this chapter. With each model, if we can become aware of the *emotions* that exist at each stage of learning, we will be better able to manage the learning journey. This means the next time we try something new, rather than saying to ourselves, *This is SO hard and I am SO bad at it* or *Everyone else is getting this faster than me*, we can understand it as a stage in the learning journey.

The Conscious Competence Ladder – Founded in the 1970s, this framework describes four stages we go through when we learn something. First, in *unconscious incompetence* we don’t know that we are lacking a skill we need to learn. Second, in *conscious incompetence* we know that we don’t yet have certain skills and we are aware that others are more competent in this skill. We may feel discomfort or anxiety about not having the skill. When we reach *conscious competence*, we gain more confidence because we have learned the skill, but it still takes conscious effort to perform the skill. We still need practice. Finally, at the *unconscious competence* stage we can perform the skill automatically. Now we need to teach the skill to others to continue growing.

Mind the Gap – This is Aguilar’s framework. It helps us understand the learning process better by outlining six gaps that interfere with our ability to learn something new. Below is an overview of these gaps:

6 Gaps That Interfere with Learning		
Gap	Description	Examples
Skill	The ability to execute skills or apply knowledge	• Using discussion structures • Creating a doable aim for a lesson
Knowledge	An understanding of a subject or information	• Knowing discussion strategies • Understanding polynomials
Capacity	The time or resources to do something. Might also be emotional or physical capacity	• Having time to call students’ parents • Having the emotional skills to manage an angry parent
Will	The desire, motivation, or commitment to do something	• Loving the work • Having a commitment to help kids learn
Cultural Competence	The ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people with different backgrounds from one’s own	• Recognizing assets in students from different backgrounds • Validating students’ backgrounds in choice of curriculum
Emotional Intelligence	The ability to be aware of and manage one’s own emotions and that of others	• Awareness of feeling anxious when with an administrator • Ability to calm an upset student

A framework like **Mind the Gap** is helpful in identifying obstacles teachers face in learning. For example, when Aguilar observed a teacher with poor classroom management, she decided to help the teacher with her *knowledge* and *skill* gaps by teaching her some classroom management skills. The next week the teacher was still struggling. What happened? By examining possible gaps with the framework above, it turns out that this teacher’s primary issue was a lack of confidence. In fact, once they spoke further, other gaps from this framework came to the surface. Once they addressed some of these other gaps, the teacher was ready to improve her class management skills. This is exactly how the framework can be used. It helps teachers explore exactly where their gap lies: *Do I have a knowledge gap about polynomials?* or *Do I not know how to teach students about polynomials in a way that they understand?*

Conditions for Learning

Overall, it is up to the leader to create the conditions for a *learning organization* to flourish. A *learning organization* is simply an organization in which everyone is learning. Learning thrives when people feel they can take risks, express dissenting opinions, get feedback, have time to think and reflect on what was learned, and share learning. Leaders can show that they value learning by modeling their own learning and allowing staff to see them learning. Furthermore, when leaders provide educators with *time* to learn, practice, and get feedback, this reinforces a commitment to learning. One study shows that teachers need about 50 hours of PD in a particular area to improve. To truly prioritize learning, leaders should make sure to block out sufficient time to learn new skills.

Disposition: Curiosity

When educators develop the disposition of curiosity, they are relentless in asking questions. This helps them to become resilient because instead of seeing challenges as obstacles, they see them as opportunities to explore, *What can I learn from this experience?*

Chapter 10 – Play and Create

1. Know Yourself	4. Build Community	7. Focus on the Bright Spots	10. Play and Create
2. Understand Emotions	5. Be Here Now	8. Cultivate Compassion	11. Ride the Waves of Change
3. Tell Empowering Stories	6. Take Care of Yourself	9. Be a Learner	12. Celebrate and Appreciate

When we play, our thinking expands and this resourcefulness fuels our courage. In schools, we're so results-oriented that it is hard to truly play and be creative. However, scientists who study play have found it is vital in our development. Stuart Brown, the founder of the Institute for Play, argues that "nonproductive play" – that is, play that is purposeless, voluntary, and causes you to lose a sense of time and yourself – makes us more energetic and resilient. Teachers of younger children often already know the benefits of play, but other educators may not know that play relieves stress, improves relationships, stimulates the mind, and keeps us young. Play works best when we don't relegate it to vacations, but incorporate it into our daily lives -- cooking a special meal or playing with your cat.

Art and Creativity

In addition to play, *art* can also be useful in boosting resilience. Although many of us get caught up in thoughts such as, *I'm not good at art*, if we can accept that we are not creating art for a museum, we will find that there are many therapeutic reasons to create art. We can create art to give us hope and optimism, to better understand ourselves, to push ourselves to grow, and to help us better understand our emotions. When times are tough, art is one tool that can help us bounce back. Almost every study on resiliency includes creativity as a key component. Thinking creatively allows us to see a problem in a new light and come up with novel solutions. For example, when student behavior is a problem, rather than simply tighten the rules and consequences – which may only address the issue in the short-term – what if we used more creative problem solving to address the root of the problem in a more innovative way?

Disposition: Courage

Aguiar argues that creativity, play, and art are not nice add-ons; they are essential tools for picking ourselves up when we've fallen. In toxic schools there is often little creativity, few people listen to each other, and there is no reflection. It takes courage to turn these conditions around. In turn, courage strengthens all of the other resiliency dispositions introduced in this book.

Chapter 11 – Ride the Waves of Change

1. Know Yourself	4. Build Community	7. Focus on the Bright Spots	10. Play and Create
2. Understand Emotions	5. Be Here Now	8. Cultivate Compassion	11. Ride the Waves of Change
3. Tell Empowering Stories	6. Take Care of Yourself	9. Be a Learner	12. Celebrate and Appreciate

Being able to handle unanticipated change heightens our perseverance. Change in schools is inevitable: colleagues leave, leaders are fired, and new initiatives are added. There are also changes *we initiate* such as teaching another grade or taking on a leadership role. In either case, our ability to handle change is a reflection of our resilience. Typically, humans like control. Unfortunately, in education we face even more rapid changes than in other professions. To face these changes, we need to build our resilience.

Resilient people *accept* change, feel they have some influence over the events in their lives, and believe they have some control over their *response* to these events. Understanding this not only helps you to feel more empowered, but it helps you decide where to expend your energy. For example, if as a teacher, you have a disorganized classroom, you feel you work for a principal with no vision, and you believe teachers are underpaid, you can use your knowledge about what you can control to decide where to put in effort. Obviously, you have the most control over your classroom, and you'll have to decide whether you want to exert the energy to lobby for increased teacher salaries or find a job at a school with a more inspiring leader.

How to Deal with Change: Four Principles

When faced with an unwanted change, we often think, *How will I survive this?* Responding this way limits what's possible. By focusing on surviving, we forgo the possibility that we might thrive. What if we change that inner voice to say, *How might this change help me thrive?* Below are four principles to help you manage changes like a new teaching assignment or a turnover in leadership:

- 1. Slow Down** – Imagine that at a staff meeting you hear that your principal and assistant principal are being moved to another school. For many of us the immediate reaction would be fight (organize to oppose this) or flight (leave the school). However, in order to do your clearest thinking, it's best to give yourself 24-48 hours to think and become aware of your feelings before any action.
- 2. Evaluate and Analyze the Situation** – When you slow down, you'll have time to ask yourself: *What other information do I need about the change? What story am I telling about this change? What's within my influence?* Another strategy is to view the change through different lenses. Zoom in to examine positives you might have missed. Then zoom out to determine the impact of this change in six months or two years. Finally, try on a wide view lens and think about other people and factors that are affected by this change.
- 3. Use Your Energy Where it Counts** – You only have so much energy. Think back to the first habit, Know Yourself, and ask yourself what really matters. Is your ego bruised? Are you taking it too personally? When you can clarify what really matters to you then you will know whether to put energy into accepting the change, influencing it, or managing your response to it.
- 4. Be Open to Outcomes** – It can be hard to be open to the uncertainty that comes with change. Even if you want to challenge a change, you don't know everything. Allowing yourself to be open to other outcomes will help you become more flexible and versatile.

The Secret to Successfully Leading Change

Once you can handle unwanted change, you can *lead* others through change. Below are three secrets of successfully leading change:

A. Deal with Fear – In bringing others through change, leaders often forget to manage *fear* in themselves and others. When you ask teachers to use a new strategy, they may be afraid that they won't know how to do it or they'll be publicly embarrassed. Even if you hold them accountable and use tools to track changes, no long-lasting change will occur until you deal with *emotions* – such as fear.

B. Remember That Change is About Learning – Change usually involves learning. You will more successfully lead change if you establish the conditions necessary for learning and address any gaps in skills, knowledge, capacity, will, cultural competence, and emotional intelligence (introduced in Chapter 9).

C. Understand the Backfire Effect – One novice principal was concerned about discipline at his school, so at a staff meeting he shared statistics concerning the problem and then rolled out a new behavior management plan. The teachers became incensed. Why? Because of the *backfire effect* – when people feel threatened, they hold onto their beliefs even more firmly. Teachers felt defensive because they saw the data as a condemnation of their classroom management skills. Rather than shocking teachers into a change with data, start by helping them to feel comfortable and safe. Give them time to reflect on their current practice and set up opportunities to listen to their concerns and feelings, particularly fear. Work together to collaboratively paint a picture of how things could be better.

Disposition: Perseverance

The more you overcome challenges and changes, the more you build your perseverance, a key muscle needed for resilience. To do this, not only do you need to handle the unwanted changes in front of you, but it helps to seek out opportunities for growth and challenge so you can continue to grow and learn to persevere.

Chapter 12 – Celebrate and Appreciate

1. Know Yourself	4. Build Community	7. Focus on the Bright Spots	10. Play and Create
2. Understand Emotions	5. Be Here Now	8. Cultivate Compassion	11. Ride the Waves of Change
3. Tell Empowering Stories	6. Take Care of Yourself	9. Be a Learner	12. Celebrate and Appreciate

Practicing gratitude and appreciation builds trust in ourselves, trust in the process, and trust in something greater. There are countless opportunities for celebration and appreciation – at the end of a semester or on a daily or weekly basis. While it may seem a bit fluffy to focus on appreciating ourselves and others, Aguilar found scientific research showing that it is instrumental in improving our well-being. And you don't need much of it to see the effects. Incorporating just a few minutes of gratitude into the day leads to improved self-confidence, heightened emotional intelligence, and an increased focus on the positive. Practicing gratitude takes the focus off of ourselves and helps us recognize others. It builds social bonds and encourages us to be kinder toward others.

Gratitude, like the other habits in this book, can be cultivated through regular practice. First, think about the people you appreciate – students, colleagues, supervisors, non-teaching staff. Next, imagine ways to regularly share a genuine appreciation for the impact someone has had on you, “I appreciate how, every time I arrive at school, you welcome me so warmly. It makes me feel happy to be here.” You might even text a message like this to a colleague! In a group setting, it is useful to establish structures to regularly express gratitude. This might include randomly choosing a name and inviting staff to share an appreciation of this person or having a time for people to write appreciations on Post-It notes. Setting up structures like these positively impacts staff retention.

In thinking about developing a habit of appreciation, it is important to remember to appreciate yourself! At the end of a day or a week, you might think of three things that went well and what your part was in making these things happen. Consider setting an alarm for a few times each day as a reminder to stop and appreciate something about yourself that day. The US Department of Labor reports that the primary reason people quit their jobs is that they don't feel appreciated. They go on to say that 65% of those in the workforce receive *no* praise or recognition. Practicing gratitude with yourself and others can help address this.

Disposition: Trust

When you regularly practice appreciation, your confidence builds. Before you might have said, *I don't know if I can do this*. Now you begin to trust yourself and trust the process. Celebrating helps you to reflect and appreciate your own effort and the efforts of others. Trusting yourself, others, and the process is something resilient people do. When the going gets tough they say to themselves, *Trust the process*. The more you appreciate, the more you will trust, and ultimately the more resilient you will become.

Conclusion

The goal of this book is to help you see that you have the potential to develop your own resilience. By practicing these twelve habits, you can cultivate essential dispositions that fuel your resilience. More than simply surviving the challenges of working in a school, you can thrive. The next time you arrive early to work so you can make copies of your Do Now, but find the copier broken, you no longer have to let that throw off your whole day. In the moment, you have the choice and the power to decide to respond in a different way. You have the perspective to know the difference between a broken copier and the loss of a loved one. Your resilience helps you to see other options; perhaps you can simply modify the Do Now. The challenge is still there, and the feelings of frustration will still surface, but by having cultivated your resilience, you will be much better able to manage situations like these.

THE MAIN IDEA's PD suggestions for *Onward*

I. Build a Rationale for Why Educators Need These Skills

1. In pairs, give teachers time to choose a few of the following scenarios and discuss how they would respond to them (see [handout](#)):

- What to do when you disagree with a colleague
- How to disagree with your principal
- What to do with upset parents
- What to do when you dislike a student
- How to respond to teachers who are negative
- How to respond to your principal's critical feedback
- How to respond when you must cover a class last-minute
- What to do when you feel as if a student dislikes you

As a larger group, share that education is a particularly stressful profession given the demands of the job, the constant changes, and the quantity of interpersonal interactions each day. Let them know that when teachers have the skills to respond to these daily frustrations, this can significantly impact their lives for the better. The PD ideas that follow, based on the ideas from Elena Aguilar's book, *Onward*, help teachers develop the social-emotional skills necessary to not only survive, but thrive in schools.

Next, tell teachers that there are many books about resilience, but this one is particularly aimed at educators. Ask teachers to discuss: Why do you think resilience is particularly important in the field of education?

2. If your school is currently addressing the social-emotional needs of students, discuss the key skills you are working to develop in students. Next, discuss: Which of these social-emotional skills would resonate or be worthwhile to build in adults as well?

3. Give teachers time to think about their own resilience. Have them think of a time they experienced a setback and discuss or journal responses to these questions: How did you respond to the setback (a parent yelled at you, a principal gave you particularly critical feedback)? How long did it take you to recover? Do you remember employing any particular skills to help you respond? Can you speak to how these types of skills have helped you navigate the stresses of working at a school?

Let them know that how they responded to the setback is an indication of the types of resiliency skills they've developed. Tell them that their resilience is the product of their *genes*, their *upbringing*, their *circumstances*, and their own *skills and habits*. In pairs, have teachers discuss which of these factors they believe most influences their resiliency. If they feel comfortable, they can share the particular setback they were thinking about and how they responded to it in their pairs.

4. The book introduces 12 skills that resilient educators employ. Have teachers complete a self-assessment of how strong they feel they are in each of the 12 skills now, and then again, after all of the PD sessions on these topics have been completed (on the [handout](#)):

(Rate this item from 1 = I rarely do this to 4 = I do this regularly & effectively) HABIT – your behaviors	Rating before PD sessions	Rating after PD sessions
KNOW YOURSELF - knowing our emotions, values, and personality		
UNDERSTAND EMOTIONS - when we understand and have strategies to address our emotions		
TELL EMPOWERING STORIES - when we interpret events by telling empowering stories		
BUILD COMMUNITY - when we build a strong, healthy community		
BE HERE NOW - when we're fully present, without judgment		
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF - when your body is well cared for		
FOCUS ON THE BRIGHT SPOTS - when we focus on our strengths and assets		
CULTIVATE COMPASSION – when we have compassion for ourselves and others		
BE A LEARNER - when we see challenges as opportunities for learning		
PLAY AND CREATE - when we play, and as a result, our thinking expands		
RIDE THE WAVES OF CHANGE - being able to handle inevitable change		
CELEBRATE AND APPRECIATE - practicing gratitude and appreciation		

II. Structure to Introduce One Resilience Skill at a Time

This book introduces 12 different skills that support resilience -- far too many to introduce in *one* PD session. Aguilar suggests introducing *one* a month. Below is a structure you can use to have one **volunteer** (a teacher or a leader) introduce one skill at a time. Have the entire staff read the appropriate chapter and then have the volunteer facilitate the following at a PD session:

A. Discussion: For each habit, start with the following discussion (in a larger group or small groups):

1. What has been your experience with this skill or disposition (share anecdotes from in and outside of schools)? In what ways do you exhibit strengths in this area and what areas for growth do you see?
2. Discuss what this particular habit and disposition might look like in real life - in the classroom, the school, and your personal life. For example, what might "Focus on the Bright Spots" or "Be a Learner" look like? A brainstorm might be a good idea here.
3. Discuss how you think this habit might fuel the disposition or the disposition might fuel the habit.

4. Have teachers do a self-assessment on this particular habit (and then do this again after the month-long challenge). Where do you see yourself with this habit? Use the Conscious Competence Ladder (rate yourself 1-4, see descriptions below)
- (1) *Unconscious incompetence* - We don't know that we are lacking a skill we need to learn.
 - (2) *Conscious incompetence* - We don't yet have certain skills, and we are aware that others are more competent in this skill.
 - (3) *Conscious competence* - We gain more confidence because we have learned the skill, but it still takes conscious effort to perform it.
 - (4) *Unconscious competence* - We can perform the skill automatically. Now we need to teach the skill to others to continue growing.

B. Conduct one activity:

Below this section (in part III), there is *one* suggested activity for each skill. You can use the activity as it is, adapt it, or add more activities that you come up with on your own. Or you can look at the *Onward* workbook for more ideas.

C. Propose a Challenge

When I sent my summary of *Onward* to my subscribers, I offered a one-month challenge (March Mindfulness Madness) to subscribers who wanted to try to cultivate a daily habit of meditation. The idea was for each person to come up with her own mindfulness goal, and then I would check in with one email weekly to share an inspiration, remind people of this challenge, and provide some type of external validation/accountability. You can email me at the end of March and I'll send you the emails I sent out as models.

The volunteer at your school can offer a similar challenge for the skill of the month. If the skill is "Play and Create," individuals can each craft a personal goal and the volunteer can check in via email, in person, or any other way for the month. At the end of the month, staff should self-assess again with the Conscious Competence Ladder.

III. One PD Activity for Each Skill

Chapter 1 – Know Yourself: Have teachers choose ONE of the aspects of self outlined in this chapter, explore it, and journal about it (*values* - Google a list of values and choose those that most define you; *personality* - take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test, (www.16personalities.com); *sociopolitical identities* – think about whether you most identify with your race, class, gender, etc., *strengths & aptitudes* - brainstorm yours). After they explore and write, put people into groups based on which of the 4 aspects of self they chose and have them discuss how this helps them to understand themselves.

Chapter 2 – Understand Emotions: Awareness of the stages of an emotion is a key aspect of this chapter. Ask teachers to: Think about a strong reaction you've had recently to an event at school (due to a student's behavior, an administrator's actions, a new policy, etc.) Now look at the stages of an emotion (see the *handout*) and write what was happening to you at each of these stages. If you had a negative reaction, the goal is to *interrupt* these stages. With a partner, discuss the different ways you might have disrupted these stages and which one *you* are most likely to employ (slow breathing, talking to a friend, changing your interpretation of the initial event, etc.)

Chapter 3 – Tell Empowering Stories: Share all 8 types of distorted thinking (see the *handout* for the descriptions) and ask teachers to discuss the following (in smaller groups): Which of these types of distorted thinking do you most engage in? Which have you honestly never heard of? Can anyone share examples of what these types of distorted thinking sound like in your head? Why might it be important to *recognize* different types of distorted thinking if the goal is to tell empowering stories?

Chapter 4 – Build Community: Have teachers discuss ways they already build community in the classroom, the school, and the outside community. Many people think about community-building *activities*, but another effective way to build community is simply by listening. Have teachers look at the different ways to listen that build relationships (*expansive* listening) in the chart below (also on the *handout*). Have them discuss the idea of listening expansively in pairs and share which of these ways of listening they have the most difficulty with. Then they should *practice* listening in one of these ways as their partner talks about a topic for 2 minutes (for example, a challenge the teacher has with a particular teaching or learning issue). Next, they should debrief: How did the listening go?

Expansive Ways of Listening	
<i>Listen...</i>	<i>Suggestions</i>
For the big picture	Listen for the whole – see the person and the situation embedded within the many moving pieces.
With love	Listen with an open heart, know your heart will not break from pain, and understand the humanity of the person speaking.
For pain	Without trying to fix – listen to hear the emotions under the story.
With humility	Listen with gratitude for the trust that has been bestowed on you.
With curiosity	Listen without an attachment to how you think things should be. Be willing to be surprised.
With compassion	Suspend judgment of yourself and others – appreciate that everyone makes choices based on their knowledge and skills and what makes sense for them.
For relationships	Listen to build healthy relationships with others who might be resources.
With hope	Listen with the belief that possibilities and outcomes exist that you may not yet be aware of.

Chapter 5 - Be Here Now: Many people have never tried meditation and yet there is a lot of research about the benefits of it. Give staff an opportunity to *try it* during a staff meeting. The facilitator herself does not need to lead the group through a meditation. Consider playing one of the meditations on the Headspace app (the first 10 are free) or sharing one from Tara Brach's podcast (also free).

Chapter 6 - Take Care of Yourself: Teachers will appreciate having time to think about how to better care for themselves. Share different aspects of self-care with them and have them choose *one* area they would like to focus on. Here are 4 suggestions: *sleep, nutrition, exercise, and fun stuff!* This is probably not the first time teachers have thought of taking better care of themselves in this area. In pairs, have teachers identify which of the following gaps may be getting in the way of them caring for this aspect of themselves (and there may be more than one gap). Next, have them brainstorm ways to overcome this together: (see the **handout**)

1. A **knowledge gap** – We don't have the information to know what it would involve to take care of ourselves.
2. A **skill gap** – We don't have the skills to take care of ourselves.
3. A **will gap** – We think we can get by with poor nutrition and little sleep so we don't have the will to change.
4. An **emotional intelligence gap** – We don't feel we deserve to take care of ourselves when there is so much work to do.

Chapter 7 – Focus on the Bright Spots: We don't always focus on the positives. Have teachers explore three primary reasons it's not always so easy to focus on the bright spots: neurology, culture, and emotions (descriptions of these are on the **handout**). Have a larger discussion about these three challenges, and then ask teachers to choose one of these three obstacles they *most* identify with and go to one corner of the room. Each smaller group (neurology, culture, and emotions) should choose a facilitator and share their own experiences with this particular obstacle. The goal is to raise awareness.

Chapter 8 - Cultivate Compassion: Have staff think about a few people they'd like to have more compassion for – a student, a colleague, an administrator, a parent. Give them a few minutes to think about how it might feel different if they had more compassion for this person. Have them consider: What might this person be going through that you're not aware of? Next, have teachers set an *intention* to listen to this person (see the types of *expansive* listening above), bring them an apple, or show some compassion for them in the next few weeks. Ask teachers to literally write a note in their calendars to show compassion to the people they chose.

Chapter 9 – Be a Learner: In order for teachers to be true learners, the school must be a “learning organization” – a place where everyone is learning. Have teachers silently rate the statements below from 1-5 (completely agree), and tally their totals. Aguilar says that totals between 28 and 35 mean it *is* a learning organization, totals between 20 and 27 mean it's an *emerging* learning organization, and scores lower than 20 means this is a *weak* learning organization. (Statements are on the **handout**.)

- I can disagree with colleagues and supervisors.
- I am encouraged to take risks and try new things and I do so.
- I get feedback from multiple sources.
- I am provided with time to pause, reflect, and learn from experiences.
- I share what I learn with others and outside my group and organization.
- Leaders model the practices of being a learner and make their learning visible.

Chapter 10 - Play and Create: Sometimes teachers work so hard, they not only forget to “play,” but they don't even remember what they like to do for play. Ask teachers to think back to when they were children: What did you do with your free time then? What kinds of activities do you do now that cause you to lose track of time? After teachers have time to think individually, have the entire staff share what they do to play and create and compiled list all of these activities for them to see. With this entire list in front of them, have them choose at least one activity for each category below and post this near their desk: (This chart is on the **handout**.)

Play activities I can do if I have 5 min:	Play activities I can do if I have an hour:	Play activities I can do if I have a half day:

Chapter 11 – Ride the Waves of Change: We face many changes in schools. Have teachers do the following: Take a few moments to write down some of the changes or frustrations you are currently facing. Next, put these changes into three categories (in the chart below and on the **handout**) based on whether you have total *control*, some *influence*, or NO control at all over these changes. Alone or with a partner, brainstorm ideas for how you might respond to these frustrations. Keep in mind that for the third category – no control – you will need to think about how you want to shift your own *response* to the change.

	Which changes fit into this category?	What might you do about these changes?
What you can CONTROL		
What can you INFLUENCE		
What is outside of your CONTROL or INFLUENCE?		(In this case, how might you change your response? Try answering this question: <i>How might this change help me thrive?</i>)

Chapter 12 – Celebrate and Appreciate: Teachers need to feel appreciated (this significantly impacts retention), but they may want to be involved in planning *how* they would like to be appreciated. As a staff, brainstorm ideas for ways to appreciate teachers *on a regular basis* such as the following: The school might take a few minutes out of every staff meeting to share appreciations. Or, if teachers don't want public appreciations, they might prefer to randomly choose the name of one staff member at a meeting and have people write anonymous notes describing why they appreciate this person to give to that staff member. Brainstorm other ideas, discuss them, and have the whole staff vote on one practice to put in place, starting at today's meeting if possible! Whatever you decide, make sure to put it as a *recurring* event on the staff meeting agenda.

***Remember to have teachers fill out the second column of the self-assessment after going through all of these PD sessions!