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Martha Stewart Exposé

The lifestyle queen's shocking change of heart is making news.

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Thursday, December 20, 2007

Those lemons Martha Stewart hands out to reporters are the metaphor of the y

Those lemons Martha Stewart hands out to reporters are the metaphor of the year. The finishing touch was when she brandished the very lemons she was using to "make lemonade" of her situation.

No matter which side of the fence you come down on about Martha Stewart, it's hard to deny her resilience. What can we learn from her, and what qualities are universal in people who display such emotional resilience?

Al Siebert, PhD, author of the *The Survivor Personality*, tells WebMD that Stewart is not unique in her ability to learn lessons from life and make them work for her.

"We all have this inner capacity," he says, "to size up situations rapidly and solve problems -- but at the same time, handle the emotions that accompany the situation."

Unlike other animals, human beings have the lifelong ability to learn to cope with their environment, Siebert points out. Some animals, he says, have the instincts and reflexes to cope in a matter of days, but some psychologists say people don't achieve self-actualization until age 60. Siebert is also author of the upcoming book *The Resiliency Advantage: Master Change, Thrive Under Pressure, and Bounce Back From Setbacks*.

Part of the learning is how to react in a crisis. "Resilient people," he says, "know when to size up, find solutions, and when to emote. They do not go straight to the emotions."

3 Steps to Greater Resiliency

For many, not feeling emotions in a crisis may be hard to imagine.

Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, author of *Three Steps to Happiness: Healing Through Joy*, puts the steps of awareness in a slightly different order. He tells WebMD that Stewart handled the three steps exactly correctly.

"First, you feel the feelings," he says. "But if you stop there, with the feelings, you become a victim. If you feel persecuted or claim victim status, you will have a sucky life."

His family, Teitelbaum explains, was killed in the Holocaust, and he made a personal decision to be happy and see the positives. "If the Holocaust had not happened," he explains, "I would not be here. I would not be treating

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not happened," he explains, "I would not be here, I would not be treating

pain and fibromyalgia and telling people how to be resilient."

Step 2 is to make life a no-fault deal. Stop trying to blame.

And Step 3 is to do what feels good. "Instead of wallowing in victimhood, Martha is going out, writing a book, starting a show, making money. You have to focus on what makes you happy."

Where Does Resiliency Begin?

Some people always seem to bob to the top. Is it genetic?

"I think this can be learned," says C. Jeffrey Terrell, PhD, president of a free-standing graduate school in counseling called the Psychological Studies Institute in Atlanta and Chattanooga. "If parents have a high level of nurture combined with a high level of expectation, they will support the accomplishments of their children as well as supporting them in general, independent of their accomplishments."

A child raised this way will attract a strong support group of friends and relatives. "Studies show two main indicators of mental health are intelligence and social support," Terrell says.

Dealing with change is a huge component of resilience. "But if you don't learn these skills early on," Terrell says, "you will have to make an intensive effort to plug them in. People who are resilient don't fear change as much. They figure they have handled it before and can handle it again."

Taking on the subject of resiliency "training" from the flip side -- what not to do -- Siebert says that people trained to do as they are told and think a certain way as children are not likely to be as resilient. "It's OK to be this way unless the environment changes -- and it always will.

"It's not safe in today's world to always do what you are told."

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