



Episode 19

Adversity into Opportunities

Welcome to Toni Talks -- Humanity Matters. This is your host, Toni Julian. Today we're going to talk about how to turn adversity into opportunities. Thanks for listening in.

Many of us would describe adversity as some sort of misfortune. I tend to look at it as more of an opportunity for growth and moving beyond the things that happen to us in our external environment, into opportunities for growth. So really not looking at what's going on the outside, but what is happening on the inside. Adversity could also be considered a traumatic event. I can give you an example of a couple that occurred to me. And you are probably no stranger to adversity yourself. But what happened with me is that when I was very young, we went through all kinds of domestic terrorism, abuse, abandonment, when I was just a little girl. And I don't really enjoy talking about it, because it kind of brings me there, and I think that part of moving beyond it is not really living in that anymore, because our brains don't really understand the difference between us thinking about it or actually being in that. It's just secreting those chemicals; it is remembering what has happened. And so I only bring it up to be able to illustrate some points and to share it with you and not necessarily relive it.

When I was a kid, we had some neighbors that were, frankly, kind of crazy. And they had about 10 pit bulls. And one day our little dog, he was a little Lhasa apso, so about 10 pounds, and he wandered into their yard, and they destroyed my poor little dog. So my parents were upset with this and they called the police, and we ended up being on the receiving end of just a lot of retaliation. And what ended up happening is that they started shooting at our house, shooting out lights around the exterior of our home. They graffitied our home once when we weren't home. When we went to Disneyland as a family, and I think I was probably about 12 years old, they actually put a hose in my little brother's bedroom window and flooded our entire house. I remember one night in the middle of the night, waking up to a really loud crash, and they had thrown a tear gas bomb, a military scale, tear gas bomb, in my bedroom window in the middle of the night. My sister and I had

bunk beds and it was horrifying. I see movies about tear gassing and people are choking and coughing. Well, it is nothing like that. It is your whole body's on fire. Your eyes are burning, your nose is running. It's just a really horrific thing. And especially for kids. So I grew up in this kind of environment. It happened over a course of years.

And then I remember one time on April fool's day, I got a call to the principal's office that my house was on fire. It had completely burned down to the ground. So needless to say, my teen years were pretty horrific. I think I stayed clean by going to a gymnastics summer school every single year, just really immersing myself in school. I loved to learn anyway. But it was really a hard time. So when I talk to you about trauma, I share these things with you because I am sure whatever you've been through is different than that. There may be some similarities, and the experiences that I have had, I don't mean at all to make light of anything that you have been through. I don't know that I've been through exactly what you've been through. But for the people that have, you know, we all have different types of experiences in our life, what I call adversity, and we all have found different ways of coping with them. So they are not all created equal for sure. But some of the things that have happened to me have really helped me grow, because rather than looking at it as a horrible thing – and yes, during the time it was most certainly traumatic - I look at it now, looking back, as a real opportunity for growth.

One thing that I can just suggest if you're going through any sort of adversity or difficulty, now there are about five steps that I am looking back, and also moving forward, in different types of situations or challenges or traumas that either are current or coming up. There are five steps that I think it can really help us going through it.

The first off, be really, really aware of your emotions. We may want to stuff them. We may ignore them. We may distract ourselves, keep ourselves busy, and maybe that's okay for a little while, but eventually we need to be able to be in touch with those emotions. We need to work through them and we need to release them; otherwise, they're going to stay with us in the form of trauma for quite some time. One emotion that I think is of particular importance is the feeling of being stuck. One example is, right now we are in the midst of a pandemic. We're one year into it as of this recording. And some of us may feel like we're stuck. And one thing that I did learn is when something is occurring outside of us is not to feel that way. Look at it a little differently, change the way you're thinking and get on with things. Yes, we cannot do things the way that we would normally do them, but it doesn't mean that we're stuck. It doesn't mean that our lives have to be on hold. We can still experience joy, we can still be productive. We just need to learn how to be flexible and change the way that we are looking at things and change the way that we are doing them so that we are protecting our mental and emotional health.

So that's one thing. I've just heard so many times people saying, 'Oh, I can't wait for this to be over.' We are in it, and this is our life. This is a learning experience. If we look at it that way, we will be present in the moment and savor what we have. And I think one thing that I've learned, too, is just really to value the experiences that we have right now. We had so much that we were taking for granted before this. So I think that's a really important one.

The next is uncertainty. Whenever there's certainty, there can be fear and there can be doubt. And the reality is there's no certainty about tomorrow, anyway, we're still going to be dealing with the pandemic, for example, for quite some time. And I think we just don't know. So I think being flexible is going to be one of the key things that we need to do is continue to be flexible in our daily lives and what's happening, we need to adapt and just recognize that that uncertainty is a really justified feeling. And so is fear. So we could feel fear, but it's also great to identify it if we are feeling fearful and move beyond it, address it. Embrace it. Yes, I'm scared. Okay. But the problem is fear drives irrational actions, right? Because of fear during the pandemic, people hoarded supplies. Everyone was so afraid we were gonna run out of toilet paper. We're going to run out of all these things. We're going to run out of water and lots of people took advantage of that - hoarding water, selling items at a higher price because they could. All right. So fear - the reality is there really wasn't a shortage of anything. We created that by being fearful. So that's just one example.

So the first one is emotions. The second one is stepping up your self-care, and this is one that we could really lose sight of if we're not careful. But the things that we need to be super focused on is - in order of importance here - sleep is number one. If we're not sleeping properly, then we are messing with our blood sugar regulation and we'll start self-medicating in the way of simple carbs and sugars and alcohol. And alcohol is actually a depressant, so when you drink it, it can affect your blood sugar up to three days later, four days later. And it also makes us maybe numb ourselves a little bit, or maybe it puts you in a happy mood, but the next day you might feel a little depressed, and that's because maybe we had a little bit too much of the imbibing. So self-care is really important.

Exercise is the third part of that, where the more we can exercise, the more we can oxygenate our bodies, the healthier we are, the better we are able to cope. And when we exercise, you know, the exercise, the food and the sleep, they all work together. So if you are doing all three really well, that really builds momentum around being able to put yourself in the absolute best position to cope, to have mental clarity for your body - do you feel good? - for your mind to be clear and to be able to move beyond things and really show up in this world in a really positive way. And that's what we all want.

All right. The third one is flexibility. We cannot control so many things outside of us. What we can control is how we respond to it. So being flexible is really key. If we can be flexible, we can survive. And those who embrace flexibility will thrive. All right?

Fourth is have a positive mindset. Every day that we complain, we have self-pity, and we can't find a reason why we can't do something, that is an opportunity for us to change our mindset. So how we think about things is really a decision, right? If you wake up and you're not happy, put a smile on your face, all of a sudden your heart gets connected to your brain and your feelings, and you're like, hmm, all right, I can be happy today. I choose to be happy. So the positive mindset is just super critical. And if you think about having a positive mindset and looking for opportunities, you can see that there's a - if there's a door in front of you and you see it as being closed, all right, there's a closed door and you're looking at the closed door and it's right in front of you. You're focusing on the problem. But if you expand your focus and you say, okay, I recognize that it's there, but I'm going to look around. Guess

what? There are a hundred open doors to the left and a hundred open doors to the right, that maybe you wouldn't have even seen. So do be sure you have a positive mindset. You will find more opportunities, more reasons to enjoy your life than if you just kept closed.

So one thing that's really important, which is the fifth aspect, which is staying motivated during this time. And the way to do that - what I like to do is I like celebrating my wins, even if they're small, something small that happened today. Oh, so-and-so reached out, that's wonderful, we made a little progress with this, or I made a new connection or I made a new friend, anything that you can say, or even like ok, this morning I got up it's lunchtime. I had a really healthy breakfast and a really healthy lunch. That's a win. That is super important, is to focus on those little things. They don't have to be monumental for you to consider them to be wins.

The other one is to adjust your expectations. And this is something I have coached people on for a very long time is say, for example, someone's on this really healthy eating regimen and the holidays roll around and they really want to make progress. They've made progress to date, but the holidays are hitting. Well instead of going overboard, I think a win is to sometimes adjusting our expectations so that we just stay constant through that. Most people might overeat, overindulge, fall off their healthy habits, but if you stay on them, that is a win. So adjusting your expectations to just stay even is super positive.

The other thing is - one way to stay motivated is to express gratitude and that just opens us up to so many things. And one way to do that is write down three things every morning that you're appreciative for, that you may expect to happen during the day or maybe not, but just three things that you're excited about. And then at the end of the day, write down three things that maybe have occurred or that you've felt appreciative for by the end of the day.

And then the last is stay focused and persevere right now. The pandemic has certainly put us in a situation where many of us are isolated. The flip side of that, the upside, is that we have fewer distractions. So let's allow ourselves to stay focused on the things that we want to, we can persevere through it. We can focus on ourselves - right now is the best time to do that.

So now, how do we turn adversity and negative situations into positive ones? Well, I can tell you that one thing that we can do is not listen to other people's limits. Right? So if we think of ourself as limitless, opportunities will come to us. One example is long time ago, when I was back in college, I was in an advertising class and one of my peer students, and I, decided to start an advertising agency. We thought, what better way to do it? We were about like 21 years old, which is really young, but we opened an office. And what was interesting is we started hiring interns from our class. And so we had several interns working for us. It was all legitimate, did all the paperwork and everything. And we thought, what better way to actually use what we learn in school and apply it to the real world. And then look at the real world and say, Oh, these are the situations - let's learn what we need to in school to be able manage through them and learn and have this direct application of school and real life and connect those dots. And I remember my instructor was absolutely, he had so much angst around this and was yelling, "You can't do this, you're not allowed to do this." Well, there were no rules against it. And frankly, I like rules - I'll follow them as long as I don't think

they're completely stupid, and there wasn't a rule, and it was kind of stupid even if it was a rule, because it was such a great thing.

So anyway, I took that opportunity of being a young student, of having no money, of having nothing, you know, putting myself through college - it took seven years, and just deciding, I was going to take this opportunity, and I was going to get some clients, and I was going to apply what I learned in school and take a look at what real life was about. Because I had no clue, you know, it's kind of like when you're interviewing for a job when you're young or maybe you've got some kids that are interviewing for a job and they have no idea what to ask because they don't know, and they don't even know what they want to do for a living necessarily because they don't know what it's like. They have no experience around it. So how do you know? And so I found a really good way to just kind of turn that situation around from a negative. Turned out we had great interns, learned a lot that semester and it was a great, great year.

Another situation was when I was in my, I think late twenties, I had a new infant, a husband who was really depressed. He had just lost both of his parents three months apart to different things, different diseases. And I had no money and I thought, Oh boy, you know, what am I going to do? I cannot afford to pay our mortgage for the next month. Like literally, we had no money. We had enough money for food for that month, but that was it. So that's quite a pickle, quite a conundrum I was in at that point in time. Did not know what to do. I was unemployed because the company that I had worked with had just gone under. I'm like, okay. So rather than look at the negatives, what I did is I decided to flip that around and look at the positives and I thought, okay, well, what can I do? I know I'm organized. So I just put a call out to someone with an offer to be of help to this one woman who was coordinating events. And she said, yeah, Toni, I'd love it if you would help me. So I helped her with that and the clients really liked me.

I ended up parlaying that into a full-fledged marketing communications firm. It was the first one in the United States that managed where we manage trade shows, conferences and special events. And there were plenty of consultants around in those days. But no marketing communications firms. So I grew that business from nothing, to not having any money for the mortgage next month, into making over a million dollars a year, 43% profit margin. And this was a service business with an office, lots of employees, and we managed these shows for Intel, Hewlett-Packard, a lot of pharma companies, medical device companies, semiconductor equipment companies, adapt tech. So it just turned out to be this amazing, amazing situation. And that would not have happened had I not lost that last job, that last company, had it not gone under. So instead of poor me, I totally turned that into a situation, and that wouldn't have happened if that adversity hadn't been there to push me along.

So anyway, I hope this has been helpful for you. Please be sure to subscribe. I would love to be able to stay in touch with you, and check out my website - it's tonijulian.com. The link is in the comments below, and I just wish you lots of goodness and blessings from my heart to yours. Bye-bye.

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