

# The Road to Resilience: Turn Stress into Strength and Obstacles into Opportunities™ with SGT Ken®

## Summary

There are two things that can happen when you face an obstacle: fall apart or bounce back. Resilience (sometimes called emotional fitness, or mental toughness) is when you can face adversity head-on and grow from the experience. Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran, SGT Ken®, teaches powerful positive psychology skills to help eliminate counter-productive thinking and focus on authentic happiness. SGT Ken® is the creator of countless tactical fitness (aka “Boot Camp”) and health programs for Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and their families. His personal mission is to empower you with exceptional resilience training, so that you can turn stress into strength and obstacles into opportunities!

## Fitness in seven sections and forward momentum

1. Emotional
2. Nutrition
3. Physical
4. Social
5. Family
6. Financial
7. Spiritual

Notes:

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## What is PERPETUAL FITNESS?

80% Resilience (Emotional Fitness)  
10% Nutrition  
+ 10% Physical Fitness  
= Perpetual Fitness

Notes:

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## Write down six words for RESILIENCE?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

## Two courses of action

An experience will cause you to react or respond, fall apart or bounce back (leap forward).

**Three Resilience Resources**

- 1. How you think
- 2. Support system
- 3. Genetics

Notes:

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**A Daily Dose of Resilience**

- 1. Put it in Perspective (PIIP)

How to stop counter-productive thinking and to focus on the evidence at hand

Notes:

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- 2. Real-time Resilience

Fast-acting responses when you are challenged with adversity –

- A. Evidence: “That’s not completely true because...”
- B. Optimism: “A more optimistic way of seeing this is...”
- C. Perspective: “The most likely implication is...and I can...”

Notes:

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**Beware of the Shadow Side of each Resilience Skill**

- 1. Dismissing the truth
- 2. Minimizing the situation

Notes:

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**Mastering Resilience Competencies**

- 1. Self-awareness
- 2. Self-regulation
- 3. Optimism
- 4. Mental Agility
- 5. Strength of Character
- 6. Connection

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**Accuracy over speed**

Focus on your response, instead of your reaction

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## Active Constructive Response

There are four possible ways in which you can respond to the good events in the lives of those with whom you interact.

1. A **passive destructive response** can take either of two forms: "Wow! Wait until I tell you what happened to me today," which is very self-focused, or, "What's for dinner?" or, ignoring the event all together by continuing to type a text or email on your smart phone.

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2. A **passive constructive response** is where you respond with little or no emotions. Example: "Great job, honey!" then shifting to the next topic, like dinner or the leaky faucet that needs to be fixed.

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3. An **active destructive response** is where you display negative emotions. Example: "Wow! Does this mean you'll be working later hours? Are they going to be paying you more? I can't believe they picked you out of all the candidates."

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4. An **active constructive response** is where you display enthusiasm, support and interest in what is being said. Example: "That's great, you've earned it, I'm so proud of you!" followed by questions that encourage you to talk more about it.

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## Hunt the Good Stuff!

*Hunt the good stuff* is a way of countering the negative bias and focusing on optimism as the primary target.

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## ***Hunt the Good Stuff***

According to *Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D.*, *Hunt the good stuff* is a way of countering the negative bias and focusing on optimism as the primary target.

Write down at least one good experience that transpired within the last 24-48 hours:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Next to each positive event that you list, write a reflection (at least one sentence) about the following:

A. **Why** this good thing happened

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B. **What** this good thing means to you

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C. **What** you can do tomorrow to enable more of this good thing

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D. **What** ways you or others contribute to this good thing

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Courtesy of *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*, 2011, *Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D.*

**Making Mental Nutrition a part of your life**

1. What was the last book that you read?
2. What is in your reading schedule?
3. Do you have a reading schedule?
4. What do you listen to in the car or at home?
5. Does the music that you listen to build you up or tear you down?
6. The sights and sounds that you choose to take-in have a huge impact on your mood and well-being?

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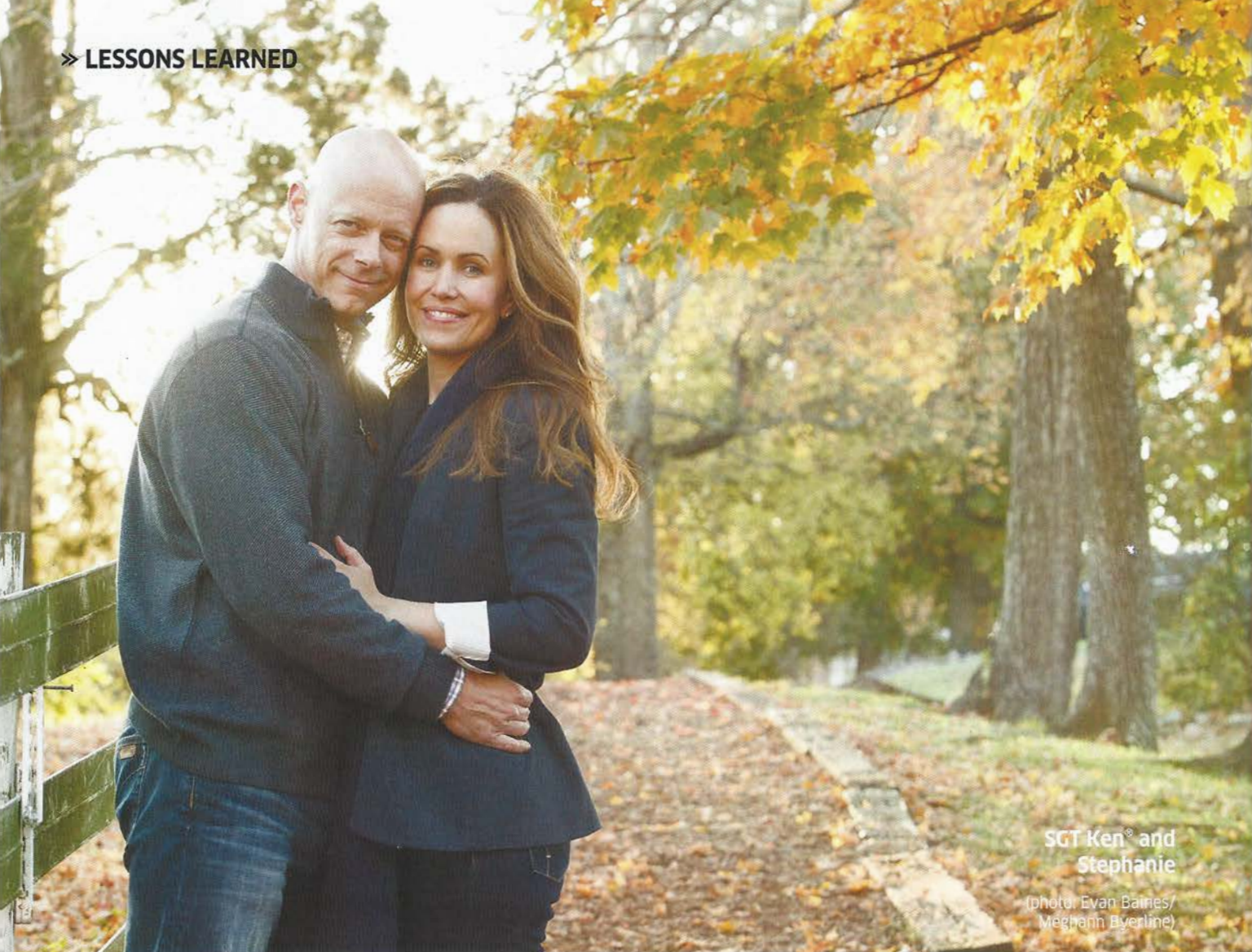
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*“And in the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years.”*  
- Abraham Lincoln

References:

1. *The Resiliency Advantage, 2005, Al Siebert, Ph.D.*
2. *The Resilience Factor, 2003, Karen Reivich, Ph.D., Andrew Shatte, Ph.D.*
3. *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being, 2011, Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D.*
4. *Positive Psychological Interventions, 2004, Shelly Gable, Ph.D.*



SGT Ken® and  
Stephanie

(photo: Evan Baines/  
Meghan Byerline)

# Resilience Works!

What You Go Through, You Grow Through™

By Ken “SGT Ken®” and Stephanie Weichert

I sat painfully nervous inside a Boeing-747, making our final approach toward the San Francisco International airport after a 13-month tour of duty in Iraq. I had been traveling for 48 hours straight. I would soon be embracing my wife that I had to leave behind only hours after our marriage ceremony, and reconnecting to a strangely peaceful civilian life.

My year away was much like living in the fourth quarter of a challenging football game, but the clock never ran out. My mind was slipping into numerous daydreams of each mission. Looking at the faces of my brothers and sisters in arms, I could tell that I was not alone. All of us were partly still there. We sat silent, covered in grass, grime, sand and sweat. Now it seemed like we were all just waiting for the winning touchdown.

What happens when the game finally ends? When the adrenaline spikes subside and you realize that you will no longer have the support system of your comrades around you, you go home exhausted and uncertain of what lies next. In my case, I went home to an eerily quiet apartment. I needed to learn how to reconnect to life, love, and contentment.

I knew that I would resume teaching fitness classes, however I could not shake the feeling that something inside of me had changed. I was coming home a different person. Each point of connection with my old life felt strange and unfamiliar.

It took time, but I bounced back. Best of all, I realized that I



was now a stronger person because I learned from my experiences.

My new mission: Show others how to turn stress into strength and obstacles into opportunities.

I learned some simple strategies to help navigate the homecoming for anyone and to help people in any season of change, uncertainty, and unfamiliarity.

Seven years following my deployment, I graduated from the Master Resilience Trainer course at the University of Pennsylvania School of Positive Psychology. It further reinforced the skills I'd learned by trial and error. These skills can help put you on a fast track to overcoming adversity and navigating uncertainty.

One of the most impactful moments of the course for me was when Dr. Karen Reivich defined *Comprehensive Fitness* as the combination and balance of five dimensions: Physical, Emotional, Social, Family, and Spiritual. I learned that fitness was not just physical anymore. This new perspective provided a certain validity to the power of emotional fitness. It changed everything for me, even in the way that I trained others.

The results were astounding!

There are two things that can happen when you face an obstacle: fall apart or bounce back. Dr. Martin Seligman, one of the founders of Positive Psychology defines resilience (sometimes called *emotional fitness* or *mental toughness*) as the growth experienced when you can face adversity. Resilience is a powerful positive psychology skill that helps you eliminate counter-productive thinking and focus on authentic happiness.

We all have defining moments of change and uncertainty. Best selling author, Dr. Brené Brown, says navigating these times requires a level of vulnerability and courage. You can apply them in major life circumstances like I did or you can also use them with smaller issues that pop up from time to time.

Use the following eight resilience tips to help you navigate through uncertain and challenging times:

### **1. Connect for Effect.**

A good support system will help you when you face adversity in life. Do your absolute best to strengthen your relationships with family and friends. Know when to ask for help from the people that you care about, and to accept it. Good friends can remind you of your best self, your best traits, your highest goals, and can also reconnect you with your deepest values and beliefs. Write a short list of the people in your support system. Are these people a healthy source of influence for you? Can you rely on them as a source of strength in your life? Write your list now.

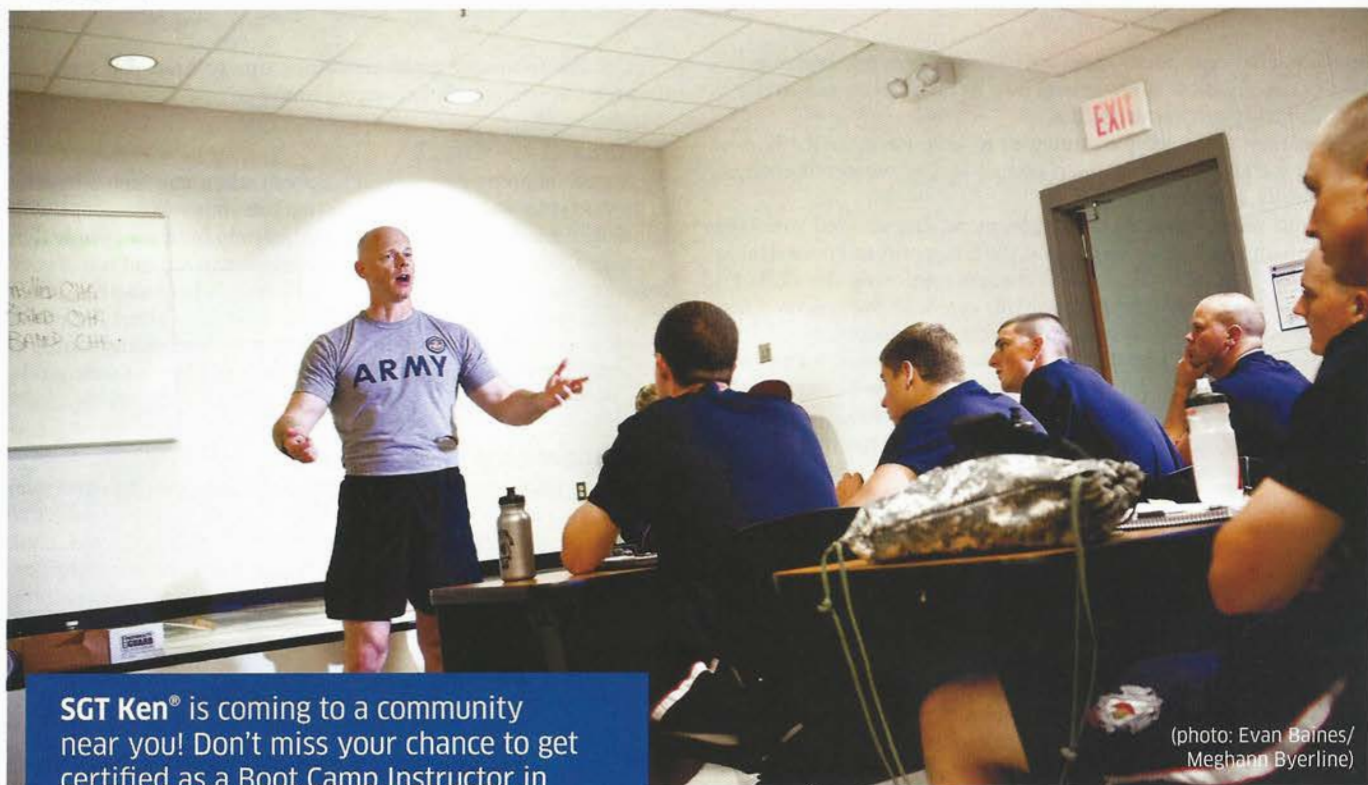
### **2. Acknowledge the Evidence.**

You cannot always control your circumstances; however you can always control your response. Don't allow counterproductive thinking to overwhelm you when things don't go as planned. Look at the evidence at hand, and base your decisions on the right perspective. Think back to a situation where you gave a quick reaction. How could you have slowed down and done things differently? How could you have offered a more thoughtful response instead of a reaction? Write it down.

### **3. Push for Perspective.**

Pain is temporary. It might last for a day, a week, a month, or a year. When we are in the middle of it, it can feel like it will last forever. If you will press forward, eventually your pain will subside. Pushing for perspective means to look at your situation with a broader outlook in order to discover a suitable solution. What is the story you've been >>





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(photo: Evan Baines/  
Meghann Byerline)

telling yourself about an uncomfortable situation? Is it helping or hindering you? Consider writing a new version of the old situation, from a position of strength and love. What can you tell yourself that will help put the story to rest and help you move forward?

#### 4. Champion through Change.

When you bounce back from adversity, you land on higher ground because you learn from the experience. Accepting change will help you to gain clarity in your purpose. Without clarity in your purpose, you cannot see the opportunity in your practice. Circumstances may have changed, you might have changed, but there is still hope for your future. If you want to connect to your deepest sense of purpose, start with your values. Your purpose will always stem from your highest values. Make a list of your top five.

#### 5. Go for Your Goals.

Discovering and documenting your goals will keep you on the right path toward success. Take advantage of the holidays by brainstorming about what you want to accomplish in life. Come up with a list of at least 50 goals. Keep in mind that is only five goals per year over the next 10 years. The key is to get them out of your head and on to paper. The simple act of writing your goals will help you see things not as they are, but as they can be. Writing your goals helps to turn your thoughts into actions.

#### 6. Live to Learn.

Resilient people learn how to turn stress into strength and obstacles into opportunities. Search for a solution when you face adversity. Your test in life can become your testimony. In her book *Rising Strong*, Dr. Brené Brown discusses the notion of a second act. You might have failed at something in your past but your second act is right around the corner. Write down one thing you can do to move closer to your second act.

#### 7. Opt for Optimism.

Optimistic people live healthier lives and are less likely become overwhelmed with counterproductive thinking. Remember to focus on your purpose and what you want in life, rather than the things that get in your way. Reflect on things that empower you. If you have a critical voice in your head, give yourself permission to stop that voice and to begin saying positive things about your actions and your life. It's time to believe good things are in store for you. Our experiences will eventually catch up to our beliefs. What do you believe about your future?

#### 8. Be Your Best.

Wake up, wind up, workout, wind down, and repeat. Spend each day in search of an active lifestyle and make certain to take the time to relax and recover. You are always taking care of others, but in order to be your best you have to take the time to take care of yourself. This means you need to make time to exercise regularly and time to rest and recover, so that you will be ready for whatever life throws at you.

Lastly, keep in mind that failure is an event and not who you are. Without challenges in your life, you simply will not grow. Albert Einstein once said, "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." Indeed, our brokenness leads to our brilliance.

By incorporating these resilience tips into your daily life, you will discover a new passion to pursue your highest purpose and truly rewarding relationships.

#### References

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