

Resilience Text

Episode 2 – Startup Survival Podcast

By Peter Harrington

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Speaker 1: [\(00:02\)](#)

Life is a magnificent game of chance.

And by choosing to sail the entrepreneurial seas, our lives can take on a magic quality. You can discover the highs and a great sense of achievement, but your quest necessarily means you must know the lows too

Speaker 1: [\(00:34\)](#)

Leading and working your way through the good stuff should be straightforward and a joy. But how do you navigate? How do you cope when trouble strikes your idea, your startup, your business is at stake and suddenly your mind is more questions than answers? And there is no supervisor or boss to turn to.

Meanwhile, those external devilish forces are loosening your grip on the very wheel you have crafted with so much thought, care and commitment. And worry about admitting failure to others, worry about letting go of your achievements, and worst of all, worry about losing everything necessarily generate stress, fear, and even panic.

Speaker 1: [\(01:22\)](#)

But with some insight you can make sense of this new world. It is possible to progress your entrepreneurial ambitions and you can develop skills and powerful ways of working that will stay with you forever. So how do you generate an attitude that helps you to take control of your wheel of fortune?

Whatever your venture, this episode, all about resilience is designed to help you. Remember, there are no quick wins and easy solutions. Change takes time and focused work. So let's get going. My name's Peter Harrington, and this is your startup survival podcast. And this episode focuses on developing resilience when tackling turbulent times.

Speaker 1: [\(02:10\)](#)

Let me take you back 20 or so years when York was hit by floods in 1999. The ground floor of our main city centre office near to the river Ouse was knee deep in water. TV crews, stationed themselves for days next to a newly formed lake opposite our offices on Tower street. Our work meanwhile was grinding to a halt.

And as a way to mark the misery, I have a vivid memory of the mother of all rats scurrying along the main road as the relentless rain poured and gutters wept filthy river water. Really dark times. But somehow we made it through with surprising results, which I'll share later.

Speaker 1: [\(03:04\)](#)

Startup business inevitably reveals our weaknesses. But if you are resilient, you learn, you develop new skills and your skin thickens. You continuously adapt and grow because the challenges are frequent yet occasionally serious and threatening events like the flood or this pandemic occur.

When I started my first venture in 1989, self-employment was all I wanted to do and having to go out, meet people and write quotes and proposals created work, but I reckon more than 95% of my suggestions and ideas for work were rejected. I could have quit, but the resilient desire to continue was fuelled and supported by an unwavering desire to prove to myself that I could make that first business work. It wasn't always comfortable, but I knew I had found something in me that made me sing. The joys of hitchhiking from the age of 17 had taught me I love to beat the odds in an unconventional way. Being the underdog has always appealed. That's why I've always supported West Ham.

Speaker 1: [\(04:16\)](#)

My experience is not enough to really help you. We need to dig deeper into the issue of resilience. To do this, let me introduce you to a lifelong friend whose wisdom and insight, I've always admired. I first met Martin Summerfield in the mid-eighties when we both worked at an outdoor field centre in the Lake District, Martin applied his skills for many years as a full time teacher and outdoor instructor before turning his professional interests to mindfulness. Mindfulness is about paying attention to our thoughts and feelings as they happen without judging them, without believing for instance, that there's a right or wrong way to think or feel in a given moment. And for many years, Martin has been sharing his mindfulness skills with individuals, schools, SMEs, and large organisations. So I wanted to ask Martin what in his view did resilience mean?

Speaker 2: [\(05:17\)](#)

Thanks for the introduction there, Pete. So, yes, I totally agree with, you know, the introduction there, it really picks out some salient points around that the external forces that are around here are pretty immense. For everyone involved. And obviously they're playing out in many different ways for different people. Myself included as my business has been running for five years now.

I was about to have my most successful quarter ever. I'm looking forward to business growing and it's really stopped me in my tracks. So I'm just acknowledging this, the common, experiences many of us are having myself included, with children at home and so on and the multiple pressures that are around. So I suppose the question comes back to, this resilience question, what is resilience? And how can we work with this? So just the initial sense to begin with of, for me resilience being about having a steady place. So I take it down to the personal level. So what can I do to keep myself in balance and the attributes that I can draw upon to weather the storm. So I think that's a great point to start with.

Speaker 2: [\(06:46\)](#)

So in these times of great challenge and uncertainty, I think one of the things that we can usefully do is to look back at people who've weathered storms, have even greater consequence or greater personal cost. The first of those is Viktor Frankl. So he was incarcerated by the Nazis upon his release. He wrote a book and published in 1946 around man's search for meaning. And what he talks about is acknowledging the harshness and brutality of his time in the concentration camps, but at the same time, acknowledging the importance of having meaning and purpose in life. And I think that, you know, another example of this is James Stockdale, a US soldier put into a prison of war camp, during the Vietnam War. And something that came out of his experience is called the

Stockdale Paradox. So the sense that we need to be honest and face the realities of a situation, and yet at the same time, we might hold out hope, optimism, and a belief that things will prevail. So I think holding these in concert, so we're not in a situation of unbridled optimism or fully fledged pessimism, but acknowledging things from a steady place, both of these together. And that allows us to stay grounded and open and adaptable to change

Speaker 1: [\(08:30\)](#)

For me, being adaptable rather than rigid is a very important part of resilience. As a strategy, holding on to things, because you've always done something that way is very unlikely to bring you success. And this reminds me of a recent media story. A London restaurant was forced to close because of the pandemic only to open as a takeaway. The owner is reportedly experiencing levels of success and profitability never witnessed when operating purely as a restaurant.

Then there's Yohan Iddawela whose business Lantern had developed an app to support people needing to move safely through conflict zones. That same app technology is being adapted. So places such as supermarkets can show the density of people in any store. But whilst pivoting a business maybe one way to change and is in fact something Martin discusses later, it's important to look at how the human brain copes with change. So I asked Martin to go beyond words and behaviours and explain what is actually going on in the mind.

Speaker 2: [\(09:43\)](#)

So what's actually going on in times of challenge and distress is really, really interesting. So first point to bear in mind is the human body has evolved to respond above all else to any threats that are around. So, our mind and our bodies will gear up for action ahead of all other rational, functioning that's happening in our mind when we think there's threat or uncertainty. So the area in the brain that gets involved is the amygdala and the classic responses are the fight flight freeze response. So emotions around that include the fight in that kind of anger coming out. The flight is involved in the fear response. And finally, the freeze is when we withdraw and disengage and recognizing the body will be gearing up, adrenaline cortisol, all these things that are preparing us for action. But of course, the sting in the tail here is that our crisis is ongoing and open-ended, so it's, it's firing our system, but at the same time, it's a system that isn't necessarily adapted to ongoing chronic stresses of this sort when this amygdala firing takes place.

Speaker 2: [\(10:58\)](#)

And I think it's really important and relevant to take note of what happens to your thinking and perception, typically perception and thinking becomes much narrower, much more focused on the immediate, threat and the immediate actions you can take. And while this is important, I think it needs to be recognized that strategic thinking involved in standing back tends to go by the wayside. There's a lovely article by Matthew Syed, where he looks at the 2009 emergency landing in the Hudson River by Captain Sully Sullenberger. And what he talks about is how Sully had to deal with, immediate threats, immediate decisions that needed to be taken to fly the plane. But at the same time, the importance of Sully keeping broader situational awareness, I think this is very relevant here. I think there's a sense of recognizing the temptation to get drawn into detail again and again, and the importance of standing back, seeing things strategically,

Speaker 1: [\(12:12\)](#)

seeing things strategically, especially in the startup phase of a business is not always easy because there is so much uncertainty patterns and trends are yet to emerge. So wanting to dig deeper, I

asked Martin about practical steps startups can take to improve their own resilience in these troubled times,

Speaker 2: ([12:34](#))

What practical steps can people take in startups to improve their resilience? So I think there's four immediate tools that I would or approaches I recommend. The first is to slow things down, to build pauses into the day. However you can, whether it's getting out and walking around the block, sitting and having a cup of coffee where you're tuning into the sensations of drinking. So you're interrupting the flow of thinking and action. This allows you to pause, to resettle, to take perspective and to gain all important self-knowledge of what's happening for you right now.

Speaker 2: ([13:19](#))

More information I'd recommend people having a listen to the first podcast, the lovely quote by Pema Chodron and the work of Dave Jarman. My second top tip is to recognize and acknowledge that in times of stress people's biases towards action. And this comes at a cost in terms of relationship and connection with others. So particularly if you're working in a small team, I would recommend people spend time intentionally, including each other in their thinking around work, their planning, their concerns, future, ideas, and also going beyond the immediate workplace focus. So many of us have gone on to Zoom for example, and exchanging, very factual content. And I think it's very legitimate to go beyond this and inquiring to people with broader human experience at the moment. This builds trust, it builds connection. And if anyone's familiar with the work of Amy Edmondson, it's vital for psychological safety to build these links.

Speaker 2: ([14:32](#))

And the third tip, or area I would recommend around is the idea of self-care. So this is the nuts and bolts of areas such as sleep. There's an excellent book by Matthew Walker, I'm looking at diet exercise. So these fundamentals allow us to over the longer term. And in times of, of chronic stress and ongoing uncertainty, we need to recognize our resources will quickly become depleted and lead to burn-out in many cases. So the importance here is to rebalance and not to do so in a way where we're feeling guilty about doing so. So a lovely analogy is the oxygen mask. So when we're flying, the oxygen mask principle is that if we wish to, to assist and help others, we need to look after ourselves first. So I put this as a very high priority and to do so with a recognition that you're not doing it for selfish reasons.

Speaker 2: ([15:37](#))

And the fourth recommendation is around mindfulness, which I find to be an absolutely crucial tool along with many, many senior leaders, a host of sports people and increasingly broad number of people recognizing that having a daily mindfulness practice allows you to gain perspective, to set the tone for the day to work with less reactivity to events as they happen around you, and to generally live with more sense of depth and purpose. So there's a host of resources out there, apps, including Headspace, 10% happier. And I highly recommend to people within workplaces, Professor Mark Williams', book 'Finding Peace in a Frantic World', which is available as an audio book. And, there's an app, which could be helpful too.

Speaker 1: ([16:42](#))

Martin's for tips, make complete sense to me, especially his reference to teams and the value of communication, relationships and talking about human feelings and building trust through meaningful activity has to be a good thing. Business environments right now, brim with stresses and

strains that left unchecked only serve to erode our faith in one another. When I went back to Martin to see if he had any final advice to offer, I was delighted to hear him mention as part of his response, a book that I'll also refer to later.

Speaker 2: [\(17:23\)](#)

I think the most important thing for me is, is to have a really strong belief and a strong passion around what you're doing. A good example for me is, is what's happening right now. So I was looking to have my best quarter and really feel my business was finally hitting a, a really sustainable, steady footing. And obviously things have turned out otherwise, but it's a real lesson for, in terms of checking in myself, am I still motivated? Am I going to weather this step?

And it really comes from having a deep seated passion and belief in what I'm doing. If anyone hasn't read, Philip Knight's book, 'Shoedog', I definitely recommend that, just showing the importance of this inner belief. The next thing I definitely kind of share is around the importance of not having a fixed view of what your service or your product, might offer the marketplace time.

Speaker 2: [\(18:25\)](#)

And again, I've been surprised by how my work has been received and the requests that have come out to, to adapt to what I'm doing. And one of my best clients, EDF, a nuclear power, energy plant near here, who rather surprisingly took up mindfulness for their workers has really been fundamental in shifting my work in new directions. So just keeping an open mind and being willing to flex, at the request of the needs out there for your field work or your product.

So linked to that, the importance of talking to clients, the importance of taking advice on board, it's taking a while for that penny to drop for me personally, sometimes I think I might know best, but time and again I'm kind of becoming aware of how feedback and support from others is, is really fundamental and crucial because many people have had experiences that can, can help me, in, in my future path.

Speaker 2: [\(19:28\)](#)

So it's always worth bearing in mind the importance of great advice. And finally, just a reflection around the dilemma I faced early on, which was how to position myself with regard to potential competitors and people in the same field or working in the same locality as me. And I've generally found it to be the case that it's, it's more helpful to be a collaborator, to be generous with your support for others around you. And I've just found it's paid back in dividends, the number of times, people in town have sent work my way or have been supportive of my work. So I hope those are helpful. I'm still on the journey myself, of building my business, good luck, whatever you're facing, whatever you're doing,

Speaker 1: [\(20:26\)](#)

I find Martin's wisdom and insight invaluable. I hope you can make use of it too, if you can. You'll no doubt find that small changes and thought through decisions can make a really big impact, especially if you are in the early stages of startup. A valuable lesson I learned and important change I made brings back memories of the summer of 1990. The football world cup was about to start in Italy, but I arrived at work one warm Monday morning only to find my office ransacked and all computer equipment stolen. That event knocked me badly, but the insurance company paid out for the lost goods. And after a few weeks, the business was back on its feet. But as a result of that experience, I learned a very important lesson. I learned about the value of consequential loss cover, or rather the value of paying an additional insurance premium. So should the business be adversely affected

again, it wouldn't just be covered for the loss of goods, but also the consequences of that loss, which brings me back to the floods of 1999...

Speaker 1: ([21:39](#))

As the water level started to recede in York. So discussion started with the company's insurance agent. Because of the burglary in 1990, the company now had consequential loss cover. This meant that all our lost goods together with the considerable time we had not been able to work for clients were both covered by the policy. The payout for the consequential loss was 10 times the amount compared to the payout for the goods we lost. And as a result, the business had a far better year than I ever thought possible when the water first started to rise in our office.

Speaker 1: ([22:25](#))

Finally, with every episode I'm recommending a book to buy. If you can use the extra time you have now to read or listen to the suggested text, I guarantee you will be better equipped to get wherever you're headed far more quickly than you thought possible when this crisis started.

And you'll not be surprised to hear my recommendation. It's 'Shoedog' by Phil Knight. When you read this stunning autobiography, you'll discover how one man's relentless determination, passion, and resilience allowed him to win out against all odds. And in the book, Phil Knight makes clear that if you are doing something you are passionate about, don't give up. Don't give up. Despite hostile takeover, bids, banks, withdrawing services, and unfounded, multimillion dollar tax bills, Phil Knight managed to start survive and ultimately thrive with his business and that business.

And if you are wondering which company this is? It's Nike.

Speaker 1: ([23:41](#))

In the next episode, I'm going to take a look at the subject building trust. And after that, I'll be examining the issue of effective communications before moving on to making sales.

Through all this mayhem, your feedback is not just welcomed. It's needed like you. This is the first time I've ever dealt with a pandemic whilst in business. So please let me know your thoughts and questions, I'd love to hear from you. And finally my thanks go to my expert guest Martin Summerfield, whose contact details should you need them, are provided on the blog page.

My name's Peter Harrington, and this has been your Startup Survival Podcast.

Go well

Stay Safe

And thank you.