

What Yoga taught me about resiliency

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From a former anti-yogi, here is what the practice of yoga has taught me about resilience.

When we think of yoga, one of the first things we think is “that’s for bendy people.” I thought that. I wanted no part of that (a) cause bending hurts when you’re inflexible and (b) I believed building strength had to happen in the weight room. But here I was, in a yoga class watching all these people bend and hold poses that in my wildest dreams could not imagine getting into. I am not going to lie, my first class kind of hurt, cause I was inflexible.

Let’s start with how I ended up in a yoga class. Well, my oncology doctors recommended I try yoga to alleviate stress and use it as a strategy for coping with cancer treatment. I was not convinced this would help me at all, but what the heck, I tried it. So here I am learning to bend and twist in this 45-minute class. I felt awful, but I can’t be this bad at anything physical; I am strong, fit and completely capable of holding a dancer’s pose! Well actually I wasn’t at first. But I didn’t give up and you know what, over time, I have gained that flexibility, that ability to bend and twist. This is one of the major pillars of resilient people, the ability to be flexible. Being bendy in our backs is all well and good, but being bendy in our minds, that is real power. Being able to look at a situation and adapt quickly mentally, emotionally and physically builds resilience in all 3 areas. Think about it, if you don’t stretch your muscles, they are more susceptible to snapping or breaking...same with our mindsets. So, when life presents a stressful situation, practice looking at it in a few ways. Ask yourself, what could this look like from another perspective? Is there a positive angle to hold on to? Practice not getting stuck in one thought pattern.

I didn’t want to do yoga at first because, I didn’t really know how and thought of all mistakes I would make. Well, here is yoga lesson number 1, there are no mistakes in yoga, only practice. See how that simple change in wording shifts everything. You are not there to be perfect; you are there to practice your flexibility, your mind body connection and stillness (I will get to that one later). Sounds great, but how do you switch your thinking? Ask yourself two questions. (1) What if someone in the room holds pigeon pose better than me, what would my life be like? Realize immediately this is a ridiculous thought and move to question (2). What is funny about this? Yoga can put you in a few awkward positions, um, hello happy baby pose?! So, find humor in it, lighten it up and realize we are all in this awkward pose together. Understanding you are not alone and even tough times can have some underlying levity is another formidable trait of resilient people

The stillness. Oh my word, my first “savasana” or meditation at the end of a yoga class. The stress I felt waiting for those 3-5 minutes to be over. Full disclosure, I got in the habit of leaving class before meditation. C’mon, I had things to do and these 3 minutes were crucial! Really? That’s just insane. We all have 3 minutes to offer ourselves to find calm and silence, and it is so important for our mental and emotional wellbeing. Because I got in the habit of leaving, my yoga instructor asked me to try it again, that I needed to practice stillness. It was hard for me at first, laying there while life is still happening without me for the moment. But guess what, after 3 minutes, life and all its challenges were still there, but my mind was different. I was calmer, more patient with myself, and understood that there is purpose and power in pausing. It allows us to reflect more clearly on the day’s events.

I still don't consider myself a yogi, but I still do it. I take what I have learned in my stretchy bendy class and have applied it to my mindset. I am not perfect, but I am practicing.