

# BLUE ZONES

“Cheerfulness is the best promoter of health and is as friendly to the mind as to the body.”

Joseph Addison, an English essayist, poet, playwright, politician



For many of us, this time of COVID has shown the value of our personal connections, as well as mental and physical health. SUBMITTED

## Getting to the heart of resiliency in these unusual times

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“It is your decisions, and not your conditions, that determine your destiny. Choose wisely.” — Tony Robbins

As I am writing this, the sweet voice of Diana Ross and the Supremes singing “Reflections of, the way life used to be” tickle my ear as I put pen to paper. But of course, in this day and age, there is no pen and no paper, just the quiet clicking of my keyboard.

Otherwise, my home is silent. I am single and live alone. For two months now, I haven’t been touched, embraced in loving arms, cuddled, or even playfully poked. My workdays have consisted of artificial Zoom meetings, phone calls, and excessive emails that would normally be negated by a quick face to face conversation, a giggle and likely a high five.

Thus far, on my team, a baby was born, a mother was lost, a new home was purchased, and a young woman graduated college. I mourn the loss of the ability to celebrate and console. I can’t look into my co-worker’s eyes to see how they are really doing, I can’t hear the depth of their breath, feel their warmth or soak in their energy.

Like a baby monkey in Harlow’s Monkey Experiment, I have learned to cope, existing with this new artificial mother that facilitates all my work needs. I have not yet covered my laptop in terry cloth to make it softer and cuddlier, but I am getting close.

I am tired of all my connection coming through a screen. For many of us, this time of COVID and its new dictation of our lifestyle has served as a reflection — and potentially a warning of what is to come if we don’t press pause and place more value on our connections, mental and physical health, practice of being present and establishing what the Okinawans call Ikigai or our purpose and the reason we get out of bed every morning.

These are all key factors that impact our ability to overcome hardship and build a flexible muscle we call resiliency.

Resiliency is our capability to bounce back, or better yet, bounce forward after a set-back or loss. It is what keeps our monkey mind from living from and through our fears and instead allows us to swing freely from branch to branch improvising and recalculating life as we trust that the roots of our tree have built strong enough limbs to hold our weight.

Those roots are the foundation of our resiliency, and it just so happens they flourish when fertilized by continuously practicing the Blue Zones Power 9 principles.

Deep connections, effective communication, shared purpose and a strong support network are vital to a resilient outlook. These traits help build trust among our Right Tribe which encourages collaboration, resourcefulness, collective problem solving and realistic optimism during challenges.

Our Right Tribe will also support us and keep us accountable for our health, helping us eat wisely and move naturally for optimal wellness.

Paramount to resiliency, however, is our mindset.

Back in the tree, the gap between where we are and where we want to go (branch to branch) is where our decisions and resiliency influence the outcome. To successfully bridge this gap, every guru from Tony Robbins to Eckhart Tolle states that you must be in the present moment and operating devoid of fear to successfully move forward.

Looking across the savannah, the zebra is the perfect example of the power of presence and living without fear. While their stripes make them less conspicuous in groups, and there is safety in numbers, Dr. Robert Sapolsky has proven that zebras only experience the fight or flight response when there is actual danger, like a hunting lioness, present.

Sapolsky’s research shows that unlike humans, the zebra’s pre-frontal cortex does not allow it to plan nor re-live stressful, traumatic events.

Once the danger is past, the zebra returns to its supportive harem and resumes a calm state of being in the present moment. It does not stop eating or lose its hair due to post-traumatic stress.

Luckily, our pre-frontal cortex allows us to both anticipate and manage our emotions

while downshifting and staying present so we can make clear decisions and take positive action from a place of grit and tenacity instead of fear.

Now is the perfect time to work out our resiliency muscles. Take time to connect to your loved ones by practicing active listening and discussing goals. Join a moai, take a Purpose Workshop, start a consistent diet and exercise routine. Use this time to break out of your cage and grow.

### Online Power Nine activity of the week

Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida wants to know how you are living the Power 9, a set of shared principles followed by the longest-lived people.

Each week, we will have a specific Power 9 activity for you to try and share with us.

This week’s Power 9 activity is Family First.

As Blue Zones has scientifically proven, investing time with your family can add up to 6 years to your life. Making time for family meals and play is important! It helps create invaluable bonds and memories for all involved. Also, keeping your aging family members and loved ones nearby or even in your own home will lower disease and mortality rates.

This week we want to encourage you to do something fun with the people in your household: throw a little party, put some healthy food and snacks on the table, play some music, have a family cook off or play a board game. Get creative and do anything that helps you connect and create a new memory. Please share your experience with us on Facebook by tagging us at @Blue Zones Project – Southwest Florida. You can also email us at [bluezonesprojectswfl@sharecare.com](mailto:bluezonesprojectswfl@sharecare.com).

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