

Speaker 1 ([00:03](#)):

Please stand by, we are about to begin. Resilience and Challenging Times, brought to you by Cigna. Please note that copies of the presentation slides and handouts are available for download in the dropdown box on the lower left side of the player window. Our presenter today is Dr. Tom Troast. Dr. Troast has over 25 years of experience as a clinical therapist, university faculty member, administrator, EAP affiliate, and small business owner. Dr. Troast holds a doctoral degree in educational psychology from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and a masters degree in counseling from Michigan State University. And now, Dr. Tom Troast.

Dr. Tom Troast ([00:44](#)):

Thank you so much. And it's a pleasure to be with you today. Certainly, this is a topic that we all can use when we're faced with real challenging times. You know, the coronavirus, which is so much in our minds, the pa-, this, this pandemic has resulted in, in really a, an abrupt and, and certainly unsettling transformation of our daily norms. Uh, change has been the order of the day, hasn't it? You know, places that we no- normally go without even thinking about it, going to the shopping malls, going to our schools, and perhaps having children go to c- college, places of worship or, or simply just going out to a restaurant, they're no longer an option for us. And the plans that we had for travel or public events, or going to a wedding, whatever it is, all of that's been put on hold. For most of us, these measures, these, these incidences are certainly unprecedented, seeming kinda larger than life as we watch this situation unfold on, on this global scale.

Dr. Tom Troast ([01:43](#)):

You know, as the health, lives, and livelihoods of our friends and our neighbors and our families, and even ourselves, are thrust into uncertainty, it's, it's so easy to feel a, a sense of doom, isn't it? And just that kinda this feeling of, uh, for lack of a better word, doom. And th-, and that these events right now are just too much to handle. But we can and will overcome this, using the power of our own natural resilience. Today, we're gonna talk about believing in you, finding that inside ourselves and believing in ourselves.

Dr. Tom Troast ([02:15](#)):

So let's talk about where we're going today, and let's talk about our goals. Today, we're gonna discuss what it means to be resilient during these stressful times. What, what does it mean? What does it mean to you? What does it look like? Perhaps what it feels like. Then, maybe explore the ways in which you're already resilient. Remember I, I hinted that we're, we're out discovering, but we're discovering something that we already know, that you already possess, the qualities of resiliency. We're gonna explore the ways in which you already are. Then, let's talk about and learn some strategy to tap into that resilience as you meet this challenge, how we get through this truly challenging time. So that's where we're headed today. We're gonna do some self-discovery and some self-empowerment.

Dr. Tom Troast ([03:06](#)):

Let's talk about what does it mean, really what does it mean to be resilient? Uh, how do we, how do we see that, you know? Y- you may think of someone. I know when I think of resiliency, I think of someone personally that, that I know. You know, but often I leap to people that are so resilient that they faced incredible challenges that maybe jumped into the headlines, ca-, became into movies, became almost folklore. You know, a Hellen Keller, your Stephen Hawkings, and others, folks like that, larger than life people that, that just kind of defy adversity that might, that just comes up in their lives. The- these are

the types of folks that, that jump into my minds when I, when I think of, when I think of resiliency. Uh, an incredible person like a Helen Keller, right?

Dr. Tom Troast ([03:55](#)):

So what qualities would you say factor into being resilient? You know, it's likely your list includes some of the factors listed on this slide. Y-, take a look at some of those. You know, y-, don't give up, stay hopeful, seek solutions, being adaptive, you know, even managing stress, right? Well, especially in extraordinary circumstances like we find ourselves, resilience can seem like a quality that's kind of out of reach. You know, right now we're experiencing rapid and disruptive change to our outcomes. I think we're all feeling that. And we're, we're trying to thwart off a, a threat that we, we, we can't even see. You know, the outcome and duration of this threat is uncertain. And it feels like we're all at risk. And it's easy to think at times like this, "I, I just can't handle this." Or, "I- I- I'm not able to do it." But is that really true?

Dr. Tom Troast ([05:01](#)):

The traits we listed, these are not superhuman qualities. These are not the characteristics of superheroes. There are ways of thinking and acting that we're all capable of, you know? And often, that, when we, we have concerns like these, these arise. Note, note the, the quote. I love this quote. This Japanese proverb really crystallizes resilience in the simplest of terms. That's where our conversation, this is where we're gonna start today. We're gonna look at that proverb. "Fall seven times, stand up eight." It's a powerful statement. It's talking about finding and developing ourselves the belief and ability that we can get up that eighth time. So we look at these characteristics and then look at the extraordinary circumstances that we find ourselves in, right? This feeling that we're at risk, how do we get through this? How do we get up the eighth time?

Dr. Tom Troast ([05:59](#)):

Well, we're talking about, and we go to our, our next slide, really resilience is a response. And I think that's a, a key component as we visit this topic today. It's a, it's a response, you know? And it isn't... You know, resiliency isn't a remarkable quality that you either have or you don't. In, in simple terms, it's part of our response when we're faced with one or two negative events or stressors. Think of a rubber band. You know, the stressors stretch us, sometimes when it feels like to the breaking point, but we can still get back to the original shape, or at least close to it. In many ways, we are predisposed to respond with resilience. It's, it's the most adaptive response. In fact, we adapt to minor stressors.

Dr. Tom Troast ([06:48](#)):

Look at our, our spectrum there. We adapt to minor stressors every day that don't even register on our radar, right? The, it's not even part of our consciousness. It's like riding a bike. You know, think about riding a bike, you shift slightly, uh, when, when the terrain changes. We, we want to stay upright. So if it's a little slippery or it's a little slopey, we make that change. We don't even think about it. But then, at the other end of our spectrum, right, are life-threatening stressors. A car veers into our bike lane and, and without even thinking about it, we instantly brake or swerve to avoid to a crash. It's a response.

Dr. Tom Troast ([07:22](#)):

But what about a stressor like this one, that can be life-threatening and is unseen and unpredictable, creating lots of other stressors too? For some, this threat may feel distant and removed from reality, but with real impact to our daily lives, as our plans and our routines have been interrupted. For those of us

who are suffering from the virus of course, or know someone who is, that threat seems really there, right? It seems all too real. A key factor in how stressed we feel is our interpretation of what is happening to us. You know, for example, I, I have to work virtually now. I'm, uh, I can't get anything done. That's what I'm doing right now, right? I, I, I am working virtually. Uh, I could easily [inaudible 00:08:10], but, but we need to ask ourselves how harmful is this stressor? Do I have any control over the consequences? In other words, can I handle this or is it just too much for me?

Dr. Tom Troast ([08:25](#)):

Let's talk about what factors are at play in shaping this interpretation and our ability to respond in a resilient way, you know? Let's talk about h-, what shapes our ability to be resilient. You know, our interpretation is influenced by a number of factors. Let's, let's visit this equation and take a look at this. You know, stress load is one factor. The intensity of the stress, that is, what's at stake? You know, is it lose, is it losing some work hours or losing your parking space? This is one aspect of our stress load. The other is these cumulative amount, losing work hours, plus having to work from home, plus the schools are closed so, and my kids are home, right? Both can impact how stressed you feel and your ability to be resilient during these challenging times. This volume of stress.

Dr. Tom Troast ([09:25](#)):

But the equation doesn't end there. You know, we, each of us, all of us as individuals bring a, a unique set of factors that further influence how we interpret and manage a stressor. We all have vulnerabilities. You know, we all have our own weakest links. They may stem from experiences we've had or just one aspect of our makeup. If you're a worrier by nature, for example, the, the unknowns of this disease outbreak can be especially challenging. If you've experienced significant loss in your life to disease, maybe the stress of this situation feels even more difficult. The impact of stress is multiplied when it comes and when it makes a direct hit on a vulnerable area, right?

Dr. Tom Troast ([10:13](#)):

Well, the last part of this, let's talk about some strengths. All of us come preloaded with strengths. We don't always recognize them in ourselves or that they play a role in how we think and act. A strength can be persistence, could be your sense of humor, right? These are kinda day-to-day strengths. Sometimes we don't even see them anymore, right? It can be a strength that comes from even our external supports, from our friends, our family, our coworkers, our community. These strengths can shift our interpretation. See where we're going here, right? They can shift our interpretation. They offset the impact of the stress and positions u-, position us to respond with resilience.

Dr. Tom Troast ([11:05](#)):

But what does this look like in the real world, right? One which we have to, you know, w- do rapid change and have new change all the time. Let's talk about some areas, right, that, that we need to address as we look at resiliency. We know it's easy to lose hope and momentum when your thoughts are filled, you know, from edge to edge, you know 24/7 with this uncertainty that, that you're facing. Practicing new perspectives can shift your interpretation to a stressor away from being this idea of feeling helpless, you know?

Dr. Tom Troast ([11:45](#)):

But how can you regain a sense of control when the situation shifts so rapidly? How do we regain it? So let's unpack this and talk about regaining a sense of control. First, we certainly want to stay informed on

new development and recommendations. You know, when we've dealt with infectious diseases before, you know, and, and we've had to look at it one way. But this one, this thing and this strain is new. And what we know right now is that it is constantly evolving. It's important to stay up to date on the recommendations from public health officials, and to take them seriously. You know, even small tasks that we've been asked to do, like washing our hands, covering our sneezes, not touching our face, these are ways that we can feel that we have control and can mitigate the feeling of risk.

Dr. Tom Troast ([12:37](#)):

We want to remind ourselves that this is temporary. This new normal can be unsettling, especially when like our favorite restaurants are closed. We can't go to the movies like we usually do. These extreme measures are being taken to help prevent wide spread of the disease. And eventually, life will return to some semblance of normal. Other communities across the globe have coped with this virus. And while it may take some time, you know, we will too. We will.

Dr. Tom Troast ([13:10](#)):

Third, in terms of regaining a sense of control, take note of what remains constant in your life. You know, with so many changes, what remains the same? Hold on to those routines and ask them to, uh, you know, and, and ask yourself how do I take note of these constant things in my life. We want to hold on to that. Hold on to these routines and use them to maintain some stability for you and your loved ones. Example, maintaining, uh, your regular dinner hour with your family or a regular bedtime with your children. These are the types of daily routines that can help you feel your world is more predictable.

Dr. Tom Troast ([13:56](#)):

And lastly, remember your capabilities. Look to your past for examples of how you survived and how you thrived. Use these examples to support the perspective, "I am a person who can manage a crisis." How'd you do it? Maybe it was taking care of others. Maybe it was a plan of action, talking through the situation with others, or taking small steps. Could these actions work again now? Know that you have already made it through so much and these skills can help you in the coming days. So we're talking about regaining this sense of control, this idea of our perspective.

Dr. Tom Troast ([14:37](#)):

Let's talk about purpose, and let's share some ideas and unpack this. You know, another tool for all of this is finding our purpose. Finding your purpose can help you find firm footing among what might seem like chaos, supplying things like structure and momentum and stamina. You know, having a sense of purpose can help us remember where we're going, even when we have to keep our head down to get through the problems right in front of us. It's a powerful part of us really. As we talk about finding our purpose, we need to embrace who you are. You're allowed to have weaknesses. Of course we are. You're allowed to have emotions. And you're also allowed to recognize that you have strengths. Being honest with yourself about what you can manage will offer this strong foundation on which you could build this, this idea of resiliency.

Dr. Tom Troast ([15:41](#)):

We're goal setters, right? So we want to set goals and we want to make them realistic. Taking on the whole of a challenging situation, it's really, really too hard and can actually keep us from moving forward. So the question isn't how am I gonna be I-, how am I gonna live through all this? How am I

gonna get through all these days? Rather, how am I gonna get through this day? That's where you live for now. Maybe it's finding something to keep your children entertained, something to do in the next hour, some work task that you can finish right now. Maybe it's putting together a recipe for dinner tonight. Start with small goals to meet some immediate needs, and build on it slowly, right? Think about a goal you can accomplish today or tomorrow.

Dr. Tom Troast ([16:28](#)):

You certainly want to offer support to others. You know, offering to pick up groceries for someone, calling someone who's alone. We, we, we know that this self-isolating is really difficult, especially those with underlying health conditions, people with disabilities, our elderly neighbors, right? They may feel scared to leave the house, maybe even reluctant to ask for help. You know, you're friendly voice of reassurance can make a huge difference by reaching out to them. And it also, for you, will make you not feel so much like a victim of circumstance. I think it's really empowering, right?

Dr. Tom Troast ([17:08](#)):

And then, lastly, know that difficulty sometimes brings growth and meaning to our lives. You know, right now it may be hard to imagine that anything valuable can come out of this experience, especially while we're struggling. But at some point, you may notice that this hardship has brought something into your life that could be considered meaningful. It might impact your relationships for the better. Or maybe it's helping you find creative solutions to problems. Maybe you're developing a deeper spirituality. Or it just may be the gift of discovering that you could survive this. Finding your purpose can help you find firm footing, right? It can help us get there when we feel like life is in chaos.

Dr. Tom Troast ([17:56](#)):

Another way to reach out to others, right, is for us to feel like we're bigger than this, right? And that's where our purpose is, that we embrace who we are, we take our goals, we look to help others, and we realize that this could be growing, you know?

Dr. Tom Troast ([18:18](#)):

As we move forward, another idea is to reach out to others. Because everyone is coping with this challenge along with us. So let's talk about how valuable the idea of people can be through a crisis like this. You know, some studies say that having and turning to positive relationships, especially during difficult times, may be the most important factor in resiliency. And I believe that too, from working with people. I think, I think we, we need that social component to our lives and it's really, really powerful.

Dr. Tom Troast ([18:54](#)):

Let's, let's talk about the pieces of this, why turning to others is so important and why turn to others to get and give support. Well, others can provide a safety net. And that stops us from hitting bottom and, and allows us to bounce back. You know, support might be tangible, could be things like money or food, help- helping with childcare, or more interpersonal, you know, such as being the voice of reality, someone problem solving with your or, or that person who is showing some empathy towards you. All of these are more resources than you would have available if you were alone. Just knowing that you have the safety net can allow you to really tap into a, kind of a more resilient mindset.

Dr. Tom Troast ([19:41](#)):

You know, it's always interesting, and I, I love this one study. The study has found that when people were asked to estimate the slope of a hill, they rated it as less steep than with others. Have you ever taken one of those really long walks with a friend, and at the end of the walk you go, "I can't believe we walked all this way."? Why did that seem easier? Why would you not do that alone? Because we're better together, you know?

Dr. Tom Troast ([20:07](#)):

Other ways to turn to others to get and give support. You know, other people can s-, help us through difficulties through a humorous lens. And they could try, and they could really trigger laughter. Both found in people, you know, these qualities of joy and humor, that's what we find with folks that are resilient. And there may be nothing funny about this current situation. But there may be some small ways to still find some humor and even joy in your life. You know, look at, look at online with celebrities and others offering their talents as if, as, as they're, as they're isolating themselves. Or even tips on how to, to make this new normal work for them. I guess I'm asking for you to give yourself permission to enjoy these small moments if you find them, and recognize that we're all in this together.

Dr. Tom Troast ([21:01](#)):

I think we also, especially during these difficult times, w- we need to find ways to stay connected. You know, in this digital age there are so many ways for us to stay connected, even while we're separated physically. Think of ways, right, to stay connected with others. You know, this situation is unique in that it's truly a global, shared experience. Take advantage of it to gain support and solutions. I think this is so important for us. You know, I just think it's the only way to do that.

Dr. Tom Troast ([21:37](#)):

And then, I think a really great idea around the social stuff is to plan something to look forward to. Remember, these measures are temporary. Plan something to look forward to in the future, a trip you want to take, maybe a concert that's coming up. Plan a neighborhood block party to celebrate the end of social distancing. And while we may not even know the firm dates yet, the act of planning, all those good things about planning, that, that wonderful anticipatory good stuff, right, uh, reminds that there's gonna be a time when this is gonna be a reality. So in spite of all the challenges that social distancing, uh, talks about, the social is-, the social isolation and the shelter-in-place directives... They're important. It's also more important than ever to take advantage of resources at your disposal to connect with others. I think these are the keys to the kingdom, frankly, right? For us to connect with others. This kind of support is an important tool in helped, in helping you adapt to the rapid changes that are happening all around us.

Dr. Tom Troast ([22:44](#)):

Our last pillar of resiliency is plasticity. You know, our brains are built to adapt. We grow and learn every day. We do. When challenges like this strike, we need to tap into this natural plasticity more than ever. But it can be hard to be flexible and adaptable in a time when we're facing such uncertainty and facing, sometimes, loss. We may be experiencing all these things. What can help us? Remember that you will adapt. We talk about taking it day by day. People who don't give up have a habit of interpreting major setbacks as temporary or local or changeable. That's why they don't give up. And while today, right, may be so overwhelming, tomorrow may be less so. And despite all the challenges you face, life does go on.

Dr. Tom Troast ([23:45](#)):

What small things can be a reminder of that to you? Maybe you want to develop a mantra, you know, a, a, a repeated phrase, to remind yourselves to take this viewpoint, saying things to ourselves like, "This too shall pass. I've, I've gotten through stuff like this before. I can do it again." Can you think of a phrase, a phrase that you can use to help you?

Dr. Tom Troast ([24:07](#)):

You want to create structure with routines. Create some type of structure, because that offers needed stability. Look for small ways to back your norms, right? Maybe it's reading a story before bedtime. Maybe it's having tea or coffee with friends. Connect online. Allow these small routines to be your anchor. We want to respond to challenges creatively. Not every change you face is gonna look the same, so you don't have to respond to everything the same way. Go ahead and experiment and find some new ways to respond to and solve the problems that arise. And as you try these new approaches, expand your capability to adapt to different situations, this is strengthening our resiliency.

Dr. Tom Troast ([24:51](#)):

And lastly, stay focused on the present. Worst-case scenario thinking is, of course, natural when things are uncertain. That's where we go. That's our go-to, especially in a situation like this that's unpredictable and uncharted. But it can help you stay focused, right? And we want to stay focused on the here and now instead of being frantic about what's gonna happen in the future. Give yourself permission to focus on just what you want to do. It's a simple and powerful response to take on the catastrophe thinking that we do. You've heard of mindfulness, and we have things on the internet and on the website about mindfulness, it's about getting quiet and teaching ourselves to be in the present.

Dr. Tom Troast ([25:35](#)):

We'll bring this all the way around, and let's talk about a firm foundation for ourselves. You know, basic needs come first in times of stress. And self-care, a lot of times, gets thrown out the window. We need to, to remember without proper rest, nutrition and exercise, resiliency can really feel out of reach. So let's touch on some reminders, and one's you've heard before. But we need to be reminded 'cause this, this is a founding block for resiliency.

Dr. Tom Troast ([26:11](#)):

You know, sleep, even the deepest stages of sleep, are more important than ever. You know, that deep sleep is a time to renew resources that can support resiliency. You know, our stress hormones are reset, mood-lifting brain chemicals are refreshed, and that's where creative problem solving can take place. It cannot become optional. It's got to be a priority. If you're having insomnia during this time, talk to your doctor. Perhaps try to write down your worries and put them, and tuck them away for the night, mentally getting ready to revisit them in the morning so they're not there during your sleep.

Dr. Tom Troast ([26:49](#)):

We need to remember how important nutrition is, because stress like right now can really propel us to overeat, can get us to forget to eat, or even start eating unhealthy foods. You know, research tells us that a balanced diet, that can help your stress systems become more flexible. R-, regular meals together with your family is also a great way to build that structure that we talked about. Let's be careful with all the restaurants being closed, right? It's okay maybe to start cooking for the first time, looking at new ingredients. Be creative, try new recipes, experiment.

Dr. Tom Troast ([27:26](#)):

We cannot overstate how important exercise is, right? It has to be a priority right now. It may not feel like it should be, but it should be. Remember that physical exercise is a good way to reduce stress. It helps change our brain cells, makes us less responsive to anxiety. Go outside and do an activity.

Dr. Tom Troast ([27:47](#)):

And I've been preaching for now, for, for three weeks, limit the news coverage. Even well-reported, accurate news coverage can arouse emotional stuff and, and really increase our fear. It's, it's okay and important to get the facts, but it's not helpful to hear it over and over again. I advocate limiting television and online coverage, especially as it becomes distressing. Pick one time, look at the headlines, and then put it away.

Dr. Tom Troast ([28:16](#)):

And finally, don't forget to fill your spiritual and emotional tanks. Take time, when you can, for reflection. Allow yourself to experience what is happening on an emotional level. Reach out to others for support. Take time for nature, you know? Perhaps helping out others is the best move for you, but remember your personal health and safety. It's time to nourish your spirit. It can be en-energized and it can be resilient.

Dr. Tom Troast ([28:45](#)):

I hope you're able to take some chances, to take some risks, and grow and feel resilient during these particularly challenging times. I'll kick it back to you for any questions or, or comments.

Speaker 1 ([29:04](#)):

Thank you, Dr. Troast. And ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for being with us today. That concludes today's webinar.