

Tolerance for Adversity and Uncertainty: Self-Assessment

Due Date: Tuesday 3 October 2024

University study, expeditions in remote environments, and work in teams often involve mental and physical challenges, personal hardship, social stress, and uncertainty about conditions beyond one's control. They also can facilitate exceptional achievement and profound fulfillment. Experiences in these contexts can lead to transference, or enrichment of life beyond the university, expedition, or participation on the team.

Transference is supported by self-awareness on individual and social levels. Self-awareness includes understanding your strengths, weaknesses, needs, and desires. It also includes recognizing how you can use your attributes to adapt to diverse conditions, achieve personal goals, and contribute to group initiatives. Among the most important components of self-awareness is an understanding of your tolerance for adversity and uncertainty.

Below is a self-inventory of tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, copied from Goodkin and Leach (2009). Some statements in the inventory clearly apply to outdoor activities, while others also pertain to challenging personal and social experiences in many contexts. The page after the assessment describes how each tolerance trait relates to resilience and performance in stressful situations.

Please review each of the 26 statements on the list, and candidly mark your response to each statement. Use this exercise for self-assessment. It is not intended for comparing yourself with others, boasting, or shaming. You should complete the self-assessment and bring it to class only to verify your work to the instructor (i.e., briefly flash the assessment sheet without allowing time for anyone to determine your responses to individual items). Do not share it with anyone else. Please be honest with yourself in your assessments; because you need not share them with anyone else, there is no value in inflating your responses. Be prepared to discuss the assessment in general terms, including strategies to increase your tolerance.

Goodkin J. and S. Leach, editors. 2009. *NOLS Leadership Educator Notebook: A Toolbox for Leadership Educators*. National Outdoor Leadership School, Lander, WY, pp. 44-45.

Tolerance For Adversity And Uncertainty Self-Inventory

Instructions

Here are some generalized statements about your responses to adversity and uncertainty.

Quickly guess how often you exhibit these behaviors.

If you are curious about why a question is important, look at the user's guide on the back.

Hardly Ever
Occasionally
Usually
Frequently
Almost Always

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 1. I adapt quickly to change, and do not focus on what we would have been doing. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 2. I bounce back quickly after fatigue, illness, or other hardships. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 3. During risky or challenging circumstances, I remain calmly methodical (like James Bond). |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 4. I view most choices as having many workable options and combinations, rather than one perfect solution. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 5. In difficult situations, I "own" my stress rather than blaming it on external factors like the weather or other people. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 6. I quickly adapt to factors I can't control, like the weather. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 7. I admit my mistakes so I can fix them and learn from them. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 8. I learn as much from my successes as I do from my mistakes. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 9. I learn from the experiences of myself and others. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 10. In tough situations, I use appropriate group decision-making styles. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 11. I make focused decisions in difficult situations, even finding creative solutions. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 12. I can endure, or even enjoy, hard work and challenge. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 13. I carry backpacks without letting the discomfort and hard work affect my attitude. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 14. I can hike all day without compromising the style in which I camp. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 15. When I get cuts, scrapes, bruises, or bee stings, I tolerate the pain well. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 16. When it is time to get out of my warm sleeping bag on a frosty morning, I get it over with quickly. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 17. I find opportunity in challenges. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 18. During times of stress, I still communicate effectively by listening well, and by making sure others understand me. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 19. I take good care of myself. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 20. I take good care of my equipment. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 21. If I need to relax and think clearly during tough times, I can distance myself from distracting thoughts & worries. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 22. I anticipate problems so I can avoid them or be ready to deal with them. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 23. In tough situations, humor helps me keep things in perspective. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 24. I'm a good team player, even if I think other team members are physically, technically, mentally, or socially inept. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 25. I exhibit a playful curiosity. |
| <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | 26. I understand that I can make all the right decisions and bad things can still happen. |

Tolerance For Adversity & Uncertainty Self-Inventory Discussion Points

- 1) This attitude helps you focus on the new reality and also conserves energy (the brain burns lots of sugar).
- 2) These people don't let self-induced stress linger long after externally induced stress subsides. These first two items are huge predictors of related factors in resiliency (Vaishnavi, 2007).
- 3) We are generally more efficient, more clever, and more coordinated when we remain calmer.
- 4) These people are more adaptable to change.
- 5) These people take more responsibility for their choices, rather than viewing themselves as victims of circumstances.
- 6) These people realize they can't control certain factors, and save their mental energy for factors they can control.
- 7) These people have enough self-confidence to admit their errors.
- 8) Resilient people capitalize on opportunity.
- 9) Resilient people learn from all experiences.
- 10) These people maintain the presence of mind to apply situational leadership styles effectively, either by making directive decisions, or by taking the time to involve the group appropriately.
- 11) These people maintain enough calmness to still have a high level of inter-neural communication, which is when the creative and logical sides of the brain communicate.
- 12) These people have enough experience doing hard work that it isn't a limiting factor.
- 13) No one likes heavy packs, so these people show high tolerance levels. This statement emphasizes that no one is perfectly resilient.
- 14) These people maintain a lot of self-discipline when they are tired. This shows the ability to tolerate stress without compromising values. This type of self-discipline is something you can train yourself to do.
- 15) ER nurses anecdotally say that these injuries have roughly equally consistent pain (compared to the more variable headaches and broken bones) so they are good standards to use in assessing a person's pain threshold.
- 16) These people demonstrate self-discipline, and the wisdom to recognize that everything is temporary, including unpleasant experiences. A crisp example is Admiral James Stockdale who spent years in a Vietnamese POW camp but kept reminding himself that this was just a temporary predicament. He noted a higher survival rate of fellow prisoners who shared this mindset. (Collins, 2001, Ch.4).
- 17) This is a classic survivor trait. Finding opportunity becomes sport. A vivid media example is the film "Life Is Beautiful."
- 18) These people remain functional communicators during trying times.
- 19) These people are better prepared to withstand trials and tribulations for general conditioning, wellness, and immunity reasons. They generally have better self-esteem, which makes them more resilient on an interpersonal basis.
- 20) These people are better prepared logistically to be tested by adverse conditions. This gives them deeper self-confidence.
- 21) Being able to play cards or nap in the tent during a storm conserves energy that might be needed later. Developing the habit of standing back from a crisis helps these people clear their minds to make more thoughtful decisions.
- 22) Anticipating what can possibly go wrong, and thinking of responses, is important to not only be ready to respond more intelligently, but to have a more prepared mind if an improbable event actually occurs. It is important that this feels like a mental logistical exercise, rather than worrying about potential disasters.
- 23) Humor can reduce tension, which increases human performance.
- 24) Tolerating adversity may mean tolerating a social situation we don't like. People who do this recognize that they can only control themselves; they can't control anyone else.
- 25) These people know how to learn and figure out new challenges more quickly.
- 26) Stress from unusual traumatic events is less bothersome to people who understand that no matter what decisions we make, random events still occasionally lead to bad outcomes.

This self-test helps you find your strengths so you can use them better. Don't worry about not being perfect: that's normal. Folks who score high on these resiliency scales still get stressed out, but these "protective factors" can reduce the self-induced stress some, and they especially help folks bounce back after stress. The Latin root for the word *resilience* actually means *bounce back*.

Interested in learning more about this topic?

Keywords you can use in search engines:

resilience resiliency mental toughness
hardiness survival skills coping skills

Books to check out:

- *Deep Survival: who lives, who dies, and why*, by Laurence Gonzales
- *The Survivor Personality*, by Al Siebert
- *Resilience: The power to bounce back when the going gets tough!* by Frederic Flach
- *Resiliency in action: Practical ideas for overcoming risks and building strengths in youth, families, and communities*, by Nan Henderson
- *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers: An Updated Guide to Stress, Stress-Related Diseases and Coping* by Robert Sapolsky