4 Ways to Find Opportunity Within Adversity

July 31, 2020 7 min read

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In his self-help classic *Think and Grow Rich*, Napoleon Hill proclaims, “Never has there been a time more favorable to pioneers than the present.” And yet, when Hill wrote these words, America was at the tail-end of the worst economic downturn in history. *Think and Grow Rich* was published in March 1937, right before the nation experienced a recession while still in the midst of recovery efforts from the Great Depression. To put it in perspective: The unemployment rate in May 1937 was at 14.3 percent and would continue on an upward trajectory to reach 20 percent in 1938. In comparison, the unemployment rate in April 2020 peaked at 14.7 percent and by June has decreased to a still substantial 11.1 percent.

Despite the bleak outlook in the 1930s, Hill was emphatic about the potential for incredible success for those who reframed their perspective on challenges and took consistent action toward achieving their definite chief aim. In fact, in *Think and Grow Rich*, he goes so far as to claim that “the ‘depression’ was a blessing in disguise” because it “reduced the whole world to a new starting point that gives every one a new opportunity.” In other words, it leveled the playing field, clearing the way for entrepreneurs who lacked the resources of the corporate giants to build their businesses. Similarly, we can approach the “new normal” brought on by the global pandemic as an opportunity for entrepreneurs, organizations, and society at large to regroup, reset, and create better pathways to success. The following four

strategies will help you locate the opportunities within adversity.

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Reframe your perspective on obstacles

Obstacles often conceal the seeds of success. As Hill writes in *Think and Grow Rich*, opportunity "has the sly habit of slipping in by the back door, and often it comes disguised in the form of misfortune, or temporary defeat." This is likely why, he notes, so many people miss out on life-changing opportunities. As difficult as it may seem, we need to shift our mindset so that we can identify the possibilities to pivot that challenges provide. This is not a naïve, "silver lining" mentality: It is okay—even necessary—to acknowledge the weight of our feelings about adversity, but we should use those emotions to drive us forward toward our dreams, rather than allowing them to keep us stuck grieving a lost path. Remember, there are many roads to success, and just because one happened to be our favorite does not mean that it was the right one for us. If we hold tightly to our expectations for how our plans should have gone, our focus will be too narrow to recognize the most valuable opportunities for originality, growth, and connection. For instance, perhaps an unexpected job loss provides you with the chance to leverage your experience and expertise and build your own business as a freelancer. It truly takes an open, enlarged mindset to be able to see an obstacle from a new angle—a perspective that oftentimes will shift our perception of it.

Reduce your vulnerability to

negative influences

It is impossible to completely remove all the “noise” from your life, but you can choose how you filter, process, and respond to it—and it is extremely important that you do so, because your subconscious processes these emotions regardless of whether you are actively or passively allowing them to penetrate your psyche. The negative emotions to be particularly wary of include fear, worry, and self-doubt, as these emotions color our dominating thoughts in such a way as to diminish our agency and faith in our ability to persevere and succeed; instead, we open ourselves up to being consumed by helplessness, which manifests either in inaction or frenzy. In order to reduce your vulnerability to negative influences and emotions, cultivate an awareness of which negative influences harmonize the most with your weaknesses, as these are the ones to which you will be the most susceptible. In addition, assess your inner circle to ensure it is comprised only of supportive individuals who will encourage you to think and act for yourself. For those negative individuals in your personal and professional spheres with whom you must regularly interact, establish firm boundaries about the information they share in your presence.

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Harness the power of decision

Because negative emotions and influences tend to work us into a state of inaction, the greatest antidote to them is decisiveness. Making firm decisions enables us to create momentum in a constructive direction. A similar principle to the one behind exposure therapy is at play here: If we consistently decide to take action toward our dreams in spite of our negative emotions, then we can disempower them by incrementally confronting them. Self-discipline and willpower are crucial here. We must keep our definite chief aim at the

forefront of our mind and not allow negative influences, whether external or internal, to throw us off course. Granted, progress will not always be linear, but as Alyson Van Hooser suggests in *Level Up*, as long as we are taking correct, calculated, and consistent action toward our goals, we will get results. If you have been thinking of becoming an entrepreneur but are concerned that circumstances are not favorable to it right now, take heart. You can decide today to create the business opportunity you envision. As Sara Blakely, founder and CEO of Spanx, offers: "If you have a good product, if you're solving a problem, if you are making a product or service better…it's always a good time to start a business."

Identify new opportunities for collaboration and innovation

Many businesses right now are flourishing because they have pivoted by building connections and collaborating across industries. How can you expand your network to include diverse perspectives that complement and enrich your own? How can you "lean out," to use author Letitia Frye's term, by contributing to others' success through mentorship and service? By creating new partnerships, particularly those focused on adding value to others' lives, we can find new ways to serve our customers and clients while creating new pathways for prosperity for ourselves and the larger world. The pandemic has revealed the ways in which we are dynamically interconnected. This interdependence, when viewed correctly, is an opportunity for innovation that is more attentive to the complex, evolving needs of a global society.

As Hill encourages us in his 1952 speech "Maker of Miracle Men," "If there was ever a time in this country when men and women need to recognize the power of their own minds…that time is now.… Let's get our minds, each and every one of us as individuals, fixed upon a definite goal so big and so

outstanding that we'll have no time to think about these things we don't want." By reframing our perspective on adversity, we can use the current climate, difficult as it is, as an opportunity for creativity and a springboard for success.

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