

When You Can't Choose Your Divorce, You Can Choose Your Attitude

David Poles

In September of 2015, I did an impromptu 10 mile road race. At some point earlier that week, I got the idea to do the race; I believed I needed it. On race day, I was still compelled to run despite the hour-and-half drive from my home and the rainy, overcast, muggy weather. On the way to the race, I used my GPS, and I got lost. Not a good start.

When I arrived, I noticed a group of runners running in from the high school and not the middle school where I was parked. I was then embarrassed. The race director and staff were supportive, got me registered, gave me a bib number, and pointed me in the right direction.

Typically, I average a 10:30 per mile pace and was on that pace for about the first 4.5 miles. In fact, at one point, I passed three runners. However, somehow by mile 5, I got fatigued, and my legs felt heavy. I ended up with an average time of about 14.5 minutes per mile. Similar to the weather, getting lost and being late, my race time was not the mark of a good day. I finished the race but was not happy with my results.

Another emotional, and times physically difficult experience, was on the last day of August 2015 when, in court, I finalized my divorce. As with the road race, there was nothing easy about the day. And I realized again, sometimes in life, the only thing one can control is attitude. This was true as I dragged my heavy legs to the finish line of that race, just as it was true as I sat in court and ended my marriage.

Divorce was never my first choice. I struggled with this for some time. My marriage was a relationship I desperately wanted to save. However, in order for me to be the best version of myself, divorce was my only option. I made this decision after much time, thought, use of supports and relying on my Higher Power. Once the decision was made and the legal proceedings had ended, I came away from the experience with sadness of course but also of gratitude and forgiveness, and a strong belief that I am now a better person overall.

With both experiences, I am better having gone through the hard parts. For having run the hard miles and the hard emotional challenges. It is said that adversity builds character but I believe it is more accurate that adversity reveals character. I hope that has been true for me. Friends have said I showed strength of character throughout this transition. And that feels good to hear. All I know is that I did the best I could.

In my Counseling and Coaching services with my clients, I often speak about resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity. Another form of resilience is sometimes referred to as *post traumatic growth or steeling effects* wherein adversity leads to better functioning, much like a vaccination give one the capacity to cope well to future exposure to disease. Resilience is most commonly understood as a process.

Resiliency can be learned. The following are some methods for building your resiliency muscles:

Have a healthy support system. Surround yourself with high-quality people who care about you. A life coach, psychotherapist, close friend, clergy person, or special family member are all examples of good support systems.

Have a sense of humor. Don't forget to laugh at yourself and life in general. When we let go of our own importance we can then laugh at ourselves. Watch

funny movies. You tube has some great videos. Try not to take things too seriously, take a break from the intensity sometimes.

Remember the mind and body connection. What we do or don't do with our bodies is directly correlated to how we feel. 7-8 hours sleep per night, eat well, and try to get moderate exercise, especially outdoor time . Sunshine is a great healer.

Develop a sense of spirituality. Studies show that people who acknowledge a higher power are happier than those who don't. Organized religion, being in nature, praying, meditating, music and reading scripture can all be ways of cultivating our spirituality.

Learn how to reframe. Reframing is at the heart of resilience. It means looking at something from a different perspective. We do this by asking better questions. When dealing with pain, ask questions such as "What else can this mean" or "What's perfect about this?" These questions will elicit healthier responses and outcomes vs. "Why me?" or "Why am I cursed?"

Having to deal with a challenge like divorce or, on a smaller scale, a tough 10 mile road race, is painful. However, with the right attitude, these experiences can teach valuable life lessons. Change is a growth opportunity. Sometimes we change because we have to. Tony Robbins says that people change more readily when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of changing. "I have to change" is more powerful than "I want to change." In my own life, while going through divorce, I changed because I had to. It was too painful to go back and too painful to stay the same. But, now, I am happier, stronger, and more resilient.