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The Book of Awesome and *The Happiness Equation*

YOU ARE
AWESOME

How to Navigate Change,
Wrestle with Failure, and
Live an Intentional Life

INTRODUCTION

You Need to Be More Resilient

There's an old Taoist fable about a farmer with one horse.
Have you heard it? It goes like this:

A farmer had only one horse. One day, his horse ran away.

His neighbors said, "I'm so sorry. This is such bad news. You must be so upset."

The man just said, "We'll see."

A few days later, his horse came back with twenty wild horses following. The man and his son corralled all twenty-one horses.

His neighbors said, "Congratulations! This is such good news. You must be so happy!"

The man just said, "We'll see."

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One of the wild horses kicked the man's only son, breaking both his legs.

His neighbors said, "I'm so sorry. This is such bad news. You must be so upset."

The man just said, "We'll see."

The country went to war, and every able-bodied young man was drafted to fight. The war was terrible and killed every young man, but the farmer's son was spared since his broken legs prevented him from being drafted.

His neighbors said, "Congratulations! This is such good news. You must be so happy!"

The man just said, "We'll see . . ."

What is up with this crazy farmer, right?

Well, what's up with this crazy farmer is that he has truly developed resilience. He has built up his resilience. He is resilient! He's steady, he's ready, and whatever the future brings, we all know he's going to stare it straight in the face with eyes that scream, "Bring it on."

The farmer has come to understand that every skyrocketing pleasure or stomach-churning defeat defines not *who he is* but simply *where he is*.

The farmer knows that what happens in life only serves to help him see where he is and decide which way to go next.

The farmer knows every end is a beginning.

Whenever I read the fable of the farmer with one horse I sort of picture one of those inflatable clown punching bags that stands in the corner at a five-year-old's birthday party.

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Do you know the ones I mean?

They look like this:



Pop him in the nose! He goes down. He gets back up. Knock him to the ground with a violent bear hug! He goes down. He gets back up. Deliver a dirty karate kick to his side of his head? He goes down.

And he gets back up.

Resilience.

In my journey to think, write, and speak about how we live an intentional life—while always wrestling with my own demons as I do so—this concept of resilience has quickly moved front and center with the volume blaring.

I wasn't looking for it!

Ten years ago my wife left me and my best friend took his own life, and I channeled that heartbreak into the simple practice

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of writing one awesome thing a day on a blog called *1000 Awesome Things*. That blog turned into my first book.

The Book of Awesome is all about **gratitude**.

Five years later I met and fell in love with Leslie, and we got married. She told me she was pregnant on the flight home from our honeymoon. When we landed I started writing a long letter to my unborn child on how to live a happy life. That letter turned into my last book.

The Happiness Equation is all about **happiness**.

And now I'm saying that resilience has moved front and center and become loud and clear.

Why?

Because resilience is a skill we now have in very short supply. Not many of us have been through famines or wars or, let's be honest, any form of true scarcity. We have it all! And the side effect is that we no longer have the tools to handle failure or even perceived failure. These days when we fall we just lie on the sidewalk crying. We are turning into an army of porcelain dolls.

After a speech I gave recently a breathless fiftysomething ran up to me and asked a question that represented what I'm getting asked everywhere:

My son was captain of the high school football team! He graduated with honors from Duke! And he called me last night crying again because his boss sent him a rude email! What is going on with him? What is going on with us? And what do we do about it?

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What *is* going on with us?

We are living in a world where we no longer bend—we break. When we spill, we splatter. When we crack, we shatter. The *New York Times* reports that one in three adolescents has clinical anxiety. Cell phones show us we're never good enough. Yesterday's butterflies are tomorrow's panic attacks. And what about rates of depression, loneliness, and suicide? All rising!

We just can't handle it.

Today we need to learn the skills the farmer had in spades. And we need to learn them fast. Volatility, uncertainty, and complexity are accelerating. Change? Constant. Latest disruption? Getting disrupted. Meanwhile we know relationships will always spin and swerve and and life always, always, always has other plans.

What do we need?

To be like the farmer.

What do we want?

To be like the farmer.

We need to take all the uncertainty and failure and change coming at us and use it as momentum that slingshots us forward and forward and forward.

You Are Awesome is all about **resilience**.

It is a series of nine research-backed secrets, shared through personal stories, on how we can move from change-resistant to change-ready, failure-prone to failure-proof, thin-skinned to thick-skinned, and anxious to awesome.

Life is tiny and fragile and beautiful and precious.

And we really are awesome.

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All we need are a few directional arrows to get us back on track whenever we fall off course.

This is a book of nine arrows.

I hope you like it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neil". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the letters connected.

Neil