Authentic Resilience with Fatima Doman transcript

**Jackie Congedo** 00:03

These are your superpowers, positive character strengths. You have them, all of them, some more than others,

**Dr. Neal Mayerson** 00:11

what we are best suited to do in our lives connects with who we are and our character strengths,

**Jackie Congedo** 00:19

standing up strong, activating your superpowers is how you can change the world,

**Dr. Neal Mayerson** 00:25

and you're pioneering the future of humanity.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:27

Let's start right now.

**Kara Driscoll** 00:31

Hi. I'm Kara Driscoll, the Director of Marketing and Events for the Nancy and David Wolf Holocaust and Humanity Center. Life requires us all to be resilient, especially in this time. Today's guest is someone who has written about that extensively and has insights about how we can lean in on that character strength to become more resilient. Welcome, Fatima, we're so appreciative that you joined us today tell us a little bit about yourself and your work and how you became to believe in the power of character strengths and and how you began studying resilience.

**Fatima Doman** 01:09

Well, thank you. And first of all, thank you very much for having me on your podcast. I I am a great fan of what your organization is doing, and a little bit about me. So my background is in positive psychology coaching. I've written four books on positive psychology and coaching, and one of more my more recent books, which is what we're going to talk about today, is authentic resilience. And I I really like to take an evidence based approach to any topic that I'm that I'm discussing in my books and in in the case of resilience, I wrote this book during the pandemic, and I thought that I had already started writing it, and then it just took on legs during the pandemic, because collectively, I feel we across the globe experienced a collective trauma. You know, so many people did. They experienced a lot of stress. So it was deeply compelling to me to write the book during that time, and the way that I have defined resilience. I mean, if you look in Oxford Dictionary, it's the ability, the capacity to bounce back from difficulties, to quickly recover from them. And also doctors Martinez and Ruch, who are highly respected individuals in the field of studying resilience, also talk about psychological resilience, and they're looking at, you know, what is it that about some people that they can withstand stress better than others? And they're, they're wanting to really understand that the reason that that speaks so much to me and just a little bit about me personally, what what drew me to positive psychology in in great part is my childhood. My family came to this country fleeing war in Angola, and, you know, arriving in this country at the age of three, my parents, I was the youngest, and my parents were very stressed out, and I could see the stress in our family. There was so much change, so much upheaval. You know, my mother went from being a school teacher in Angola to working in turkey plants, you know, long, hard hours of labor and not speaking the language. And my father went from having his own farm to milking cows on a dairy in California. And you know, their their lives were truly upended. We were lucky that they had jobs. But I remember one of the euphemisms that I grew up with. Often I'd hear my mother say, "Oh, que miséria" when she was really stressed. And those words mean in Portuguese, oh, what misery. And so, you know, I remember as a young girl just wanting my parents to feel better and intensely feeling their stress and emotions in the home and and being so grateful for how hard they were working, but yet, you know, worried for my parents. So that drew me to positive psychology and this study of resilience in particular. And what is it that we can do? What's in our power? And how can we cultivate more positive emotions and experiences. And so I'm going to pause in just a minute, but I want, I wanted to say one more thing, and that is in relation to resilience. Just this week, there was in the Scientific American there was an article released about the undoing effect of positive emotions on negative emotions. You know, it kind of builds from Dr Barbara Fredrickson's work the the broaden and build theory, and the latest research is showing that it's not just about removing negative emotions and negative you know, getting yourself out of negative situations, that that lowers things like anxiety and depression, helps people overcome those and feel better. It's even more importantly, it's cultivating the positive emotions and learning how to savor them. And so that's that's a big part of what I've been writing about for many years, and I was really excited to see that in Scientific American this week. So in a nutshell, I think that's kind of where we're going during our time together.

**Kara Driscoll** 05:54

Well, incredible. Thank you for sharing all of that, and I want to dig in a little bit deeper on that last part about positive emotions versus negative emotions and leaning into the positive. And so we'll talk about that a little bit later. But I also just want to you know, say how much I appreciate you sharing your personal story, and I think it's really interesting, because it resonates so much with the stories of Holocaust survivors that we feature in our museum. And, you know, oftentimes, especially during the pandemic, working at this organization, you have to think about those stories and the things that they survived and they were able to rebuild their lives. And you know, much like your parents, start from scratch. And I think when you reflect on that resilience, it's so helpful to know that you know we we all, can make, make it through different challenges. When you know, people who have experienced the worst of humanity can rebuild their lives in the United States,

**Kara Driscoll** 07:08

but to your point, that doesn't come without negative emotions just because they survived. So I appreciate you sharing that. So let's talk a little bit more about your book. You say that any of the 24 character strengths that we use throughout our our mission can be tapped into to increase our resilience are some more closely tied to resilience. And how have you seen that kind of play out with the people that you've worked with?

**Fatima Doman** 07:38

Yes, some are more closely tied to resilience. And I'd like to say just a couple of sentences for our listeners or viewers who may not know a lot about the science of character strengths. So 50 of the world's most elite scholars in the fields of like sociology, psychology, they came together, and with a million dollars of funding, they studied human virtues, human character strengths. And they wanted to see what's universal in in all cultures around the globe. And they found that there were... they... They cataloged 24 strengths of character that they felt that were universal, that that all cultures embrace and and set apart as virtues, something to you know, that that defines the good life for people and and their highest and best selves. So looking at character strengths and which of those 24 are most highly correlated to resilience. We know, again, from Dr Martinez and Ruch, their their research from 2016 is very highly regarded because it was a very comprehensive study on race, on resilience, although there are now over 1000 global peer reviewed studies on character strengths and how they impact us in many ways, but they found that there were several character strengths that were highly correlated to resilience, and some of those are things like kindness, kindness to self, bravery, bravery rose to the top, you know, the ability to really look at your situation and deal with it right. There were character strengths, like spirituality, you know, just finding meaning. And we're not talking religiosity, but you know, the the undying aspect of the human spirit, the the that that part of us that rises to the occasion and and that that finds meaning in what we face and and what we experience in life. So yes, there were, there were several character strengths. That are highly correlated to resilience, and I write about them in detail in my book.

**Kara Driscoll** 10:07

It's interesting, because a lot of the character strengths that you just mentioned are also the ones that we tie or associate with. You know, being an upstander, someone who not only stands up for themselves, but for others. How do you kind of correlate resilience with people who are able to, you know, stand in their bravery and make a difference for themselves and others?

**Fatima Doman** 10:33

So we know that our human experience is it's a collective experience, I mean, and we know that psychological well-being has a lot to do with community, so not only standing up for ourselves, but that aspect of standing up for others, because human beings are social by nature, And we thrive when those around us thrive, so innately we know this, and when we see that others are in need of us to speak up, to stand up for their well being as well, we tend to rise to that occasion. And that's one of the things that I love about this, this terminology, upstander and the ripple effect. How can we all stand up for each other, help each other more, help each other thrive? So yes, for all those reasons, I believe that we're more resilient when we're building resilience together. It's not just an individual pursuit, although it is although it is that as well. In many instances.

**Kara Driscoll** 11:46

Sure, you know and you talk about that collective experience, but you also write in the book about the concept of kind of your inner critic or inner coach. And you know, oftentimes I think people certainly I experienced this, you might be harder on yourself than you would ever be on someone else. So one way that you recommend people grow their resilience is by examining their their self talk so that they can use their words to build themselves up rather than tear themselves down. So walk us through what that kind of looks like, and give us some examples of how to do that. If you find yourself being, you know, kind of overly critical with yourself, then you know, then the way you might be to your friend sitting next to you.

**Fatima Doman** 12:39

So one of my friends and colleagues, Dr Daniel Amen, who actually wrote the forward in my book authentic resilience. He's, he's one of the first people, if not the first, who coined the term automatic negative thoughts. So as human beings, you know, we've through our evolution, we have learned to survive by detecting potential problems in danger, right? And so we, we have these automatic negative thoughts that come up within us. It's, it's a survival mechanism, oh, that can go wrong, that could go wrong, and we need to become aware of those automatic negative thoughts, and we can overcome them. I mean, we can, you know, our consciousness is has, has evolved a lot, and and we, as you know, our our social structures and and our human experience has evolved, and we aren't necessarily running from that tiger anymore, although metaphorically, we see it and feel it in many ways, but we can develop this capacity to turn down the volume on the inner critic and turn up the volume on the inner coach. That's the way I like to look at it. I feel that when we're objective, when we are focused on the positive emotions, broadening and building those looking for what's working. For example, one of the taglines that you'll hear a lot about positive psychology, and I like to use it a lot, is moving from what's wrong to what's strong. So rather than just focusing on our weaknesses and everything that's going wrong, shifting that focus to what's strong, our strengths of character, the capacities that we have to deal with these things, and then also the very small little things in life that we can savor to produce those positive emotions and that that has to do with this article I was talking about earlier, that came out in Scientific American this past week, and it talks about the positive. What. They call Pat, P, A, T, positive app, the affect treatment, they're finding that it's one of the most powerful ways to help people move out of anxiety and depression. So if we can even find just small things that are going well or small things that we can savor, you know it can be that wonderful, steamy cup of coffee or tea in the morning that brings pleasure just really sitting with it and enjoying it and soaking in the positive emotions that it brings, or the smile of your child or a loved one or friend, and find the little things to relish that that has a beneficial effect that they're finding is even stronger than cognitive behavioral therapy. They're finding that it's more effective in reducing anxiety and depression, going back to the critic versus coach and I have on you know throughout my book, for example, the first one is on page 49 I have these charts right, the critic, inner critic column, the inner Coach column, where people can read through those and self assess and even mark where they are on the continuum. Are they leaning more toward the inner critic or more towards the inner coach, and how can they shift that continuum and spend more time amplifying the volume of the inner coach, who looks at things objectively, who savers the positive emotions, who intentionally cultivates positive emotions, which we know from research have an undoing effect on negative emotions. So for example, one of the things that I have people do when I teach my workshops or give my keynote speeches, I'll have everybody in the audience stand up, and I'll ask them, just give me a couple of minutes. I want you to just get into your body like pay attention to your physiological responses as I read two very distinct lists of words. I'm going to read one from the inner critic list, and then one list, and then a list from the inner coach list. Pay attention to what your body does and the thoughts that flood through your mind when you hear these so I'll ask them to close their eyes for just a moment while I read them. So I'm going to do just one example of this inner critic. Okay? Weakness focus. Problem oriented. Fixed mindset. Blame. Judge. Disregard. Know it already. Afraid of change.

**Fatima Doman** 17:50

And now from the inner coach list, Strengths focus. Solution-oriented. Growth mindset. Learn. Respect. Curious. Now, tell me, I'd love, I'd love to hear from you. Kara, tell me what did you experience? Did you have any physiological reactions or any thoughts that came into your mind as I wrote the two different lists?

**Kara Driscoll** 18:25

Yeah, it's, I mean, really interesting to think about what those different words mean to me. And you know, I want to associate with the latter list, with different things, with work or my personal life. And I think I work to do a lot of that, to be solution-oriented, you know, to try it and lean into those positive emotions. But then sometimes I think some of those on the first list come more naturally, and you have to work through that to to not lean into it, right?

**Fatima Doman** 19:07

right, right. So, and it's a matter of, we can, we can build a muscle, literally, you know, this psychological muscle of moving, moving more to the Inner Coach perspective, I call it a mindset in the book. We can cultivate that mindset over time, and the more we do it intentionally, the more it becomes a, you know, a default, a more of a comfortable place that we go and we we gain that, that habit of looking for you, the those areas in our lives where we can approach them, you know, as an inner coach, a solution, focus, approach to life, rather than a problem. Focus. And by the way, it's really interesting. There's research around. This that show shows that when you're in a coaching relationship, coaches who take people to solution focus consistently tend to have one study even showed 80% higher goal attainment with the person that they're coaching rather than focusing in on problems. And when I was trained as an executive coach at Columbia University, they taught us to say, "What problem, challenge or solution are you seeking with coaching?" And now it's all solution oriented, based on the new neuroscience that you know, the studies that that we're seeing now that show that that focusing in on the solution rather than the problem, it takes you down a very different trajectory. All of your energy and attention is on the solution, not to minimize the need to look at problems or to process problems, or for sure, not to minimize the need to process trauma things like that, there's a place for that, and we need to do that work, and we shouldn't run away from that work or shame in it or be afraid of it, but we don't want to spend too much time there. We want to spend most of our time on solutions.

**Kara Driscoll** 21:18

Well, we could probably talk for another two hours, but I'll just end with you know one, one more question, when you think about resilience and you talk to people about it, what's kind of the largest misconception or about resilience that people you know think about when they think about cultivating it? Or what would you want people to know as they try and be more resilient in their day to day life?

**Fatima Doman** 21:48

That is a great question. Thank you for asking that. Because there are some misconceptions, I would say one of the most common misconceptions is some people may think, well, others are just born more resilient. It's in their DNA they can handle stress better. You know, my family doesn't handle stress well. And you know, so environment and and also your your physical makeup, your your DNA. And so we're finding that we can learn. We can learn to build resilience. We can build the skills around resilience. And that's another reason I wrote the book. I wanted people to see the things that are in their power to, you know, I mean, maybe they've inherited a, you know, a nervous system that's a little bit more ramped up, okay, but there are things in their power that they can use to calm down their nervous system. There's so many modalities, so many techniques, and I write about many of them in the book. So pick the ones that resonate with you and try them. And, you know, like I said earlier, over 1000 global research studies are showing that this really works. It even boosts our immune systems. They're finding a very direct connection to building our resilience and using our character strengths to do it, and how that impacts our immune system in a positive way.

**Kara Driscoll** 23:22

Well, hopefully that inspires people, because you know, really, all that you can control is what you can control, and you don't have any control over what's swirling around you. And so if you can kind of focus on that and figure out ways to build your your own inner resilience, I think we all need that in this moment right now. So where can people get your book if they want to order it?

**Fatima Doman** 23:49

So you can find "Authentic Strengths," that was my first book, and then "Authentic Resilience," the one we're talking about right now. You can find them on Amazon, and you can also go to authentic strengths -that's plural - dot com, authenticstrengths.com scroll down the landing page, you'll see a blue button that says, take the free strengths survey. And well over 20 million people have done it so far. We've, you know, I've lost count, but go online and take your strengths survey. It'll give you a free two page report, and you can start to unpack and understand your strengths better. I also have a YouTube channel, Fatima Doman YouTube channel, and there are some educational videos there as well about the science of positive psychology,

**Kara Driscoll** 24:44

Amazing. And we'll put all of those links in the notes of this episode so that people can check that out. Well, I just want to thank you so much. This was a great conversation for me to have, personally, as I start out this week and. And hopefully it'll be very helpful to a lot of people. So we really appreciate your time.

**Fatima Doman** 25:06

It's such a pleasure. Thanks for having me.

**Jackie Congedo** 25:09

Our thanks to the Mayerson Family Foundation and the VIA Institute on Character for supporting this series. We have a link in the show notes so you can take your own free character strengths survey and learn more about your strengths. We'd love to hear about your experiences with character strengths and how you're using them to stand up. You can reach us anytime by email, and you can listen anytime on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or visit Holocaustandhumanity.org/podcast. You can also connect with us on Instagram and Tiktok @holocaustandhumanity and X and Facebook at@CincyHHC. The Upstander Ripple Effect is a production of the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center. This series is part of the Cynthia & Harold Gutman Family Center for Storytelling. Visit us in person at historic Union Terminal in Cincinnati, Ohio, or online at Holocaustandhumanity.org.

**Jackie Congedo** 25:59

Managing Producer is Anne Thompson. Consulting Producer is Joyce Kamen. Technical Producer is Robert Mills. Technical Director is Josh Emerson. Opening sequence is by Ken Furman. Select music is by Kick Lee, and this is Recorded at Technical Consulting Partners studios in Cincinnati, Ohio.