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Recipes for resilience in challenging times

A guide for translators

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Introduction

We all know that translation can be a lonely and stressful job. Most translators are self-employed, typically working alone, dealing with clients by email and often not speaking to anyone at work unless there is a problem, or even a crisis. Following our last year's Guide on Stress Management, and with the additional challenges of a worldwide pandemic, we asked members of the Translating Division Steering Group to tell us about their individual Recipes for Resilience in these difficult times of global health crisis and series of national lockdowns. In this guide, they are imparting us with their thoughts on the pandemic, how it has affected them privately and professionally and their coping strategies as well as some useful tips and words of wisdom.

Karine Chevalier-Watts
MCIL Chartered Linguist



“I certainly believe that it is through experience that I have developed my own capacity for resilience.”



Rachel Wingfield
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Resilience is not something you are born with, but rather it is something that you learn and develop skills to become better at. At the same time, the capacity to effectively cope with, recover from and adapt to difficult situations differs from person to person,

depending not only on their personality and general outlook on life, but also their cultural heritage, their beliefs as well as their ability to learn from experience.

I certainly believe that it is through experience that I have developed my own capacity for resilience. About two years ago, I went through a major career change when I set myself up as a freelance translator and language tutor, after a 20-year career in the public sector. This transition represented a challenge for me at the time and a test to any resilience I may have developed. I believe that the coping

mechanisms I have learned from experience, as well as professional training courses, have increased my ability to deal with the inevitable challenges, and the daily issues I face as a professional juggling a variety of work commitments, study and parental responsibilities.

Firstly, what I have gathered throughout my working life is that it is essential to keep a positive view of your strengths and competences, whilst being aware and accepting of areas where you might need further development, and if need be, to set out realistic action plans to improve on those areas. Proactively looking back and reviewing stressful events, and how you overcame them, helps to identify those personal strengths and skills that were successful, thus building confidence in your ability to handle challenging events in the future. This process can also, with effort and honesty, highlight those tools and behaviours that did not work so well, and be the catalyst to recognising approaches to avoid or skills needing improving.

Secondly, not all stressful situations are within our control and not every situation can be changed; and reframing those situations to limit their impact can allow you to get through many difficult times.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a source of stress and anxiety for many, including myself of course. As a coping mechanism, I have changed how I initially perceived the pandemic in order to decrease its emotional influence on me. I have also endeavoured to keep things in perspective, to stay calm and confident, and to be mindful of the positivity around me, especially when watching the news.

Finally, with the increase in home-working and the amount of time spent in front of a computer, I felt it was essential for me to set up a daily routine which included regular breaks from the screen, cooking healthy meals, doing some exercise – for example downloading new sports Apps as a fun incentive, and relaxation time of course. Last, but not least, staying connected with my family and friends, even when it sometimes means having yet another Zoom meeting, has been a blessing during the various lockdowns, as it has brought about some normality during what has been a very challenging year.



“I am a veteran of three consecutive lockdowns, so I am fully qualified to share my random lockdown memories.”



Natalia Racheyskova
MCIL Chartered Linguist

Lockdown 1

During the first two weeks we stayed at home, too scared to leave the house. Our first and timid venturing out was a short walk around the block. The passers-by were as scared as we were, and we tried not to breathe when approaching them.

Two weeks later, when we had consumed all our stocks, still fearful, we finally went to a supermarket to buy some food. Accidentally, I bought a pack of dry yeast, which was a big mistake. It led to a new and dangerous hobby – baking bread, cakes, and pies, which, in turn, led to unexpected expanding of our waistlines!

We acquired two new best friends, with whom we never parted – Face Mask and Sanitiser. To look good in the mask, I invested heavily in mascara, eye shadows and eyeliners, but my conscience was clear, because I saved the same amount of money on lipsticks, blushers and highlighters.

We made friends with several neighbouring cats – we enjoyed stroking them and they enjoyed our admiration of them. Cats were not our only friends – we communicated with our close friends via Zoom and Skype. It gave me an incentive to apply plenty of makeup all over my face and to dress up the top half of my body.

By May my hair was overgrown, but my interpreter's workload increased.

Lockdown 2

I don't remember much about the second lockdown, except for different tiers and numerous "do's" and "do not's".

I decided to ignore all this confusing information and, instead, developed my own resilience program consisting of two points:

1. Common sense
2. Self-preservation instinct

My humour was gradually moving to black, but stopped midway at grey, which felt about right at the time.

Lockdown 3

Looks like “déjà vu” from the first lockdown. They say that lessons must be learned, and I’ve learned mine – substituting baking for dancing and longer walks.

The good thing is that all the neighbouring cats are still very friendly and recognise us from previous lockdowns.

I also resigned to the fact that my hair would grow much longer than during the first lockdown, and perfected my skills of cutting my own fringe.

During all three lockdowns I accumulated several types of masks with different layers of protection. By lockdown three, I learned to coordinate the colour of my mask (red, blue, black, beige) with the colour of my outfit. I even have my “Sunday best” mask made from Mulberry silk.

We are more resilient than we think we are. Sometimes the expectation of something terrible happening is more damaging to our physical and mental wellbeing than the event itself and all of us can vouch for that.

“If you believe that nothing bad is happening to you, then nothing bad is happening to you!”, providing you are washing and sanitising your hands, wearing a mask and keeping social distancing of two or more meters...



“I’ve come to the conclusion that resilience is acceptance.”



Vasiliki Prestidge
MCIL Chartered Linguist

Resilience, noun: the ability of people or things to recover quickly after something unpleasant, such as shock, injury, etc.

But, what if the unpleasant is prolonged? Can we continue measuring resilience taking into consideration only the ability and our speed to recover following the unpleasant experience? 2020 forced me to have several conversations with myself. It made me reassess everything from my daily habits and lifestyle choices, to my work and place of residence. It brought back into focus what’s important: physical and mental health, the basic right to safety and home, meaningful work, and deeper human connections. In a state of painful, yet blissful awareness, I’ve come to grow my gratitude for having all of the above, while at the same time, accepting that, on certain days, it’s OK not to feel grateful. To recognise that all feelings are valid and to hold space for them. With morning meditation and gentle yoga movements, to running 15k around Royal Parks, jumping on endless Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, and Webex calls, delivering thousands of words every

month, and sitting still for 5 minutes, listening to my heartbeat, breathing deeply, walking by the river, observing the leaves, the waves, the clouds, I’ve come to the conclusion that resilience is acceptance. Resilience is knowing your limitations, listening to your body, paying attention to your thoughts. Resilience is setting work boundaries and respecting them. Resilience is dancing in the kitchen, listening to music, keeping the radio on for company, and playing a sleep story at night. Resilience is going to bed early. It is not about bouncing back or the admirable speed in which you do so. It is about identifying what forced you to become resilient in the first place. The ability of noting all experiences, without labelling them as positive or negative, honouring all your emotions in awareness, understanding them in acceptance, and knowing how to respond to them effectively, that’s what makes you resilient.

“I planned my work in blocks, reducing the number of projects and videocalls per day...”



Sandra Fernandes Tavares
MCIL Chartered Linguist
Portuguese & Spanish Translator/Interpreter

Working from home with a 3-year-old running around during the pandemic initially seemed like a Mission Impossible; one that really put resilience to the test.

I realised that I needed to quickly find a viable solution to achieve balance in the family by establishing a routine at home which could be combined with work productivity, while maintaining sanity.

The first step was to organise the day based on advice to maintain a routine as normal as possible so that my daughter could anticipate what would happen and thus feel safe and structure her thoughts. This meant accepting that I would work at lower productivity levels, readjusting working hours coupled with much needed breaks. While the delivery of projects and stress of deadlines were very difficult to handle at first,

in prioritising the above, I planned my work in blocks, reducing the number of projects and videocalls per day, around times for colouring, stamping, painting, reading, play dough, naps, free play with my toddler. The weekend is dedicated to relaxing, cooking, exercising.

There is no magic formula and the only promise is that there will be better days than others, but essentially it is about maintaining a permanent positive thinking.

“Let’s give ourselves time to recharge and carry our burden with a new-found strength.”



Martina Eco
MCIL Chartered Linguist

Resilience, in my opinion, doesn’t mean powering through whatever life throws at us and staying productive and focussed no matter what. Society nowadays seems to praise those who work day and night, those who are in a constant state of productivity, those who juggle large numbers of projects and tasks at

the same time... only to be crushed by fatigue and the pressure of success after a while.

To me, resilience is about knowing when it’s time to stop. It’s about recognising that we are humans, and as humans we need to switch off from time to time.

The Coronavirus pandemic has made this clearer than ever. Many of us are now burdened by new responsibilities, whether it’s home-schooling children, caring for a loved one, or simply having to take extra care of the space we are in 24/7. On top of that, we don’t have the chance to escape the routine and meet a friend for a coffee, or go to a conference to network with colleagues, or travel to a new destination. The burden can get really heavy really fast.

So it’s time we learn to listen to our bodies and minds to know when to switch off for a while. Read a book. Play a videogame. Lay down on the sofa and listen to some music. Go for a walk outside. Videocall a friend. Play with our children. Cuddle up with our pets. Take a bath. Let’s give ourselves time to recharge and carry our burden with a new-found strength.

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