



IssueBrief

October 2020

Build resilience personally and professionally: Seven strategies for case managers

It's not getting any easier. Case managers have been persevering throughout this epidemic, supporting clients, clients' families and of course, their own friends and families. We've discussed the profound impact of COVID-19 before.

"When the pandemic first started, I received some advice that has helped me these past few months," says Commission CEO MaryBeth Kurland, CAE. "Give yourself grace.' I understand that to mean don't be too hard on yourself. No one has been in this situation before. Mistakes are going to happen. It's what you do after making a mistake that speaks to who you are and speaks to your resilience."

Educator and resilience expert Chantrise Sims-Holliman, EdD, shares that perspective. "Don't focus on the situation, focus on your reaction to it. It's the reactions we can control, and it's our reactions that define us."

Holliman worked with groups and individuals to help them develop strength, hope and resiliency within themselves. Anyone can call themselves a resilience expert. Holliman has the scars to prove it.

Two years ago, she survived what's called a "widow maker" heart attack. After coding nine times, she awoke to find herself partially paralyzed from the waist down and a bilateral, lower-limb amputee.

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It was devastating—at first. But she made the conscious decision to take back her life, and she’s sharing her hard-won knowledge with others.

1 Cultivate self-awareness

Part of cultivating self-awareness is understanding who we are, what we value and what we believe, Holliman says. We must be able to evaluate ourselves objectively to take an honest look at who we are.

Sometimes, what we see isn’t pretty. “We are our most authentic selves when all hell is breaking loose,” she says. “Who we truly are always surfaces when circumstances kick us in the teeth.” What’s important is that we have the power to overcome.

How do we get there?

- **Recognize your strengths and your weaknesses.** Then focus on making improvements as needed.

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- **Reflect.** Think about your actions, decisions, responses to stressors, etc. What would you change? What did you handle well? Self-reflection provides an opportunity to consider and address any issues that might have gone unnoticed.

- **Ask for feedback.** We don’t see ourselves as others see us. That’s why it’s important to get honest feedback from someone we trust, such as a friend, colleague or mentor.

2 Have a positive attitude: What you say matters

“Watch your mouth. The words we speak create the bricks that we use to build the houses we live in,” Holliman warns.

Chances are, you’ve heard this message before. Maybe you are skeptical. Perhaps you’ve dismissed it as “happy talk.” But there is a scientific basis for this. For instance, a 2013 study found that what we see is a function not only of incoming visual information, but it may also be influenced by language. Put another way, words have a powerful influence on perception.¹

In a 2010 study, researchers monitored subjects’ brain responses to heard and imagined negative words. They discovered that

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painful or negative words increase implicit processing within the area of the brain that plays a key role in regulating emotion. In other words, the study showed that negative words release stress and anxiety hormones.²

But even when we do understand the power of positive self-talk, it can be hard to practice—especially when it feels like everything around us is falling apart. But that’s when it matters most.

Of course, in the middle of a pandemic that is destroying lives, it’s hard to have a positive attitude. But there are things you can do to cultivate one.

- **Choose to be happy.** She acknowledges that it’s not as simple as it sounds. Some situations you and your clients face warrant sadness, anger—even outrage. However, many don’t—or at least they have a bright side. “Make a choice to try to see the bright side of a situation,” Holliman says.

1 Lupyán G, Ward EJ. Language can boost otherwise unseen objects into visual awareness. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2013 Aug 27;110(35):14196-201. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1303312110.

2 Richter M, Eck J, Straube T, Miltner WH, Weiss T. Do words hurt? Brain activation during the processing of pain-related words. *Pain*. 2010;148(2):198-205. doi: 10.1016/j.pain.2009.08.009

Kurland adds another observation: Even if the situation *is* terrible, we have an obligation to be there for our client. “Focusing on what’s possible eases the path forward for case manager and client alike.”

- **Stop complaining.** Not everything is bad, Holliman says. “Find the good stuff. Don’t live in absolutes.”
- **Do something nice for someone.** That someone can be you, says Holliman, “but I find my attitude improves more when I do something nice for someone else.”

3 Be fearless

“There’s nothing wrong with fear—unless it prevents you from fulfilling your destiny,” Holliman says. On this point, she quotes media mogul Arianna Huffington: “*Fearlessness is not the absence of fear. It’s the mastery of fear. It’s about getting up one more time than we fall down.*”

Some fear is healthy, even beneficial. It’s that healthy fear that helps keep us safe when we are in a dangerous environment. Fear is one reason we agree to wear masks. It’s why we lock our doors. It’s why we use oven mitts when cooking and eye protection in the workshop.

But we’re not talking about that sort of fear. We’re talking about irrational fear—fear that can keep you from moving forward.

“To be resilient, face your fears. If they are irrational, push them away,” Holliman says.

We often fear something we don’t feel confident about. She shared her own personal experience after her amputations. Initially she was terrified to go out in public. “I didn’t want anybody to see me without my legs, because I was afraid of how people were going to respond.” But she faced her fear and went out anyway. “And that was pretty much a wrap! I now go anywhere and everywhere I want.”

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One of the most pernicious aspects of fear is that it captures us in a “what if” cycle. *What if this happens? What if she says this? What if I can’t do that?* We can paralyze ourselves thinking about all the terrible things that could happen, and we end up doing nothing. That’s why overcoming our fears is so important, she says. “We could be missing out on a whole bunch of good stuff if we allow ourselves to stay stuck in that fear cycle.”

Of course, knowing that is only half the journey. How do we cultivate fearlessness?

- **Speak to it.** She means this literally: The moment fear shows up,

stop and address it. Ask it what it wants. “What is it trying to get you to avoid? If it’s trying to keep you from doing something that can be for your benefit, you need to dig a little deeper and figure out the reason for the fear.”

- **Act anyway.** Sometimes we just have to acknowledge our fear and do what we fear anyway. Sometimes the best way to conquer fear is to do the very thing we fear.
- **Reframe it.** Instead of worrying about what *might* happen, we can ask what’s the worst that could happen—or even better, what’s the *best*? This, Holliman says, moves us out of the paralyzing “what if” cycle.

Overcoming fear is powerful. It’s your reaction to fear, not the fear itself, that determines how your life story will develop.

4 Find role models and mentors

Finding role models and mentors can help you grow in ways you never imagined, bolstering your resilience in the process. Here’s how Justice Sonia Sotomayor explains it: “A role model in the flesh provides more than inspiration; his or her very existence is confirmation of possibilities one may have every reason to doubt, saying, ‘Yes, someone like me can do this.’”

Holliman shares that perspective. “We often need the reassurance of

seeing someone else accomplish great things to inspire and encourage us to do the same. The same is true when we are trying to increase our resilience.”

Among her role models are Oprah Winfrey, whose story of overcoming adversity is well known, and Steven Spielberg. She looks up to the director not only because she’s a huge fan. She also admires his resilience: The USC Film School rejected him *three* times.

Like role models, mentors can help you expand your horizons and build your resilience. Unlike most role models, mentors are people you know well. (And yes, mentors can also be role models.)

“Our mentors support and inspire us in our daily lives; such relationships are especially valuable when the going gets tough,” explains Kurland. “Most CCMs can point to at least one person who helped them along their professional development journey as either formal or informal mentors.”

In turn, many of those CCMs have developed others through mentorship. Strong mentor relationships enrich both parties, often leading to lifelong friendships.

And that takes us to the fifth point.

5 Develop your outer circle

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have a vested interest in our success,” Holliman says.

You develop resilience by sharing how you conquered your challenges and fears, your triumphs and missteps. By sharing all this, you let those in your circle know they aren’t alone in their mishaps, missteps or mistakes, Holliman says. And they can do the same for you.

Do you need to build or broaden your outer circle?

■ **Join an organization.** Many of the people you might need or want in your outer circle can come from social clubs, sports teams, religious organizations, professional associations, volunteer organizations, etc.

■ **Look at the people you find yourself drawn to professionally or socially.** If you want to build resilience, surround yourself with people who understand how to overcome adversity and, more importantly, have done it themselves. “You become who you hang around with,” Holliman says.

■ **Identify your allies.** These are the people who will have your back in your professional setting and with whom you share similar interests, goals or concerns.

Even more important than your outer circle is your inner one.

6 Cultivate your inner circle

“Your inner circle are the people I affectionately refer to as your crew,” Holliman says. These are the people who will cry with you and for you, they will laugh with you and for you and, if necessary, they will fight with you and for you.

When you’re striving to become more resilient, you need to be around people you can trust—people who will help you grow. On this point, she quotes author Alice Walker. “No person is your friend who demands your silence or denies your right to grow.”

Assess, and if necessary, cull your inner circle, Holliman counsels.

“Make sure that people in your VIP section are actually there to cheer you on. Not everyone who is *with* you is actually *for* you.”

One tip: If you consistently give more than you get, it’s time to reevaluate your circle.

“One of the biggest enemies to resilience is having people in our lives who aren’t good for us. Those who never have anything nice to say about us, or anyone else for that matter, are not people who

need to be occupying space in our lives. If you had any of those people in your inner circle, you need to give them the boot, quickly.”

She softens this advice when it’s someone close: Have a candid conversation and get to the root of the problem. But if that doesn’t work, let them go.

7 Practice self-care

“You can’t pour from an empty cup. Loving yourself allows you to love others better. If you can’t help yourself first, then you can’t help anybody else either,” Holliman says.

Kurland adamantly agrees: Self-care benefits both the case managers and the client. “By taking care of yourselves, you are better equipped to help others.”

The Commission has long focused on the value of self-care but never more so than today. Throughout

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the pandemic, it’s been sharing self-care resources and offering programming to support and inspire case managers. You’ll find an array of resources for self-care, including COVID-specific information here: ccmcertification.org/blog/understanding-enemy-curated-list-covid-19-resources-case-managers.

In addition, the Commission’s “Push Pause: Stop. Exhale. Share” campaign features short videos from inspirational speakers, including Holliman, who offers words of hope, inspiration, motivation and wisdom.

More generally, what does self-care look like? Holliman offers the following:

- When we prioritize self-care in our bodies, we drink plenty of water and take care of our physical needs. We eat good, healthful food.
- When we prioritize self-care in our minds, we do things that put our minds at ease, like coloring or reading a good book.
- When we prioritize self-care of the soul and spirit, we choose to do things that protect our inner peace, like pray or meditate, or sometimes enjoy some quiet time in nature.

Taking a vacation—when possible—can accomplish all three if, says Holliman, you “do only what it is that you want to do, even if that means you don’t do anything at all.”

She has one more piece of advice—one that’s difficult for

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many case managers. “Remember that ‘No’ is a complete sentence.”

Equipped to meet the enemy

The latest COVID-19 data suggest the challenges case managers face aren’t about to subside. “You may better comprehend the difficulties faced during this pandemic, but it certainly doesn’t make the situation any easier to bear,” Kurland acknowledges.

That’s why it’s so important to cultivate resilience. “The situation remains dire, but as a community, we can become stronger and more resilient, if we take care of ourselves,” she adds. “I’ll say it again: Give yourself grace.” ■

About the Experts



Chantrise Sims-Holliman, EdD
Author, Speaker, Educator,
Resilience Coach



MaryBeth Kurland, CAE
Chief Executive Officer
Commission for Case Manager Certification

Dr. Chantrise Sims Holliman is best known for teaching others how to move mountains—academically, professionally and personally. Her message of hope, resilience and flexible thinking transforms the lives of audiences worldwide, allowing her audience to triumph over fear and failure into a life of perpetual faith. For Chantrise, it's important that people are not only inspired but conquer that and so much more for themselves.

As a partial paraplegic and bilateral amputee, Chantrise's life was forever changed when trauma stopped her in her tracks. And although it wasn't planned or expected, she consciously chooses to use what others may have used as an excuse to give up, quit and throw in the towel, as building blocks to her bounce-back. Her quirky sense of humor, coupled with her authenticity, boldness and passion for the success of others, makes her a highly sought-after speaker for people of all backgrounds.

Holding a Doctorate in Education from The University of West Georgia, it comes as no surprise that Chantrise has authored numerous books and other educational products. In addition to *TeachStayLove: A Reflective Journal to Help You Stay in the Profession You Love* and *Shoes Without Feet: A Journey of Strength, Hope, Obstacles, Encouragement, and Success*, her third book, *Noah Had an Ark. You Need a R.A.F.T.: Resiliency and Flexible Thinking* is sure to catapult readers to new levels in business, ministry and life in general.

MaryBeth Kurland leads and sets the Commission's strategic mission and vision. She manages relationships with likeminded organizations and oversees business development as well as the Commission's programs, products and services. She works directly with the Board of Commissioners, building its corps of volunteer and subject-matter experts who directly support and evaluate certification and related services.

Prior to becoming CEO, Kurland served as the Commission's chief operations officer and was staff lead for the development and launch of the Commission's signature conference, the CCMC New World Symposium®. Kurland brings extensive experience to her role, having served as executive director of organizations including the Association of Medical Media, Office Business Center Association International and the League of Professional System Administrators.

She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Delaware and is a member of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence, the American Society of Association Executives and the Mid-Atlantic Society of Association Executives. In 2011, Kurland was recognized as Association TRENDS Young & Aspiring Association Professional.



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