



TYPE R LEADERS

AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE RESILIENCE RIPPLE EFFECT

Ama Marston

Many of our greatest leaders, both famous and lesser known, have taken hardship and used it to transform themselves,

grow into their leadership roles, and leverage those skills for the contributions they make to business and the larger world. In other words, they are Type Rs—or one of the increasing number of individuals, leaders, businesses, families, and even communities that use adversity as a source of learning and innovation.

This couldn't be more important in our modern world for several reasons. Our new normal is a perfect storm of personal, professional, and global turbulence. Success amidst this increasing amount of disruption depends on Transformative Resilience—turning challenges into opportunities and creating next iterations. And ultimately, as leaders, we create a ripple effect. Regardless of if we are leading processes or projects, teams, organizations, communities or even nations, our choices chart the course of what comes next—whether it's an increasingly turbulent or more prosperous future.



A Changing World Requires Changing Paradigms

The nature of stress and the types of trials and tribulations we face have changed dramatically in recent years. We now live in a world where significant global challenges—including climate change, terrorism, and political turmoil—impact us daily, alongside the stresses and strains of our professional and personal lives, from illnesses to job changes and business restructuring. Leaders also face greater pressures than ever before. As a result their tenure in leadership roles is becoming shorter and the measure of success is increasingly dependent upon their ability to not just manage in, but harness and transform the increasing amounts of disruptive change and volatility around them.

Today there is a significant shift in the ways we think about adversity and resilience. Many people think of resilience as recovering or bouncing back. But, returning to the baseline—to the status quo—isn't enough. It isn't beneficial and perhaps isn't even possible to return to the way things were after grappling with disruptive change, stress, and difficult times. And ultimately, trying to succeed today with what worked yesterday will only make us vulnerable.

In our chaotic and ever-changing realities we have to learn, grow, and update our outlooks and ways of operating in order to thrive. Our challenge is not to overcome change, stress, and adversity—it's to meet them head-on. We have to use them as an opportunity to progress so that we are better prepared for new realities and challenges and have the resources for driving the future—our own as well as that of our local and global communities.

The Type R Skills Ripple Effect

Our mindsets, skills, and vision are the building blocks for not only our personal success, but they are what will transform the face of leadership, the future of work, and the success of our organizations, businesses, families, and communities. Type Rs, whether individually or as part of a group or business culture, start with the core belief that we have the ability to learn more, become more capable, adapt to our circumstances, and grow in the face of challenge. This forms the foundations or the structure that supports the Type R skills and behaviors: adapting, cultivating a healthy relationship to control, continually learning, developing a sense of purpose, leveraging support, and actively engaging.

By using adversity in our lives to promote growth and innovation, we have a knock on effect that influences the outlooks, decisions, and actions of a significant number of others as we navigate uncertainty and write next chapters. That makes us our own greatest resource and one of the most important assets for successful 21st century living.

Type Rs understand that leadership amidst difficult circumstances is about much more than an individual response. It's about leveraging the learning from hardship to create a broader impact, creating a ripple effect.

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First, leaders use these skills to increase their own abilities so that they are healthy, effective and strategic, can model good behavior, and are able to balance the varying demands they face. Second, with a stronger Type R skillset, leaders are equipped to navigate the challenges of organizational cultures and the dynamics of their industries and help shape them. And finally, Type R leaders can call on their personal resilience to chart a path through—and find new approaches to—difficult situations, unforeseen shocks, and entrenched conflicts in the larger world.

Opportunity from Challenges

Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, famously said that “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.” Historians more knowledgeable than I can debate the merits and deficits of Churchill’s leadership and decisions—some of which, including his views on race, have been called into question in modern times. And yet experiences like being imprisoned as a war journalist transformed him not just as a man, but as a leader and a visionary who created a wide-reaching and lasting impact.

After seeing the horrors of World War II, Churchill was the first to propose a “United States of Europe”—later to become the European Union—to ensure grounds for lasting peace and a shared common future of prosperity that would bind together nations after years spent locked in conflict. In 2015, trade within the European Union countries alone was worth EUR 3,063 billion. As Kofi Annan, the former head of the United Nations recently pointed out, the notion of war between these nations, particularly those in Western Europe, is unthinkable due to the partnership—even as the UK negotiates an exit from the union after a divisive vote over the matter.



And yet, the story of Transformative Resilience and Type Rs that is emerging is a more modern one. Take for instance Indra Nooyi, who is part of a new generation of leadership in which more women and people of varying backgrounds are taking the reins and beginning to understand the importance of their experiences and their roles in an increasingly diverse, but also turbulent, global context.

When Nooyi was tapped to lead Pepsi in 2006, she faced a convergence of mounting pressures. It was increasingly difficult to compete for market share in the industry. Obesity was growing at alarming rates around the world and consumers were becoming more health conscious. Pepsi was denied permission to open plants in certain countries with limited water resources, making natural resources an increasing concern. And the issue of plastic waste was a growing problem.

Instead of competing for more market share in a quickly shrinking soft drink industry, Nooyi decided that she had to reframe, adapt, and transform the core of Pepsi's culture and business to fit with our changing and turbulent world, shifting a large portion of Pepsi's portfolio towards healthier products, and integrating greater waste and natural resource management targets.

Nooyi also has a deep-rooted sense that change starts with her ability to transform herself and her way of thinking. "I cannot just expect the organization to improve if I don't improve myself and lift the organization," she explained to *Fast Company*. But she also had to educate and transform Pepsi's internal culture, shifting from seeing issues such as these as a matter of corporate social responsibility to them being the core of what will make the business profitable in the future. Wall Street investors who were very critical of the changes that Nooyi was making have now seen proof that a different business model can be profitable. Annual net revenues had grown to \$63 million in 2015 compared to \$35 million in 2006. And, the company estimates that it has saved \$600 million between 2011 and 2016 through water, energy, packaging, and waste reduction initiatives around the world.

Others have leveraged significant personal loss into strengthening their leadership and have used it to create a broader impact. In 2006, on the eve of hosting a global conference as Executive Director of a global women's organization, Joanna Kerr received the shocking news that her father had committed suicide.

It threw her into a very difficult period. But it was one that allowed her to strengthen skills like the ability to contextualize uncertainty, accept a lack of control and embrace the discomfort and perspective of others on an individual level, in her leadership, and in her approach to global challenges.

Years later, when Kerr became the Executive Director of Greenpeace Canada, the skills, vision, and compassion garnered from that earth-shattering experience have been critical for her leadership and invaluable in helping her manage the challenges of steering an organization. Last year, when her team went into crisis mode after losing an important senior manager, Kerr brought a fresh outlook to help the team gain perspective about the notion of crisis and the opportunity for growth that it held for the other senior members of staff, highlighting their strengths and abilities to weather difficulties.

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But she also used the skills and power of self-reflection she developed in response to her family tragedy to influence global environmental concerns in the Arctic. One of her first acts as Executive Director was to issue an apology to the Inuit who lost their livelihoods after a Greenpeace campaign on commercial seal-hunting in the mid 1970s snowballed and influenced broader global bans. This has allowed for renewed trust and collaboration with the Clyde River Inuit to address shared concerns about present day impacts on their livelihoods as well as global climate change concerns.

Many of the challenges we face, whether a bump in the road or an earth-shattering loss, are not circumstances that we would wish for or seek out. And yet for many of our most effective leaders, these challenges propel them to engage in the self-reflection and the kind of strenuous, but also rewarding, learning that comes from continually testing and strengthening their Type R skills in the face of challenges.

As we cultivate our own Type R skills and Transformative Resilience, we can begin to share these new skills with others by being transparent about where we are struggling and what has worked in areas where we have had success with new approaches. We can use our new abilities to think about the work environment and cultures that we create for our teams and organizations and the solutions we propose when faced with the next big challenge, whether it's related to people and culture or operations.

But, additionally, as we feel more capable in our Type R skills and we are less bogged down by the immediate impact of challenging situations, we can zoom out. As we reframe how our experiences fit within a larger global context, we can begin to create possibilities for coalitions, collaborations, and solutions to some of the world's challenges, both near and far, that are most in need of fresh approaches.

Navigating Turbulence and a Type R Future

While there may be differing perspectives, increasingly the conversations taking place from the boardrooms of corporations to the boardrooms of non-profits, multi-lateral organizations and even community town halls are converging.

The world that leaders are navigating and the problems they are confronting are more challenging than ever before. Many of today's biggest challenges are complex because they can't be pinpointed to a single cause. They often cross local or national borders and require the cooperation of diverse leaders, agencies, or communities that have differing perspectives and priorities. As such, they challenge our core beliefs and behaviors and confront the status quo in ways that are uncomfortable. The more complex that problems become, and reach beyond the ability of a single person to solve, the more that the nuanced and resilient leadership of the Type R leader is needed to adapt to changing times, catalyze and collectively work with others, and undertake a process of ongoing learning.

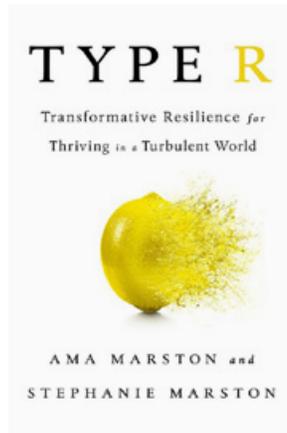
One of the greatest challenges for leaders is accepting the ambiguity of complex problems and the lack of control they have over them. This requires leadership like that of Type Rs who are comfortable with uncertainty, see new experiences as opportunities for learning, and are anchored by their sense of purpose. It also means not trying to force oversimplified solutions on them, acting too quickly, or getting attached to one particular approach in a rapidly changing environment. Furthermore, it means constantly updating and building new skills, being agile and adapting as new information is gained, and leveraging support to collectively tackle them.

With the Type R skills and strength that comes from Transformative Resilience, we are better positioned to bring nuanced thinking and appropriate solutions to the issues that cause turbulence for our employees, our organizations, and the world more broadly. And they allow us to contribute to tackling future challenges before they become crises at whatever level we are working. Whether or not we have a leadership plaque on our door or in our job titles, whether we are leading formally or informally, permanently or temporarily, we all have the opportunity to have a significant impact. By starting with shifting how each of us approaches challenges and adversity and strengthening our Type R skills we bring those to all that we do as we turn challenges into some of our best opportunities. 📌





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About the authors

Ama Marston is an internationally recognized strategy and leadership expert, and the co-author of *Type R: Transformative Resilience for Thriving in a Turbulent World*. She has worked on five continents with global leaders like Mary Robinson and Joseph Stiglitz, FTSE Index and Fortune 500 companies, the United Nations, Oxford University, NGOs, and numerous others. She holds a Masters Degree in International Relations from Columbia University. Ama has contributed to and been featured in the *Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Forbes*, *Investors Business Daily*, *Nasdaq*, and *Cheddar* among others.

Type R was co-written with veteran psychotherapist, five-time author and corporate consultant, Stephanie Marston, whose clients include Bank of America, Corning, Morgan Stanley, the Mayo Clinic and numerous others.

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