

Northwestern  
Kellogg

# Thriving in Challenge!

**How Leaders Can Create Cultures of Resilience  
in Challenging Times**

**Fred Harburg**

# Deliberate Resilience Routines

Neuroscientists assert that 40% to 95% of human behavior is habitual <https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/208/docs/Neal.Wood.Quinn.2006.pdf>. A habit is an automatic, unthinking, persistent reaction to a specific cue.

A thorough scientific study of habits done at the London College University concluded that it takes 66 days, on average, to form a new habit. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0908/09080401>.

Activation energy is the amount of thought and effort required to complete an unfamiliar action. We can accelerate or hinder the acquisition of a new habit by reducing the work (activation energy) needed to do the right thing while simultaneously increasing the effort required to do the wrong thing. A classic example involves junk food. If we remove unhealthy foods from our immediate environment and make nutritious snacks easy to reach and very visible, we decrease the energy needed to make a wise choice. We have made the path of least resistance, the way to growth, and positive change.

We change habits through the consistent, deliberate practice of routines using three steps: **Cue > Routine > Reward**. Here is an example:

Cue - Before bed, put your workout clothes, a piece of fruit, and your workout plan on the floor where you will step out of bed. These actions create a "temporal/physical cue." The cue is attached to a time of day and a place.

Routine - Print the exact workout plan or exercise routine you will use on the card with your clothes. You diminish the mental activation energy needed to think about what you are supposed to do. You can also use an app like The Scientific Seven Minute Workout <https://7minuteworkout.jnj.com/> that was designed and features my friend and colleague, Chris Jordon. Knowing what you will do, and, in this case, being guided by a phone video, further lessens the activation effort needed to get it done.

Reward- Provide yourself with an immediate, intrinsic reward for completing the routine. Here are examples:

- Log your workout in an exercise journal with reflections regarding how good you feel after completing the routine.
- Take a refreshing shower right after working out.
- Note how many calories you burned and how much additional oxygen you absorbed and how that feels.
- Have an affirming conversation about your workout with a positive energizing person in your life

Identify other rewards that are personal to your preferences and vary them over time. People continue to do things that they find rewarding. If there is no reward for doing something, it is unlikely to become a habit. The more compelling, meaningful, personal, and emotionally potent your reason for forming a new pattern is (in this case, exercise), the more likely you are to adopt and keep it. Seeing yourself moving toward the realization of a compelling life purpose (Core Ethos™) is the most potent intrinsic reward available. Focus on your Core Ethos™, both before and after exercise. Think about how physical training relates to the full realization of your best self. If you are mildly committed and ambivalent about this relationship, chances of sustaining the effort for 66 days and beyond are low.

### Avoid Perfectionism and Compulsive Aspirations

Never try to adopt more than two or three new habits at any one time. A sure way to torpedo your goals is to make them excessive. Create personal resilience routines using the following design criteria:

1. **Cue** - When / Where / Situation
2. **Routine** - Specific, realistic, observable
3. **Reward** - Associated with an appealing intrinsic payoff
4. **Small steps** – Big Change! Lower the bar, success builds on success
5. **Accountability** – the power of support is enormous
6. **Shape the Environment to Make Change Easier** – decrease the energy needed to do the right thing

# Physical Routines

- Get to bed early and avoid heavy meals/alcohol before bed.
- Before sleep – put gym clothes on the floor beside your bed.
- Before sleep – do some slow, deep breathing with gratitude.
- Start the day with a morning routine.
- Include reflection, water, stretching, and exercise in a morning routine
- Never skip breakfast
- After each workout - have a low glycemic carb/protein snack.
- Monday & Thursday - do a high-intensity cardio routine.
- Tuesday & Friday – do a high-intensity resistance workout.
- Wednesday & Saturday – do 20 min of steady cardio.
- When parking - park far away from the door
- When going up, take at least five flights of the stairs without the elevator.
- Set your alarm for movement break every 90 minutes
- Throughout the day - sip water infused with fruit juice (no sugar)
- When feeling tense - take 3, slow, deep breaths with shoulder rolls.
- When you receive a cell call – get up and walk while you talk.
- At lunchtime – walk to and from the meal.
- As you sit down to a meal - think “eat until satisfied, not full.”
- At three main meals – set only four handfuls on your plate, store the rest.
- At meals – 2 hands of veg/fruit, 1 hand lean protein, 1 hand grains
- After a meal – finish with a slow deep breath and a walk.
- When you arrive home – take a walk with family or friends.
- At parties – position yourself away from the snack table.

# Emotional Routines

- Practice a centering morning routine – prayer, meditation, etc.
- Throughout the day - take slow, deep, relaxing breaths.
- When you have a conflict - work to resolve it sooner - not later.
- When you fail to resolve a conflict, get a third party to help
- When you feel distressed - take a vigorous walk.
- When things go wrong – take responsibility, learn, gain perspective.
- When things go wrong – gain perspective and find the humor in it.
- When things go right – share credit, learn, gain perspective.
- When socializing - choose events and people that energize you
- During meals – put down your cell phone and savor every bite.
- When dealing with energy drains– resolve them quickly and thoroughly.
- When conversing with others - give them your full attention.
- When you need to communicate - consider how to increase quality.
- When talking - give others 100% focus (no multi-tasking)
- Schedule 30 min each day for a personal care conversation
- Each evening - write one affirming sentence to friend/family.
- When planning the week - schedule time w/ family & friends.
- When planning the week – build in fun.
- Once a week - have a one-on-one meeting/meal with direct reports.
- Once a week - schedule time to call an old friend.
- Once a week - schedule a night to enjoy family and friends.
- Before bed - make gratitude entries in your journal.

# Mental Routines

- Before the day - mentally rehearse crucial events.
- Block the 1<sup>st</sup> hour at work for priority one.
- When engaged - give singular attention and avoid multi-taking.
- Throughout the day - “fix position” and correct to course.
- Before acting - clarify the purpose of the activity.
- Before making agreements - define conditions of satisfaction.
- Before acting - consider who should act and why.
- When scheduling calls and meetings - invite few, inform others.
- When sending an email – avoid "reply all" & write a clear subject line.
- When taking notes - add sketches/illustrations.
- Before stopping work for the day - Identify the top 3 priorities for tomorrow.
- Before stopping work for the day - note what you learned today.
- Before stopping work for the day – schedule tomorrow’s agenda.
- Weekly - schedule focused time to think about the future.
- Weekly - write an “Adaptive Story” that challenges limitations.
- Monthly - read a challenging book.
- When you feel overwhelmed – eliminate.
- When you feel overwhelmed – automate.
- When you feel overwhelmed – delegate.
- When you feel overwhelmed – elevate.
- Before leaving work – establish priorities for next (day/week/month).
- After dinner – Set up (clothes, papers, etc.) for tomorrow.

# Ethical Routines

- Review Core Ethos™ Declaration first thing in the morning
- Daily – tell the truth.
- Daily - read and reflect on great wisdom.
- Daily - find ways to serve your work colleagues, friends, family.
- Daily - find an opportunity to help someone in need.
- Daily – perform a secret act of kindness and generosity.
- Daily - take time to express gratitude and appreciation.
- Daily – take quiet time to refresh and renew your spirit.
- Daily – act to leave a lasting, meaningful legacy.
- Reflect on how you lived your Core Ethos™ values each evening
- Weekly - write an adaptive script from scratch.
- Weekly – express appreciation to someone who helped you
- Monthly – reflect on and refine your Core Ethos™ Statement.
- Monthly – find meaningful ways to offer hospitality to others.
- Quarterly – take and action to improve the world you will leave.
- Quarterly – take a more detailed inventory of your ethical conduct.
- When you disagree - show respect for others and yourself.
- When project planning - consider the impact on future generations
- When you wrong someone - ask for forgiveness.
- When you are wronged – respectfully, give others forgiveness.
- When forming a partnership - create it for mutual benefit.
- When speaking about others – talk as though they were present.

# Recovery Routines

Oscillate to recover in each of the four dimensions previously listed. Our culture is increasingly victim to the illusion that more is better. In many cases, more is less. Getting adequate recovery is crucial to prevent athletic injury, airplane accidents for private pilots, illness among graduate students, and burnout among professionals. No recovery, no resilience.

The importance of adequate recovery is most visible in the physical dimension. Until the last decade, we ignored the importance of recovery in athletics. Most runners, even sprinters, spent a lot of time "getting in shape" by doing long steady runs of increasing distances. Today, even long-distance runners incorporate high-intensity interval training (HIIT). Numerous research studies document the remarkable efficacy of HIIT. [https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/38185209\\_Martin\\_J\\_Gibala](https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/38185209_Martin_J_Gibala)

The secret of HIIT is recovery. Most people focus on the word "intensity" when they hear about this method. However, the genuine treasure lies in the recovery. It is the recovery in each interval that equips you to go to the needed intensity in the next interval. If you stay at the same level of effort throughout the routine, you will not achieve the required intensity to gain the benefits of HIIT.

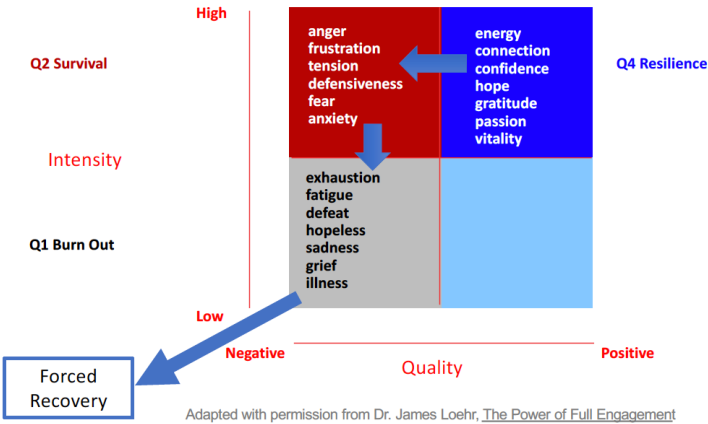
As I said before, no recovery, no resilience. As with any exercise, you need to confer with your doctor to ensure that HIIT is wise for you.

In the workplace, the need for periodic recovery is crucial. It allows us to return to work with the focus, creativity, and fervor needed to achieve excellence. When we fail to choose recovery intentionally, we pay a massive price in effectiveness and productivity. Ultimately, if we maintain intensity for an extended period without intentional recovery, we surrender productivity, lose momentum, and can even become ill.

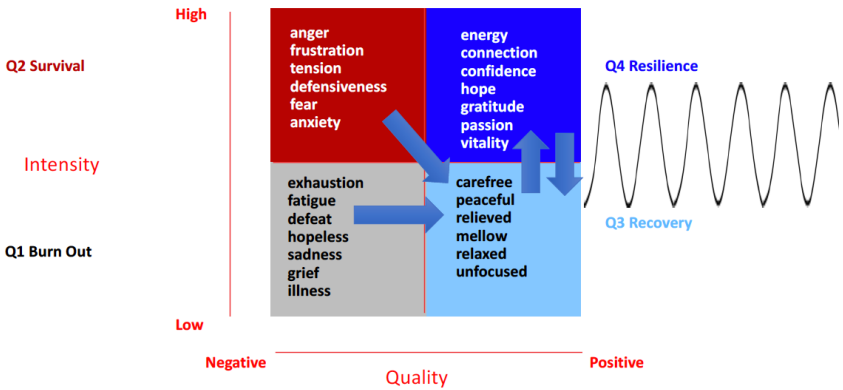
The illustration at the top of the next page shows the predictable pattern of decay, resilience > survival > burnout. This collapse is not inevitable. The chart below illustrates how one can arrest this pattern with the intelligent employment of periodic activities that restore and refresh. The question is, what restores you?



# Forced Recovery



# Intentional Recovery



## What Restores You?

High Quality and Right Quantity Sleep, Movement, Nutrition	Regular, Vigorous Physical Exercise
Prayer, Worship, Meditation	Fresh Air, Deep Breathing, Sunshine, Stretching, Massage, Yoga, Aromatherapy
Pro-Social Connections with Family, Friends, Community	Laughter, Levity, Perspective
Outdoors in Nature, Hiking, Fishing, Biking, Hunting, Skiing, Sailing	Music, Art, Dance, Theatre, Reading Entertainment
Sport, Competition, Golf, Tennis,	Walking, Biking, Swimming with friends/family

I wish you great success in acquiring resilience routines that will help you consistently live in a more fulfilling way. Live a life that allows you to bring your full possibility to fruition.

To paraphrase Aristotle:

*Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act well because we have virtue or excellence; instead, we have these qualities because we act well. We are what we repeatedly do.*

*Excellence, then, is not an act but a **habit**.*

Build routines into your life that produce virtue, excellence, and flourishing, particularly during significant challenges. And, may you use this time of trial to cultivate the habits that will fulfill your dreams.

With gratitude,

Fred Harburg

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Fred Harburg is a Clinical Professor at the Kellogg School of Management and former Executive Director of the Kellogg Executive Leadership Institute.



He provides Boards, CEOs and C-Suite Teams with catalyzing research and growth guidance. Fred served as the Chief Learning Officer and President of Motorola University, Chief Learning Officer at Williams Energy, and Senior Vice President for Leadership and Learning at Fidelity Investments. He began his career as a pilot and was a flight instructor for some of the first US Air Force female pilots. He has lectured at MIT, Harvard Business School and Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, is a senior fellow at PathNorth, and was a member of the Johnson and Johnson, Human Performance Institute's Thought Leadership Council.

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