

# openSAP Invites Thought Leaders, Episode 12

## BUILDING RESILIENCE TO SUCCEED AND THRIVE

### Transcript

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Often people say to me, well, I don't think I have resilience inside of me, you know that's for superheroes and athletes, other people, I don't have that within me. But I'm actually here to say that we all have it within us. We do. We just have to learn to rely on it more, to cultivate it and to replenish.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** Welcome to a special Thought Leaders episode with Dr. Gail Gazelle, a highly sought after and in-demand physician, coach, and speaker who's dedicated to helping others build everyday resilience. This is a powerful episode in which Dr. Gazelle shares her extensive knowledge and coaching experience to help us embrace a growth mindset, develop our emotional intelligence, and use mindfulness techniques to focus on our individual strengths and cast damaging, self-limiting thoughts aside. Wherever we are in life's journey, we all need resilience. Dr Gazelle says resilience is more than getting through. It's about thriving, being our best, getting knocked down and standing up 10 times stronger. Let me introduce you to Dr. Gail Gazelle. Dr. Gail Gazelle is a former hospice physician, part time Harvard Medical School assistant professor, a master certified coach for physicians. A long-time mindfulness practitioner and educator, she's a certified mindfulness meditation teacher. Dr. Gazelle has had her own resilience journey, moving on from a childhood that included severe abuse and building a life that includes much success, joy, and laughter. Dr. Gazelle is the author of "Everyday Resilience: A Practical Guide to Build Inner Strength and Weather Life's Challenges" released in August 2020. She's a well-respected thought leader and incredibly popular podcast guest. Her work has also been featured in such diverse venues as the New England Journal of Medicine and O, The Oprah Magazine. We're thrilled to welcome Dr. Gail Gazelle to openSAP Invites Thought Leaders. Dr. Gail Gazelle, hello and welcome to openSAP Invites Thought Leaders.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Oh, it's such a pleasure to be here. Thank you.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** It's really wonderful to welcome you as our guest today. I'm really grateful that we have the opportunity to learn from your expertise and experience as a physician and coach, how we can build our own resilience. Life's truly unpredictable at the best of times. And since 2020, the pandemic has provided us with an unexpected and, I guess, additional source of anxiety. So, what better time for us to learn ways in which we can cope better with life challenges? I'd like to start our conversation today with a warm-up question for you. When it comes to resilience, we often talk about a person's ability to bend with the wind or to bounce back. Imagine you were sitting in front of a blank canvas. What imagery would you paint that best symbolizes resilience to you?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** I think that the best imagery would be a deep well, if your listeners can actually picture that right, a deep well that is standing in front of them, that has all of this wonderful, fresh, sparkling water in it. And you can draw from it. You can dip your bucket in, or your hand and you can draw from this well to give you exactly what you need to meet whatever challenge you're facing. That's the image that I have. And I would love for your listeners to have as well.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** That's a beautiful image to share with us there to start with. Thank you. And to set the scene for us as well, Gail, how do you define resilience? We talk about being resilient, but what does that truly mean?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Well, I think that image that you started with Lizzie of the willow tree that bends and doesn't break is actually an important one because that's at the heart of resilience. We all face challenges. Challenges are part of life and suffering is the lot of all human beings, small and large. With resilience, we have what we need to bend and weather whatever the challenge or difficulty is, but not snap. And so further with resilience, what I think about the well of resources, it's something that actually resides within each and every one of us, something that we can tap into that contains our strengths, our fortitude, our courage, our goodness, our inner wisdom. So many things that are deep within us that we need to learn. One, that they're there, two, that we can tap into them, and three, that we can replenish them. So, it's actually this well of resources that allows us to weather whatever difficulty we're facing with minimal, unnecessary wear and tear, minimal, unnecessary emotional, physical, spiritual, psychological distress. In other words, the difficulties will come. We can be sure about

that. When we all reflect on our lives, whatever life path we've taken, it's a commonality that we've all faced challenges, accidents, illnesses, difficult jobs, financial insecurity, challenges with our teens, challenges with loved ones. Right. This is part of the human condition. And yet when we tap into our inner well, we have what we need to get through those challenges with some suffering, of course, but minimizing it so that we don't have any more than we need to.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** I think that just wonderful imagery that you share with us and just to imagine when we're going through difficulties that we do have that inner resource, that inner well, that we can tap into.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Yes, but let me just add to that Lizzie, that we don't always know that that well is there, we often learn that the answers come from outside of ourselves, right? From some source of wisdom. Perhaps it's an educational source. Perhaps that's our superior in our job. Perhaps as our parent or our spouse, we learn to look outside of ourselves to foster our resilience, which is important. There may be external resources that we want to connect with and draw from, but fundamentally with resilience, we realize how many of those resources we actually have within us. And once we realize that, then we're more able to tap into them. And we're also more cognizant of what we need to do to replenish our inner well of resilience. So, I think it's an important shift, a little bit of a paradigm shift. You might say that on the one hand, often people say to me, well, I don't think I have resilience inside of me. That's for superheroes and athletes, other people. I don't have that within me. But I'm actually here to say that we all have it within us. We do. We just have to learn to rely on it more to cultivate it and as we've discussed, to replenish it.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And I think that that's wonderful because there are many times in our lives where we're going through a difficult phase and we feel really quite alone. We feel very isolated. We look now at the Corona pandemic. Many of us are isolated from family and friends. And so, it's very difficult, I think, going through a difficult phase like that. I think I have the strength within me to get through this. And I think, you know, when we get that wonderful image of the well, it's such a reassuring image as well that can really help us. And I think it's a very important lesson in life that we could learn.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Yes, and I touched on this in my book, "Everyday Resilience, A Practical Guide to Build Inner Strength and Weather Life's Challenges." I provide a lot of practical exercises and one that just to get your listeners thinking about this, is to think back on a serious challenge that you faced at some time in your life, typically as an adult. And you got through that challenge, whatever it was. Right. You're here now. You're living proof that you got through that challenge. And so, to actually take time to do some life review, looking at a past challenge and thinking about, well, what strengths did I bring to bear that helped me get through that challenge? And so, when we do that reflection exercise, as I guide in the book, we can kind of make a little list of our strengths. Then here in the present day, we can think to ourselves, well, how can I use those strengths to get through this challenge that seems so overwhelming to me? How can I really lean into the same strengths that I used? I have them within me. They're there because once we do that, once we really focus on the strengths, it takes us out of the cup half empty. The idea of I can't get through this and it very importantly helps to move the challenge from overwhelming to manageable. Overwhelming is never good for any of us. When we feel overwhelmed, we scatter, we can't focus. Right. We can't really apply ourselves. We're a little bit frantic in our mind. This is overwhelming. We're kind of revving up. If we have tools to move that to manageable, then we can mobilize, we can be effective. We can be at our most resourceful in facing whatever the difficulty is that we have in front of us.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And I think it's a really wonderful exercise that you outlined there as well, that we really make the effort to write down our strengths. I think it's something a much more stronger message to ourselves then and I guess it's something that could surprise us too with the things that actually come to our minds and we put it to paper. So, this leads to my next question that I wanted to ask you, Gail, as well. What really contributes to our individual resilience? How much of it's actually genetically determined and how much of it can we learn say by visualizing this well of resilience?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** It's such an interesting question, and I'm not sure that the science has fully caught up to us on this issue of nature versus nurture, it's thought that resilience is about 30 percent genetic. But let's be honest, we don't really know this. We don't really have a great way to study this as of 2021. So, I think we have to hold that loosely. But, you know, if we kind of think of that as a ballpark, what that means is that over two thirds of our resilience comes from our lived experience. Now, of course, we all face

challenges and many of those challenges are completely out of our control. Right. There's so many things that we're born into, whether we're born into wealth, our skin color, our gender, all of the things where we're born into on the globe. Those are things that we have no control over. And that can actually affect our resilience in terms of societal norms, you know, injustices in a way and prejudices that exist very real in all of our societies. Those are things that we can't control. What resilience is largely about is figuring out what we can control. That adage that life is not so much the difficulties that we face, but how we face them. That's what resilience is about. It's about developing the tools and strategies, tapping into the well so that we have what we need to face the challenges. And that's the beauty of resilience, that there's so much that we can actually do to build our resilience.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And I think, you know, many of us have often wondered, is it truly possible, when we think about resilience, can we truly change our thought patterns? Many of them are very established within our brains. We have certain routines, certain thought patterns that we have. Is it essentially possible for an adult for us today to rewire our brains? What does the science say there?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** The science has a lot to say about this. We used to think, and we used to teach medical students that the brain no longer changed after adolescence. A fairly negative, pessimistic view of the human brain. And in the last two decades, with the growing field of neuroplasticity, we've really come to understand just how malleable the human brain is. In fact, the human brain is constantly remapping. It's remapping every day and all of the times of our life. The human brain thrives on learning. So, what that means in a very optimistic way is that we can shape a lot of our neuronal patterns. So if you think about patterns of negativity, for example, the negativity bias that is deeply imprinted on our brains from an evolutionary standpoint, a time when the only way the human species survived was for scouting and really scanning the environment for dangers and threats. And unfortunately, in the modern day, our brain is often scanning for psychological threats. But with that negativity bias, many of us have a strong inner critic, for example, that inner critic that's telling us we didn't do this well, we don't look right, we're not speaking well, all of those things. We're not a good enough parent. We're not good enough in our job on and on and on. That's an example of the negativity bias. And it's also an example of what we might think of as synaptic patterns in our brains. In other words, this idea that neurons that fire together wire together. Well, if we

have a negative outlook, those are the synaptic patterns that will actually wire together and then get more use in the brain. What we understand from neuroplasticity is that what we focus on actually thrives. So if we can switch the frame, let's say, with the inner critic and challenge the inner critic and think, well, what's what am I doing well, as opposed to what I'm not doing well, those are synaptic patterns that we can build. And then we use them more with repetitive practices and they actually become stronger. So, it's a very hopeful and realistic view and supported by a great deal and a growing body of research that really says we have a lot more control and agency over our own resilience, that our mental patterns than we ever could have imagined in the past.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** That's so reassuring to hear that we do have control over the things that our brain kind of thinks, how the synapses work, that is a very reassuring thought we have. And you mentioned there the inner critic that I think we've all heard at certain times in our lives. And it normally raises its voice when we're going through emotional difficulty or challenging situation. That's the theory, kind of saying switch think about something positive, shift your mindset. But what can we do practically in a situation where this inner critic's getting ever louder? What can we do?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** It's such an important question because I'm sure that everybody listening to this session can relate to what we're talking about, the inner critic is this fierce force that resides inside our mind and talks to us all day long. It's incredible the messages that our inner critic feeds us when we pause and reflect and kind of begin to see them. It's really kind of shocking in a sense. And yet, in some ways, the inner critic has way too much airtime. Right. This inner critical voice that's constantly harping on what we're doing wrong. So, a very practical strategy is to actually begin to notice, be aware that this pattern is occurring. That's what mindfulness is all about, being aware of our mental patterns and then pausing and asking yourself, is this true? Is that actually true, that I don't know what I'm talking about or that there's something wrong with my physique or whatever it is that the inner critic has decided is kind of the object desire to tell you about once we notice it and we ask ourselves, is this true? And then we can follow that up with a question, well, what's right about me? OK, inner critic, you're very busy telling me what's wrong with me, what's actually right about me? That is a powerful exercise to begin to right size this voice that we all have inside of ourselves that gets way too much airtime. It's amazing that we just don't learn to question the inner critic. All it is, is, is kind of this inner voice that we've internalized perhaps from parents, perhaps

from cultural norms and biases, perhaps from coaches that we've heard or other authority figures. We've internalized it and somehow, we take it to be the truth when it really isn't. At best, maybe it's a partial truth. It doesn't reflect all our moments of goodness, of generosity, of kindness, of actions for our community, of taking care of others. The inner critic just passes those by and goes to, well, why did you do this? Or you're such a fake? Get that right or you're never going to be as good as that one. And we can learn to question that message. And I've seen the powerfully positive impact that that can have. It's not to override areas where we want to strengthen where we could be doing better. That's not what we're talking about. It's to have a much more realistic and authentic appraisal of actually who we are in the world, strengths, and deficits.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And I think that's so important because I think, you know, we always have this tendency to be very critical of ourselves. We know ourselves inside out, and so we give too much airtime to this inner critic that I think can be quite a bully sometimes. Right. And we would never speak to our friends like that. We'd never be that critical. But towards ourselves, we really can be quite cruel and very, very harsh at times. And is this exercise in itself, will it get easier to tune in to a more positive mindset? The more often that we question this critical inner voice, does it get easier?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Without a doubt, it takes a lot of practice if you think about all the times that you've heard negative internal messages. For many of us, it's multiple times a day, if not more. So, if you actually multiply that by the number of days you've been in an adult on this earth, it's a crazy number of times. So, the repetition is key, the repetition, the building, a different synaptic pathway so that there's almost like a different groove in the brain for the messages to travel. That's a very simplistic way of looking at it, but that's what we're doing. We're creating new channels, new synaptic patterns, so that as they develop, as those neurons fire together and wire together, then it's easier to access them. Yes, without a doubt it gets easier and easier. And yes, it requires a lot of practice.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** Ok, so that's good news that we can get better, but we're going to have to put the exercise in and do the homework as well. Gail, you're also a certified mindfulness teacher, and we've touched a little bit just now on mindfulness. So how does mindfulness really relate into resilience and help us improve there?



**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Mindfulness is powerful. It really is, I think when many people hear the word mindfulness, they think about a monk on a mountainside sitting for hours in quiet, and they think to themselves, well, that's not me. I'm on my device. I'm on my computer. I have a busy life. So that's not what we're talking about. What we're talking about is the awareness that comes when we sit quietly in meditation and pay attention because there's so much going on in our mind that we're really not aware of. I was thinking about this today, I was thinking about the topic of perfectionism. And it's interesting that we're recording this during International Women's Day. And frankly, perfectionism is a disease more of women than of men. And we could get into a whole discussion of why that is. But I was coaching a woman who was talking about kind of procrastination and having a hard time kind of finishing tasks both on the work front and on and in her personal life at home. And as the coaching went on, she was able to see how much she was expecting herself to do all of these things perfectly. And in doing that, she would then chide herself mentally that she wasn't doing well enough because she was holding herself up to this unattainable standard of perfectionism. Then she would kind of berate herself that she wasn't doing it well enough. She would become more obsessive about it. She would feel a lack of confidence. And then before she knew it, she'd be off surfing the web and not getting the task done. Again, something that many of us can relate to. And she said something really interesting. She said, you know, I've known that I'm a perfectionist, but I really didn't understand the way it was impacting my flow of work. I had no idea that it was contributing to my procrastination. So, that's an example of bringing things out of the background where we're not even aware of them. And with mindfulness, when we tune in more and when we pay greater attention, it's kind of amazing what we see. So, we've already talked about the inner critic. Sometimes we're not even aware of these negative messages, and yet they're wearing us down. They're really eroding our ability to speak up and to contribute as fully as we can in the world. With perfectionism, we're not even aware of how costly it is to us. So, what's the big deal? I'm a perfectionist. That's not such a bad attribute. What I saw with this client is that she got it. She really got that. Wow, this has a bigger impact on me than I realized and that is a powerful motivator. Once we see the connections with mindfulness and paying attention in a very purposeful way to what's going on in our own human mind, all of a sudden, we just we have more choice about it. We don't have to follow it along in an automatic way, which is the pattern that many of us are trapped in with things like perfectionism. She could say, gosh, I really have a choice. I can decide, is perfectionism going to serve me in this particular task? Well, great, then I'll stay up all night and meet that deadline or do the



best I can. But if I've got three kids who are home during covid and I have all kinds of other responsibilities, maybe it's just not the right thing for me to put my energy into this perfectionist type of approach. So, I'm not going to do that. And that's OK. Do my best is a good enough standard for me. So that's what we're talking about with mindfulness. It's yes, it can be meditating quietly, which is the practice by which we become more mindful. But the key is this awareness, this acute awareness of our own patterns of how we interact with the things, the challenges, and the circumstances that we face.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And I think that's so good to really realize mindfulness is not just about being a monk, you're not just meditating all day. It's people who are leading really busy and full lives striving for perfectionism. That I think is something we can all identify with. It can be completely exhausting, like in the example you've just shared with us there. And I think just to think about self-awareness, self-reflection, if you can think about those patterns, I guess, and then really take action out of that, that's really good. So, mindfulness can really help all of us in many different ways.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Well, let me let me give another domain where it's so important, and that's the area of emotional reactivity. So, we're in the middle of the pandemic now. Everybody's stretched to the fullest and so many parents are home having to homeschool children. It's an incredible thing to be working full time, to be managing the domestic duties, paying the bills. And then, oh, by the way, you have to educate your children. You know, it's really, it's an unbelievable thing right now. And so many parents are struggling with that rightfully and finding themselves very short tempered with their kids. They're on an important meeting on Zoom or another platform, and the child is supposed to be up in their room in third grade and the child comes down and wants a glass of chocolate milk or something. But the poor parent is in this meeting and so often parents might snap. "Not now, go back upstairs, go back to what you're doing. No, mommy can't talk to you right now." You know, very normal responses. But what I see so much of is then a lot of guilt. Parents feeling that they're not at their best with their children and they wish that they could just pause, not be quite as reactive. So, with mindfulness, we can really notice our own patterns. We can, without judgment, this is very important, we can recognize, gosh, I'm being really emotionally reactive with my kids. And you know what? It's just a little third grader. They don't know any better. You know, they're tired, they're bored, they're trying to pay attention on Zoom all day, which is not exactly easy. And so, we remind ourselves of that. We're aware of the pattern and

then we can do something very important, which is to take a mindful pause. Child comes down, same exact situation, you're busy on Zoom in an important meeting and you feel your emotional temperature rise. You're aware of it. You take three slow, deep breaths. You take a little pause to cool things down. Maybe you joke on the Zoom meeting, oh, gosh, my my third grader is here. Hang on a second. Everybody knows that this is what we're all going through. And then you can respond to the child with a little more ease without that added tone, that kind of gives the child the message that they're bothering you and that they're not welcome in that particular moment, which can be erosive for that child's well-being. And very importantly, the parent doesn't have to feel the same guilt later on. That's mindfulness in action. That's mindfulness, awareness, paying attention, pausing, and kind of responding from a very different vantage point.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And it's really stopping the entire situation from escalating completely out of hand and I think, you know, these domestic situations, we can all identify that people are doing too many tasks all at the same time. Emotions do run high. Right. So, I mean, it's this self-regulation that you're talking about there to really take a step back and then consider how am I going to react in this situation?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Yes, exactly, and each one of these elements builds our resilience, because even in that small example of the parent, you know, guilt is a very negative force for all of us. So, let's say the parent is reactive with the child. It's not just that moment of reactivity. There's all of that guilt that comes along with it. Gosh, I'm not being a very good parent. Other parents somehow can do this better. What's wrong with me? And all of that erodes our resilience. It's not just the one little thing. It's kind of the whole experience of it. So, the more we can address each of these subtle things, there's really quiet an exponential improvement. In addition to which we improve the relationship with our loved ones, like our young children.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** Which is so important, I think it's really about having an honest relationship with ourselves then and also with those around us, so within our family, but also in the professional context, too. And I think maybe we can take pressure off by saying, look, you know, we are doing home schooling right now. There are lots of people living in this house. Things are busy or whatever. But I think maybe just being honest with one another, that really helps everyone overall.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Without a doubt, because you can be sure that there's somebody else in, let's say, a professional meeting who has a child in another room or has other responsibilities. It's just remarkable working from home and what that really means. So, it gives space to other people to actually let down their guard and drop their shoulders and be like, oh, OK, nobody else is doing this perfectly. It's OK if I don't. So, I think it really helps all of us.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** No, I think I think so, too, that's good to know. And another question that I have as well. I mean, there's always going to be a situation where, despite the best of intentions to kind of regulate your emotions, take a step back, be calm. You sometimes lose it. People sometimes snap. Your nerves are frazzled. What should we do in a situation like that where you feel guilty of not having reacted in the way you'd intended? What's the best thing to do there so we don't cut ourselves up and feel guilty? How can we kind of free ourselves of that burden afterwards?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Well, I think there's a very important medicine to apply here, and that medicine is self-compassion. In other words, we're all human. As you said, of course, we snap at times. We say things we don't mean. We act in impulsive ways. That's part of the human condition. And so, when we recognize that that's happened and let's say we're being mindfully aware, there's a lot of guilt coming in and we see it, we can actually put a hand over our heart and say something like, this is hard. The pandemic is taking quite a toll on me and everyone. And I need to be patient with myself. I need to accept that, of course, I'm going to be imperfect. We're all imperfect. That's the nature of humankind. And perhaps I can forgive myself for my imperfections. So, in other words, we're pausing. We're aware that something is there like guilt. And we're taking a moment to bring the same kindness to ourselves that we bring to so many others. I'm a physician. I'm a caregiver by career. Many of us are caregivers professionally and of course, personally. And so, we're so used to being there for others and for taking care of others. When we pause and take a self-compassion break, we're being there for ourselves. We're reminding ourselves that we deserve compassion, too, for just normal wear and tear and normal reactivity that we all exhibit. So actually pausing, literally putting your right hand over the area of your heart, and pausing there, taking a few slow, deep breaths, and reminding yourself what I'm going through is really hard. It's OK. I don't have to do this perfectly, nobody else is. And I don't have to either. So,

maybe I can just let go and forgive myself of anything small that I haven't done quite right. That can break the cycle of rumination, that whole cycle of guilt. And why did I and I shouldn't have and everybody else does it this way.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** It's this downward spiral.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Exactly, it cuts through it and those are all critically important parts of resilience. It all adds up to the wear and tear or to the upward spirals that we can foster with some of these strategies.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And I guess then it's reinforced by the physical gesture that you mentioned there as well, by putting your hand over your heart space, so you really feel that physically and emotionally as well. And I guess that can really be a good routine, a good habit to get into.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** As I said, I'm a physician and obviously I've prescribed a lot of medications over my years of practice, and yet one of the most powerful medicinals I have ever seen is self-compassion. And there's no side effects and it doesn't cost anything. And you can do it in the privacy of your own home. You can actually put a hand over your heart in almost any situation, even in a meeting, you can just kind of put your hand over here. Nobody maybe you're just kind of adjusting your sweater. Nobody really has to know what you're doing. That moment of bringing kindness to yourself as opposed to the inner critical messages, the coulda, shoulda, woulda, why didn't I everybody else, et cetera, those kinds of tapes that are running in the background for almost all of us. Again, that helps with the neuroplasticity. That helps the brain to learn a very different pattern to stimulus like guilt.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And I think it would be wonderful if we could learn this lesson much earlier in our lives, I mean, if I think back to my own childhood at primary school, I never heard about mindfulness, about meditation, about self-compassion. They're really valuable life lessons that I think you have to kind of discover for yourself later in life. And I wonder what life would be like if children if this was part of the national curriculum, it could make a massive difference. Right.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** I think this is exactly where the money is, frankly, and we have a lot of programs now internationally in what's called social emotional learning, as is juxtaposed with kind of the cognitive and the intellectual, the math, spelling, et cetera. And this involves skills like self-compassion. This helps little children learn that we all make mistakes. That's OK. We fumble. We say things that we later regret. That's OK. This type of exercise helps us learn and I could not agree more, the younger we can do it, the better. I coach a lot of physicians and physician leaders and there's a lot that we learn in medical school. We learn about every possible disease. Some diseases that are so rare that we'll never see them in the course of a lifetime of being a doctor. And so, we spend hours on pharmacology, anatomy, physiology, all of these incredibly important topics. But we get almost no education in some of these issues. And physicians can actually be their most harsh critic. I've seen such fierce inner criticism. One might think, looking from the outside and the doctors are so confident, they have such an important role in society that of course, they feel good about themselves. Of course, they're doing so much good, but very tragically, many physicians are very, very harsh with themselves. Walk around feeling like an imposter, like everybody else is smarter and a better doctor than they are. And so, this ability to actually be compassionate with ourselves. I see this in action every single day because the demands of being in health care are just tremendous. The stakes are so high, covid, things that we can't control. And so, we have to learn ways. It's almost like you're saying we have to go back and train ourselves in some of these things that that really should be part of the curriculum, part of the learning from day one.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And I think it's really worrying that you say as well with the health care profession, I mean, these are individuals who are very, very capable, very competent individuals, and there's a massive amount of strain resting on their shoulders. We go to see a doctor, right. And we go and we expect the right treatment. We go and look for guidance. We want answers. It is a question sometimes of life and death. It's a massive responsibility that they carry.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Yes, and add to that, of course, the total uncertainty that the pandemic has brought, uncertainty about treatment, uncertainty about the PPE, the protective equipment that health care providers need to wear addition to what we're wearing, just walking around in our lives. The uncertainty, how long will this go on? The uncertainty, will I get it as a health care provider? Will I put my family in jeopardy? These are not

things that we've learned how to tolerate in our training. And that's, again, what the well of resilience is all about. How can we shed many of those external ideas? Again, physicians learn that if they're not perfect, they're actually a failure. That's a heavy burden to carry in addition to the high stakes of taking care of human beings. So, maybe we can't change the high stakes of taking care of vulnerable human beings, but we can change some of the ways that we've been taught to learn about ourselves, like perfectionism, like the imposter syndrome. And so the more we can tap into that inner well, which again, contains all of our strengths, all of the things that we are doing well, all of our fortitude and courage and balance and wisdom, we need to actively tap into that to help us lessen the hold of some of those outside kind of detractors that we can work with. In other words, stepping out of the things that we can't control. Resilience is about the things that we can.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And Gail, a more personal question for you, if that's okay, you describe resilience as being the backbone of your life and career, and I love the imagery you share with us of the well of resilience that we all have inside of us. So, how and when did you discover your own well of resilience within you? What was your own personal journey if you could share that with us a little bit.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Yes, well, I, like others, have walked a complicated path. I grew up in a family that was wonderful in many ways, a family that really valued education and encouraged me to use my academic talents and succeed. You know, it was a complicated family, though. There was tragically a lot of abuse in the family. And I know I'm not the only one out there who suffers from abuse in their family. Wounded parents who haven't really tapped into their own resilience and haven't really learned, in other words, how to work through their own issues, so that they don't kind of take them out on their children. So, my own resilience journey was really kind of untangling that abuse like so many abuse survivors. I somehow thought it was my fault. That's how children, children have a funny way of looking at the world. They think that everything revolves around them. So, if something bad is happening, if the parents are fighting, if the parents get a divorce, if there's abuse, children often think that they're somehow to blame, even if they aren't at all. So, for me, I had to really untangle that sense of blame and, frankly, sense of shame that I carried with me. It's been a long journey and I've learned so much along the way. And that's kind of what resilience is about as well, to kind of learn and grow and reconfiguring and shedding, shedding some of the stories

that we carry about ourselves, that we're a failure. We're not as good, or that there's something fundamentally flawed about us. And so, I've learned so much on my own journey. And then for years, most of my career, I worked as a hospice physician. I learned so much about resilience, people being dealt such tragic blows, finding out that they're that they have an incurable illness, cancer, heart disease, strokes, liver disease, dementia, whatever it is. Quite a blow to that individual and their family. And I saw many individuals who kind of crumpled, really got caught in why me? I've led a good life. How can God be punishing me? Or some story of blame that they just couldn't get out of. And yet I saw so many individuals, of course, experienced that questioning in the beginning. How could this be happening? But actually harnessing and tapping into their well of resilience so that they could spend that last period of their life in the way that was most important to them, being forgiven, forgiving others, bringing their affairs in order, and making sure that their family was best situated, saying goodbye to people. Such important, valuable things that we can do, that's resilience. You can't change the fact necessarily that you have the disease that you have, and that modern medicine doesn't have a cure. But you can make sure to live as well as you can with the time that you have. And then, in my more recent decade of work, I've ever really had the privilege of coaching hundreds of physicians and physician leaders. And I've seen many of them, again, as we've identified, we didn't learn a lot of these resilient strategies. And yet I've seen people kind of pick them up very quickly and apply them and reverse some patterns that they've had that haven't been effective for them. That's resilience in action.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** Yeah, that's wonderful. And I think you have the most amazing gift to help others and to share your knowledge and just the thought of you really helping people going through the final stages of their lives or dealing with different issues that they have. I think it's so wonderful that you can share your own experiences and help people build their own resilience there, too. That's incredible.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Well, thank you, I feel very, very fortunate to have had the life experiences that I have as it's so sacred being with people at the end of life, really, it's almost at times just felt like it was so rich. I felt like it was a privilege to accompany people in this very vulnerable and sacred time of their lives.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** It's hard to move away from that, but during the latest Corona lockdown in Germany, I really was so pleased to discover your book, Gail, "Everyday



Resilience: A Practical Guide to Build Inner Strength and Weather Life's Challenges." It's a fabulously helpful book. And what I really like about it is the different takeaways that you list at the end of each individual unit and the wealth of practical exercises that you provide us as well. So, how we can build our own resilience. So, I wanted to ask if you could share some of the key exercises or strategies with us today that we can implement there if we think we need to work on our inner resilience?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Well, thank you so much. It's really a pleasure to synthesize so much of what I've learned into the book, and I'm delighted that it can be helpful. One practice that comes to mind has to do with our relationships. Now, tell me if this is the case in Germany, but here in the United States, we're having a lot of a lot of strife around masks. Some people wear masks. Some people don't wear masks. Maybe your in-laws wear masks and you don't or you're walking down the street. This is a universal phenomenon, isn't it?

**Elisabeth Riemann :** It is truly, yeah.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** And it's very unfortunate because the mask, it's almost become like a focal point in some of our relationships. So, you know, if you think about holidays that you would have spent with family members, now their family members that are so divided about masks and about the public health situation that they can't even get together over holidays. Tremendous rifts in otherwise very important and healthy relationships. So, one thing that I touch on in the book is what I call relationship repair, relationship strengthening, because I think the mask issue almost typifies how we get very caught. And all of a sudden, one issue becomes the focal point in our relationship. Right. If they don't wear a mask, forget it, they're not my kind of person. They don't get it. They're not respecting the importance of the epidemic and.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** It polarizes, right?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Very polarizing, and we kind of take it personally. So, what I do in that exercise is I encourage the reader to go through a couple of questions. One, what's important to me about this relationship? What's the meaning of this relationship if I look back on this relationship and our shared history, how has this person been there for me and how have I been there for them? In other words, we kind of step back from the

whole mask issue and we look at the bigger picture of this relationship. Now, if it's not an important relationship, that's one thing. But many times, that is an important relationship, actually a friendship or again, a family member, distant or immediate, that we've had a lot of life history with. And then I pose the question, well, do I really want this relationship to end? Is this issue that important? It seems important. And of course, wearing a mask is important. We could spend the whole day talking about the issue itself, but it's almost like beyond the issue.

**Elisabeth Riemann** : It puts it back into perspective, right?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Puts it back into perspective, and in fact, it can allow us to be more resourceful in helping the person move forward on something like whatever's keeping them from doing this public health issue of wearing a mask. It's, we get so caught in those small details, we lose that big picture. And I think it's really key to resilience, to reminding ourselves to step back what is most important here. So, I want to recommend that for your listeners, that's one very important strategy and another really important strategy that I cover in a whole chapter about flexibility is this flexibility of thought. As we've talked about with the inner critic, we get into these patterns of thought, this very self-judgmental, self-critical pattern of thought. And that's actually all it is. It's really just a thought process. And so, we can begin to realize that our thoughts are actually transient mental events. That's all they are. They're kind of like the clouds in the sky. They arise, they pass through, and then they dissipate. Everything that we ever experience is simply a mental event. And so, we can use that imagery. We can actually meditate with something that's called an open sky meditation. We can imagine that our mind is like the sky on a beautiful sunny day and a thought arises and we realize it's a cloud. That's all it is. And clouds are never permanent. Right. We see them kind of moving through the sky and then, oh, they're gone. And that's the nature of our thought and that's the nature of our emotions as well. We get so caught by them; we don't learn that they're actually just transient mental events. So very specific meditations. I offer one in the book about imagining the mind as an open sky. That's another practice that I really want to recommend to your listeners that can really help us loosen the hold of these thoughts that seem so monumental in the moment. Right. They seem so all important and yet they'll just pass through like clouds. We have to let them pass through with more agility.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** And I think based on my own experience, sometimes it's a thought that we don't like, it suddenly comes to mind, and it could be threatening, it could be one that's associated with fear. And we tend to grab hold of this thought. And then it kind of defines us that in that moment, rather than letting it kind of glide past across the sky to let the sky return to its blue color and peaceful, we kind of grab on to that negative emotion and that can cost so much energy. It could be completely debilitating for us too.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Yes, definitely, yes. So, it's again, it's something that we can build, it requires practice because we don't learn this as we've identified. We somehow don't learn that we can let go of our thoughts so that we have to practice it. And yet the result is so incredibly liberating to not be as torn about and is kind of thrown here and there by this thought and that thought and this worry and this fear and on and on and on. There's tremendous freedom there. So, it's worth doing the repetition.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** Thank you for sharing those with us. Would you like to conclude today's episode with a closing sentiment for us?

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Yes, I'll close with something that we covered already, which is self-compassion. So, I'll actually close by asking your listeners to put their right hand over the area of their heart. And whatever difficulty you're facing as you listen to this recording, whatever that difficulty is, as you put your hand over your heart, just hear these words. May I be kind to myself. May I be patient with myself. May I forgive myself for any imperfections and may I allow myself many, many moments of calm and ease. That's what I wish for all of your listeners.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** Thank you very much, Dr. Gail Gazelle, it's been an absolute pleasure to speak with you today. Thank you.

**Dr Gail Gazelle:** Likewise, thank you so much for the opportunity.

**Elisabeth Riemann :** Thanks for listening to openSAP Invites Thought Leaders with Dr. Gail Gazelle. If you've enjoyed this episode, please share, rate, and leave a review. Be sure to check out openSAP's free learning portfolio of Massive Open Online Courses,

microlearnings, and podcasts on opensap.com. And don't miss your next invite.  
Subscribe now.

[www.sap.com/contactsap](http://www.sap.com/contactsap)

© 2021 SAP SE or an SAP affiliate company. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or for any purpose without the express permission of SAP SE or an SAP affiliate company.

The information contained herein may be changed without prior notice. Some software products marketed by SAP SE and its distributors contain proprietary software components of other software vendors. National product specifications may vary.

These materials are provided by SAP SE or an SAP affiliate company for informational purposes only, without representation or warranty of any kind, and SAP or its affiliated companies shall not be liable for errors or omissions with respect to the materials. The only warranties for SAP or SAP affiliate company products and services are those that are set forth in the express warranty statements accompanying such products and services, if any. Nothing herein should be construed as constituting an additional warranty.

In particular, SAP SE or its affiliated companies have no obligation to pursue any course of business outlined in this document or any related presentation, or to develop or release any functionality mentioned therein. This document, or any related presentation, and SAP SE's or its affiliated companies' strategy and possible future developments, products, and/or platform directions and functionality are all subject to change and may be changed by SAP SE or its affiliated companies at any time for any reason without notice. The information in this document is not a commitment, promise, or legal obligation to deliver any material, code, or functionality. All forward-looking statements are subject to various risks and uncertainties that could cause actual results to differ materially from expectations. Readers are cautioned not to place undue reliance on these forward-looking statements, and they should not be relied upon in making purchasing decisions.

SAP and other SAP products and services mentioned herein as well as their respective logos are trademarks or registered trademarks of SAP SE (or an SAP affiliate company) in Germany and other countries. All other product and service names mentioned are the trademarks of their respective companies. See [www.sap.com/trademark](http://www.sap.com/trademark) for additional trademark information and notices.