

## Ep #284: Antifragile



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With Your Host

**Brooke Castillo**

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Welcome to *The Life Coach School Podcast*, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Well hello there, my friends. Today, we are talking about anti-fragility. You've never heard of that, have you? Unless you've read the book, you've probably never heard of this term. It is the opposite of fragile; anti-fragile.

And when I first heard this concept, I was so delighted by it. I feel like oh my gosh, they are speaking my language. I love, love, love this concept, so I wanted to share it with you. Now, there's a whole book written on it and you can buy it on Amazon and it gets into a lot more detail and kind of goes down rabbit holes that I am not going to go down. But the concept of it is what I want to talk about today because I think it's very useful.

In one of my earlier podcasts, I talked about post-traumatic growth. And that concept hit such a chord with so many of you, I think this is a similar concept. It's a similar idea. And it's a mental construct, a principle that you can utilize in your life.

A lot of clients that I work with and students that I work with inadvertently, and I think sometimes mistakenly, refer to themselves as highly sensitive, as fragile, as tender. And I think there's a way to do that with yourself that can be very compassionate, and especially when you've recently gone through something that creates a lot of vulnerability for you and your mind. I think treating yourself that way can be useful for a short amount of time.

But when you label yourself in a way that makes you overly sensitive to what an overly offended and overly hurt by everything that happens in the world, I think it creates a really unhealthy way of being in the world where you're constantly afraid and not willing to take any risk. I want to introduce a concept that's almost the complete opposite of that, and it's this idea of being anti-fragile.

So, the way that it is defined is a system that increases in capability to thrive as a result of stressors, shocks, mistakes, faults, attacks, or failures.

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It increases incapability the more that it fails, the more mistakes it makes, the more faults, attacks, or failures that it has.

And this concept brings us right back to an example that I use a lot of times, which is learning to walk, learning to ride a bike. The more you fail at that, the better you get at it. The more you fall down, the stronger you get. The more times you try, the better you get at walking.

When it comes to walking, we are anti-fragile. We're not like, "Oh no, don't fall." You have to fall in order to learn how to walk. It is how you learn how to walk; by falling and trying and failing. Same with riding a bike, right? You fall more than you ride in the beginning, until you get it, and then you ride.

And I was recently reading something that I thought was totally fascinating and they were talking about how do you teach someone to walk? And it made me think a lot about my students who come to me and they want to know the how. They're like, "How do I build a business? How do I make 100K? How do I become so natural at coaching like you are?"

And they want, like, the prescription. And I'm always telling them, it's not about the how. It's not about step-by-steps to get there. And even if I give you the step-by-steps to get there, that's not how you're going to get there. You're going to get there by falling down. And it's the same with walking.

Like, imagine that someone was asking you, "How do I walk? I want to know how to walk." And you would have to explain to them, step by step, literally, how to walk. Like, "You lift up your foot, I guess, and then you move your foot forward, and then you shift your weight, and then you put your foot down."

And it would be like this very convoluted, complicated explanation of how, quote en quote, to walk. But really, how do you learn how to walk; by understanding all the steps and following all the steps? No, by falling down and getting stronger. That's what it means to be anti-fragile.

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So the way that the professor who wrote the book – Taleb, I believe, is how you say his last name – is he talks about there's three ways to be; there's fragile, there's robust, and then there's anti-fragile. And if you're fragile, you avoid any kind of risk, any kind of mistake, any kind of falling down because you will break when things happen.

Robust means that you can stand up to challenges that happen and mistakes that happen and failures that happen. You can, like, kind of go head to head with it. But anti-fragile means that you get stronger by those things. Not only do you stand up to them or withstand them, but they actually make you stronger.

A great example of this is working out in the gym. Your muscles are anti-fragile, which means the more stress you put on them, the more you break them down, the stronger they get. And another example of that that was used is like a vaccine, like if you get a vaccination, you put a little bit of a poison inside of you and then you develop, your immune system develops an immunity to that. You actually become stronger against that by the experience of it.

And I want you to think about this for your life and the challenges and the mistakes and the failures that you make in your life. I think so many of you are living your life as if you are fragile, as if you can't take the failure, you can't take the mistakes, you can't take the humiliation, you can't take the attacks, or the stress, that you have to protect yourself from that, which, of course, makes you more fragile and more fragile and weaker because you're not going in there and stressing the muscles and making them stronger. They're literally atrophying.

And I think a lot of you who are fragile are very well-intended. I think you're trying to be compassionate and love yourself and take care of yourself, but you're getting the opposite effect. What's happening is, because you're not exposing yourself to the challenges that are available when you go after something you really want, you're not becoming any stronger, you're not growing, you're going the opposite direction.

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And I think some of you have stopped at robust. You've stopped at, "Hey, I can stand up to this. I can withstand it," but you're not utilizing it to make you stronger.

So when I talked about post-traumatic growth, one of the concepts that I introduced there is that a lot of people will go through a trauma and they will become stronger and actually better on the other side of it, not in spite of it, but because of it, because of the growth that was required to get over it and to handle it and to withstand it. They have now grown into a stronger version of themselves.

And I have a lot of students who attest to this who talk about how all the challenges in their life have really made them who they are and how they have grown from those challenges. And so I want you to try on this idea, like, I want you to consider adding this to your collection of characteristics, that you are anti-fragile, that you can utilize challenges and failures and mistakes and stressors to make yourself stronger. You will use the things in your life that challenge you as free weights. And that's how you will approach your life. Bring it on, bring over the exercises, bring over the weights, bring over the curriculum that is my life and I will utilize it to make myself stronger by.

I talk a lot to you guys about how life is 50-50. It's 50% positive, 50% negative, and that there's nothing wrong with the world because it is that way. That is the nature of the world. That is how the world is. And one of the points I believe, of being in the world, is to utilize that other half to fortify ourselves, to grow ourselves, to evolve ourselves beyond what we would be capable of doing if we didn't have those challenges.

If our life was easy and we didn't have to go through any obstacles in order to create what we wanted, there'd be no way for us to get stronger, no reason for us to get stronger, no point in us evolving at all because we're already there. We've already arrived. We don't have anything to overcome.

So if you think about being fragile as being easily broken or damaged, I want you to consider if that has been you, if that is how you have been

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identifying yourself, as someone who's fragile, or have you been identifying other people that way?

Now, people will say to me, "Oh no, that person is fragile," or, "That thing is fragile, that's just the truth." And I want you to be careful to notice if you're doing that with yourself, of just pretending like you just are the way that you are and you're just noticing that that's the way that you are, instead of recognizing that you create the way you are.

And the other thing that I want to note here is that when you're anti-fragile, it means that your challenges make you stronger. And I think, a lot of times, people mistaken strength and being powerful and getting stronger with having no compassion, with having no connection, no love, no sensitivity. And that is definitely not what I'm talking about here.

What I'm talking about here is the opposite of that because you are utilizing your challenges to get stronger, what I mean by that is the emotional strength of developing your ability to feel. And that includes compassion and love and self-care and empathy. It means opening up to those things.

Strength and courage are required in order to live the full spectrum of all of our emotions. Getting stronger doesn't mean that you don't care. It doesn't mean that you're putting your head down and you're not paying attention to the world. It means that you are open and exposed on purpose because you can handle it, because you're strong enough to handle it.

So, let's contemplate what it would mean if we were anti-fragile. If we knew that all the challenges in our lives were free weights that would make us stronger, how would we approach our lives in a different way?

First of all, we would embrace uncertainty. We would embrace change and randomness and chaos, which, by the way, have you noticed, are part of the world, are in the world at all times?

It's interesting to me how often we expect things to stay the same. We expect there to be certainty. We expect to know what is going to happen

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when there is literally so much evidence to the contrary. Just when we think things are going well, something unexpected that we have no control over happens in so many of our lives and so consistently.

And so, when you recognize that those are all part of the experience of being human and it's all part of the deal and that we've signed up for that by being human beings – and not only that, we don't have to hide from it, which is what we do if we're fragile, and we don't have to stand up to it, which is what we would do if we're robust, but we actually can embrace it and utilize it and dive into it and explore all the corners of it because we're utilizing the contrast in the world to become the ultimate version of ourselves, the most powerful version of ourselves.

The most extreme version of ourselves requires and includes challenges, obstacles, and going through them. We cannot become our ultimate potential if we're not willing to overcome the obstacles. That is how we get to our potential, is by being challenged.

When we do this on purpose, when we approach our lives as being anti-fragile, we get very good and very skilled at overcoming obstacles and problem-solving and strengthening ourselves. If we get our power from the challenge and we're always seeking the challenge, it becomes a circle. It becomes a way of regenerating our own energy; challenge, utilize, get stronger.

As we get stronger, we get better at utilizing problems. We get better at challenges the more we seek out the bigger goals, the bigger challenges, the stronger we get. Once that circle of momentum gets going, we lose our fear of the fear because we understand that the things that we are naturally afraid of are the challenges that will ultimately make us stronger.

Let me give you an example. Let's say you would love to have a bestselling book and you have stage fright, you don't like to be onstage. But you understand that, if you face the challenge and if you face the fear of being onstage, that you can be made stronger by that because you are anti-fragile.

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And let's say, your first attempt, you get onstage in front of, let's say 25 people and you freeze and you can't speak and you sweat and then you leave. That's as good as you do. You get up onstage, you sweat, and then you leave.

Now, if you are fragile in that moment, you will go and you will crawl into a very dark space and get a cuddle and probably never come out again and certainly never attempt to speak in public again. If you are robust, you will suck it up, say that you can handle it, and just move on with your life. And maybe you'll try and do it again someday.

But if you are anti-fragile, you will use that as an opportunity to learn how to feel. You will use that as an opportunity to process and digest any shame, any humiliation, any struggle that you're having with that experience. That is an opportunity that you would not have had you not tried.

The most powerful people in the world are the ones who aren't afraid of their emotions. And the one way to learn that there's nothing to be afraid of is to have terrible awful negative emotions and to survive them, to process through them, and then to thrive because of that.

My willingness and my ability to feel humiliation is one of my superpowers. I have put myself in situations where I've exposed myself to the opportunity of humiliation and have experienced it and have felt it and have thrived from it. The more I do it, the less afraid I am of it.

So the experience of stepping onstage and sweating and not being able to speak is the thing that makes you stronger to go onto the next time. And the more times you do that, the more times you fail at it, the stronger you will get at it.

Now, people will say to me, no, no, how you get good at public speaking is by succeeding at it. But here's what I want to tell you; if every time you get onstage you do well and you get standing ovations, you have not overcome the fear of not doing well. You're always going to have, in the back of your mind, "But I have to keep doing well."

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But if you've stood on that stage and the worst that could happen happened and you're still getting onstage, that confidence is the ultimate in power. "I'm good at this," and doing good at it is a level of confidence. But, "I can get up here and fail terribly and I'm still going to be good and I'm going to make myself stronger from it," that's the kind of confidence that's untouchable. It's unshakable.

Think about it, if I've always gotten onstage and everyone's always given me a standing ovation and loved me, when I get onstage and people don't respond to me or people don't applaud me or people boo me, I'm going to be very fragile in that moment, probably. But if I'm someone that's gotten onstage 50 times and half the time I haven't done well, half the time I've been booed, I have a level of strength and a level of fortitude and a level of anti-fragility that will take me to the next level, that will make me stronger.

The failing has made me stronger than had I not failed, had I not gotten up there. If you can not be afraid of what you feel, you have removed any reason not to face the challenge because we want people to think positively of us because we want to feel good. But if we're willing to feel bad, then we're willing to have people think negatively of us, we're going to be willing to do anything. We're going to be willing to show up and we're going to be willing to let our failures strengthen us.

Now, the other side of this, the other layer of this is not the part where we choose to take risks and fail, but the things that happen to us that we have no control over, the circumstances, the world happening; so, situations where people behave in a way that we don't want them to behave or circumstances happen where we don't want them to happen.

This is the other piece of anti-fragility that I think is super powerful because if we can see each of the things that happen in the world that we don't have control over as opportunities to strengthen ourselves as humans, our whole perspective on the world changes because most of us are going around trying to avoid bad things, trying to fix bad things as soon as we can because if we can fix them then they won't happen to us. We won't have to experience them.

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But when we approach the world understanding that half of it is pretty negative, it looks like by design, maybe there's a reason for that and maybe we can utilize that to step into our full potential, our full sense of who we are. Maybe when that terrible thing happens, we can utilize it.

I've done this in my own life when I was really struggling with drinking and really struggling with waking up in the morning and feeling terrible. I decided that I was going to utilize that struggle to make myself better and to make myself stronger.

I did that with my weight struggle. I utilized it. I embraced it. I understood it. I used it as a free weight to make myself stronger. All the challenges that I've faced in my business, I utilize to make myself stronger. Any stressor or mistake or criticism that I get as a CEO or as a business owner, as a partner with my husband, I can accept and say yes and bring it in and utilize it to make myself anti-fragile, to make myself stronger because of it.

And here's the thing, y'all; when you do your life like this, you open yourself up. You expose yourself. You become vulnerable to what it means to live a very expansive life because, all of a sudden, there's nothing you're not willing to feel. And so there's no reason not to do the challenging thing if the challenging thing will ultimately make you stronger.

Now, if you win at the challenging thing, that will be joyous and success. But if you don't win, you utilize it as fuel to make yourself stronger, as a free weight to make yourself stronger. So, either way, you are propelled forward. You are stronger because of it, not in spite of it.

When I look at really successful people, I truly understand that they are standing on top of a pile of failures. Those failures are what created that success. When I look at a toddler who is walking around like a boss, I know that that toddler earned that ability to walk by failing miserably multiple times.

That walk didn't come from studying a book or watching a YouTube video or understanding the steps or being able to take a course that explained it

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to them. The only way that toddler learned how to walk was by trying to walk and failing and never giving up until they got there. That is anti-fragile. That is utilizing all the fails to make themselves stronger.

That little toddler, the first time he tried to walk, didn't have enough muscle in his leg to hold himself up. But after he fell down and pushed himself up and fell down and pushed himself up, he built that strength to stand up.

He could not have learned how to walk without the failures, without the challenges, without the things that he bumped into along the way. How is that you in your life? Are you acting fragile in your life?

Now listen, if you are, if you are letting the challenges in your life break you, I just want you to ask yourself why. If you're telling yourself, "I'm just too hurt, I'm just too exhausted, I just can't handle it," just notice that it's a pattern. Do you want to use those challenges as a reason to sit down and not continue, as a reason to avoid? Or do you want to utilize the challenges in your life to make yourself stronger?

Every problem is an opportunity to get stronger when you're anti-fragile. I love, love, love this concept. When we use it along with post-traumatic growth, I feel like we've spun the paradigm enough to be able to understand the world in a way that opens us up to it instead of closes us down. And what we need in this world is more people opening up, more people exposing themselves to their full capacity so they can offer what they have to the world.

So I invite you to be anti-fragile. I invite you to utilize the challenges in your life to make yourself stronger, to set the biggest possible goal you can. And at the first sign of trouble, don't give up. Don't beat yourself up. Don't say you tried and failed. Don't ask how to walk, just get up and try and walk again and keep trying until one day you look down and you're like, "I'm walking. I can't remember when I didn't know how to walk."

And when someone asks you how to walk, you won't be able to explain it to them. How did you learn how to walk? How did you get to know how to

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walk so fast? Just practice, just trying, just failing a lot, that's how we get there. That's how anti-fragility can get us there even faster.

We get stronger from our challenges, not defeated by them. Have a beautiful week, everybody. I'll talk to you soon. Bye-bye.

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