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The Resilience Compass: How Mindset, Skills-Development, Self-Compassion, Service, and Community Empower Actors to Bounce Back, Reclaim Their Passion, and Live Their Purpose

Kimberly Wimmer Totty

University of Pennsylvania, kimtotty@gmail.com

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The Resilience Compass: How Mindset, Skills-Development, Self-Compassion, Service, and Community Empower Actors to Bounce Back, Reclaim Their Passion, and Live Their Purpose

Abstract

Actors often describe their vocation as a passion, a calling, or even a purpose. However, the very nature of a career as an actor is rife with rejection, a lack of agency, and income instability. Such strong identification with their vocation may threaten an actor's self-concept in the face of so much adversity. Many actors become frustrated, sometimes to the point of giving up, because the gatekeepers (agents, casting directors, network executives, etc.) decide whether they get to exercise their passion or fulfill their purpose by actually working in their chosen profession. While the body of research on resilience is robust, there have been virtually no studies on the application of resilience training to this particular 'at risk' population. Based on the theory, research, and practice of positive psychology, this paper proposes a resilience model for actors incorporating 1) a resilience mindset and toolkit, 2) self-compassion, 3) community, and 4) using one's talent in service to others. It is hypothesized that this combination will enhance resilience, build a strong community, bolster actors' well-being, and provide a volitional pathway to exercise one's passion and purpose without sacrificing vulnerability. This is the foundation of *The Resilience Compass*.

Keywords

Positive Psychology, Actors, Resilience, Self-Compassion, Volunteering, Psychological Capital, Social Capital, Purpose, Passion, Mindfulness, Arts Education, Performing Arts, Theatre, Well-Being

Disciplines

Art Education | Arts and Humanities

The Resilience Compass:
How Mindset, Skills-Development, Self-Compassion, Service, and Community Empower
Actors to Bounce Back, Reclaim Their Passion, and Live Their Purpose

Kimberly Wimmer Totty
University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Andrew Soren

August 1, 2016

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How Mindset, Skills-Development, Self-Compassion, Service And Community Empower Actors
To Bounce Back, Reclaim Their Passion And Live Their Purpose

Kimberly Wimmer Totty
kimtotty@gmail.com

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Abstract

Actors often describe their vocation as a passion, a calling, or even a purpose. However, the very nature of a career as an actor is rife with rejection, a lack of agency, and income instability. Such strong identification with their vocation may threaten an actor's self-concept in the face of so much adversity. Many actors become frustrated, sometimes to the point of giving up, because the gatekeepers (agents, casting directors, network executives, etc.) decide whether they get to exercise their passion or fulfill their purpose by actually working in their chosen profession. While the body of research on resilience is robust, there have been virtually no studies on the application of resilience training to this particular 'at risk' population. Based on the theory, research, and practice of positive psychology, this paper proposes a resilience model for actors incorporating 1) a resilience mindset and toolkit, 2) self-compassion, 3) community, and 4) using one's talent in service to others. It is hypothesized that this combination will enhance resilience, build a strong community, bolster actors' well-being, and provide a volitional pathway to exercise one's passion and purpose without sacrificing vulnerability. This is the foundation of *The Resilience Compass*.

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Introduction

“ I don’t know what is better than the work that is given to the actor — to teach the human heart the knowledge of itself.”—Sir Laurence Olivier (1970)

From the flickering light of pre-historic tribal fires to the spotlight in a modern theatre, actors have always been the keepers of our collective stories. Whether shamans or screen idols, actors use their voices and bodies in performance to represent humanity (May, 1975), tapping into and communicating from what Jung called the *collective unconscious*, that ineffable element of humanity that we all share (Jung, 1927). Actors take on the burden of our anger, our fears, our love, and our hopes – giving us a respite from the weight of the world, even if only for two hours. Their purpose is ancient and they are vital to the psycho-spiritual health of society.

We know that humans have been making art for at least 40,000 years, with some evidence even dating back 500,000 years--that’s 300,000 years before homo sapiens walked the earth (Brahic, 2014). Agriculture, conversely, emerged a mere 12,000 years ago ("NatGeo," 2016). It would seem that as a species, we have prioritized creative expression over developing a more reliable way to prevent starvation. It could be said that modern actors are keeping that tradition alive. The “starving artist” isn’t merely a cliché, but a very real way of life for actors within an industry that doesn’t support a living wage for most professionals. Of course, financial stability wasn’t a driving force in most actors’ choice of vocation. For many of us, it is a calling.

The nature of a professional acting career requires a tremendous amount of resilience. The unique combination of challenges for this population merits a specialized approach to resilience training. By developing a resilience mindset and toolkit, cultivating self-compassion through mindfulness, strengthening a sense of belonging through community, and using one’s talent in service to others, The Resilience Compass offers an actor-specific framework to empower actors to thrive -- so that they get to follow their passion and live their purpose.

A Call to Act

“When I connect to my soul, project it into another character, and then bring it to the stage or to a film--that has always been for me the great joy of acting. It's been as if my soul kind of leaps out of my body and is able to be free and dance around.”

--Kyra Sedgwick ("Newsweek," 2007, para. 43)

My earliest memories are of performing. Not usually for crowds or an audience of any kind – discounting the imaginary ones, of course. I would pretend to be a mermaid or a superhero or a cook in a restaurant. I would sing with absolute abandon at the top of my lungs with the radio in my bedroom. I would make up dances or organize the neighborhood children to march in a parade or put on a show in someone's garage. It was sublime to sing, to act, to dance, to create. There was never a time when I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. Creating or performing in one way or another has always been my driving passion. I have been incredibly fortunate to have made a living doing it.

The unshakable notion that I wanted to “play pretend” as a career choice never failed to invite well-meaning advice in my youth (and beyond). I was told to have a backup plan, that it was a tough business, that 95% of all actors never “make it,” and most of all, that I shouldn't do it unless I couldn't *not* do it. All of these warnings are basically true. But I was undeterred. I have always been a seeker, longing for transcendence beyond my solitary experience, needing to know that my life mattered (Steger, 2012). I am not alone in this regard. The yearning to act often feels like an undeniable calling. Actors will enthusiastically tell you why they love acting and what makes it such a life-giving art form. The joy, the frustration, the obstacles, and the transcendence – the whole beautifully messy experience of acting can be truly marvelous. To an actor, there's nothing else like it. Whether one calls this guiding force a calling, meaning, passion or purpose, the “why” is of vital importance because the path of an actor is not an easy one.

The Actor's Conundrum

“An actor is totally vulnerable. His total personality is exposed to critical judgment - his intellect, his bearing, his diction, his whole appearance. In short, his ego.” -- Alec Guinness (Simpson, 1988, p. 396)

Being a professional actor is a precarious business on many levels. The competition is fierce, rejection is frequent, the time and money invested in training, marketing and networking, which are all integral to success, can create pressure and stress that may impede the actor's ability to maintain the crucial optimistic, resilient attitude needed to secure and maintain acting work (Aisbett, 2006; “Getting Started”, 2016). What follows is a typical professional actor's experience. If you are lucky enough to get a great agent, your life becomes all about the audition/work loop. Every day you're bending and twisting yourself through the psychological acrobatics necessary to create a character. It takes an incredible amount of time, effort, skill and passion. This part is exciting and gratifying for an actor. The next part, however, can be much more difficult.

Day after day you're trying to sell your product (You!) to people who, for whatever reason, are not buying. There are so many factors which are out of your control. The system is structured in such a way that affords actors very little agency in the advancement of their own careers (Hite, 2015). There are layers upon layers of gatekeepers who decide whether an actor will be allowed to actually work. So you begin to collect NOs. It takes a very strong person indeed to remain unaffected in the face of so much rejection -- to not take it personally. Further complicating the issue, an actor needs to maintain vulnerability in order to create realistic performances. Vulnerability and a teflon exterior do not make good bedfellows. Expending so much time, energy, and resources, while still being unable to count on booking acting work produces anxiety, resentment, exasperation, insecurity, and feelings of powerlessness for many actors

(Evans & Wilson, 1999). *The medium of your art is you*, after all, and all of the NOs can begin to chip away at your self-worth as you inevitably internalize the relentless negativity (Kaplan, 2003). Nagging questions and limiting beliefs can become relentless. “How can I get noticed?” “When will I book a job?” “I’m not enough!” The longer this process goes on, the more inwardly focused you become. The system practically guarantees it. It’s all about you. You, you, you! Interestingly enough, this is also happening when you’re working. “How can I keep this momentum going?” “Will this be my last job?” “I’m not as successful as so-and-so.” “I’m not enough!” So many aspects of this career can easily become fear-based.

I believe our artistic talents are meant to be *shared and received* in a sort of communion, or exchange of intimate thoughts or feelings on a spiritual level, between people. The actor is a kind of shaman with the power to facilitate an awakening, a connection, a revelation, an escape, even a catharsis. The actor’s offering serves to remind us who we are and to connect us to our humanity. When the *receiving* element of that transaction is missing, actors suffer from it. Our belief wavers. We doubt ourselves. We lose our sense of purpose. The entertainment industry is an enormous arena for that broken cycle. Though rejection is par for the course, many actors still find it difficult to separate themselves from their work (Kaplan, 2003). You can only offer your creation for so long before the rejection and comparison begin to eat a meaning-shaped hole in your soul.

Nevertheless, acting requires tremendous commitment. Acting, in and of itself, is an expensive endeavor. Professional actors are required to invest a tremendous amount of resources in themselves as the product. A considerable allocation goes toward marketing materials (e.g. head shots, demo reels, websites, online resources), personal care and appearance (e.g. fitness, nutrition, wardrobe, hair, and makeup), continuing education (e.g. acting classes, workshops,

dance classes, coaching, voice lessons, or other special skills training). Membership dues and a percentage of their income are paid to the actors' unions (e.g. SAG-AFTRA, Actor's Equity Association). An additional large percentage of their capital goes toward the maintenance of their team (e.g. agents, managers, publicists, stylist). The primary goal of these investments is to make the actor more bookable. In juxtaposition to all of these very material investments, one area where actors often fail to invest is in their well-being.

According to Kaplan (2003), actors are open, curious, and have "incredibly strong tendencies toward self-actualizing ideals, emotional exploration and spiritual experiencing," as they continually seek to improve themselves (p. 168). I hypothesize that such seeking-behavior is not only a result of their openness and curiosity, but also stems from a desire to counterbalance the constant rejection they deal with professionally. Resilience research and training has been conducted and/or applied to populations as diverse as students in the Penn Resiliency Program (Gillham, Brunwasser, & Freres, 2008; Gillham, Linkins, & Reivich, 2009; Gillham, Reivich, & Jaycox, 2008; Gillham et al., 2012; Seligman, 2011), soldiers in the U.S. Army's Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011), Aboriginal youth (Andersson, & Ledogar, 2008; Burack, Blidner, Flores, & Fitch, 2007), Native Americans (Long, Nelson, 1999), older adults (MacLeod, Musich, Hawkins, Alsgaard, & Wicker, 2016), survivors of violent trauma (Connor, Davidson, & Lee, 2003), war veterans (King, King, Fairbank, Keane, & Adams, 1998), 911 survivors (Bonanno, Rennie, & Dekel, 2005; Fredrickson & Tugade, 2003), and insurance salesmen (Seligman & Schulman, 1986), just to name a few. Each of these populations might be deemed 'at risk' or vulnerable for one reason or another. Acting is a high-stress, low return profession, given the limited odds for success. Actors are not only vulnerable as a result of their unpredictable careers; they could also be described as courageously and

tenaciously vulnerable *emotionally* as well. While this very human quality is absolutely necessary to the *craft* of acting, it is highly incompatible with the *business* of acting, given the repetitive rejection. It is an occupational hazard for the actor and because they are their own product, many find it difficult to separate themselves from their work. Unfortunately, research-based resilience interventions have yet to be conducted with this unique population. In fact, psychological well-being and resilience training are not even touched upon in most actor training programs. A successful acting career is, for most, the result of longtime perseverance. However, the gritty are not always the most brilliant artists. Sadly, the brightest, most gifted actors are too often unprepared to press on and may give up in the face of so much adversity and rejection.

Situation analysis: Acting, by the Numbers

"If you're an actor, even a successful one, you're still waiting for the phone to ring."
-- Kevin Bacon ("Backstage," 2015)

Making the choice to become a professional actor necessitates the acceptance of a difficult path, professionally and personally. According to a 2011 research report on *Artists and Arts Workers in the United States* released by the National Endowment for the Arts [NEA], the median full-time wage for actors in 2009 was \$30,254, while the median wage for the entire labor force was \$39,280. This issue is not unique to American actors. A 2015 study reported that 40.8% of Australian actors earned less than \$10,000 from their acting careers in 2011 (Maxwell, Seton, & Szabo, 2015). Though they qualify as "professional" workers, actors earn far less than other workers in the professional category. While 32% of all U.S. workers hold a bachelor's degree or higher, actors are generally more educated, with 54.3% holding a bachelor's degree or higher (NEA, 2011). Artists are 3.5 times more likely than the total U.S. workforce to be self-employed and because of the unpredictable nature of an actor's career, nearly 44% work only

part time and for only part of the year (NEA, 2011). Of course, these numbers reflect the financial circumstances of actors who are actually able to work in their chosen profession. According to a report from Actor's Equity Association (the theatrical actor's union and hereafter referred to as Equity), actors are chronically unemployed with only 41.3% of its 42,405 members in good standing working professionally during the 2013-2014 season for an average of \$7,463, with only 13.3% working during any given week. Compared to the national *unemployment* rate of 5.6 in 2014, this disparity is remarkable. Some actors will go on 40 auditions or more without booking at job (Backstage, 2012). This is not necessarily a reflection of their talent. With a relatively small amount of jobs available and an enormous pool of talent to fill them, rejection is the rule rather than the exception (Pynoei, 2012). The Screen Actor's guild (the film and television actor's union, hereafter referred to as SAG or SAG-AFTRA) reported on its website that more than 85% of its members made less than \$5,000 in 1996 (Hite, 2015). In an update to this article in 2002, it estimated that while 85% of its membership was unemployed "at any given time," 90% of its members had to rely on supplementary non-acting income to provide food and shelter (Skirletz, 2003). Admittedly, the stats on working actors provided by SAG are out of date, but there were no recently published reports (that I could access) from the union. Regardless, actors are clearly a "highly-qualified, highly-skilled, extremely low-paid population, overwhelmingly required to work outside their field of specialty—acting—in order to secure even minimal levels of income" (Maxwell et al., 2015, p. 108). Ironically, even finding and maintaining non-acting jobs to support their acting habit, so to speak, is a challenging task as many jobs, particularly full-time, reliable ones do not allow the actor the flexibility needed to audition or even accept the acting work they manage to book (Phillips, 1991).

Obtaining regular work is not the only source of instability for an actor. Most actors

move uncertainly from contract to contract. Not only is this a challenge for an individual's budget, it is a source of stress and uncertainty in terms of healthcare as well (Jeffri, Iguchi, & Penrose, 2011). I once had a role on a major cable network television show that was under an American Federation of Radio and Television Artists [AFTRA] contract (before their merger with SAG). Though I worked more often than several of the contracted 'series regulars,' because of budget restrictions and lack of negotiation clout as a new actor, my contract was for a 'recurring guest star.' Even though I had a major storyline and appeared in 16 of the show's 22 episodes, I failed to qualify for health insurance through AFTRA's healthcare plan. Sadly, my experience was more the norm than the exception. While actors can qualify for health insurance based on their professional income (through SAG-AFTRA) or weeks worked (through Equity), most actors, even working ones, do not meet the qualifications. This reality, in addition to income instability, keeps many actors in a sort of survival mode. There are no vacation or sick days and when work does happen, it is usually on very short notice (Hite, 2015). This kind of job insecurity ensures making commitments, planning activities, or even starting a family are very difficult, placing strain on relationships and negatively affecting an actor's health as well as work/family life balance (de Jonge, Bosma, & Siegrist, 2000; McGann, Moss, & White, 2012).

As illustrated in the story of my contract, an actor's ultimate success is highly dependent upon clout or "star power" in the incredibly lucrative film and television industry. Ironically, most actors cannot make a living in their profession because of the "star system" (Skriletz, 2003, p. 21). The 2001 labor negotiations between SAG, AFTRA and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers [AMPTP] confirmed that working-class career actors who live under the radar of fame but who work regularly in film and television were being squeezed out of the industry by lower scale rates and decreased residuals, even as stars' paychecks have increased

astronomically, leaving very little to divide between the other actors (Whitaker, 2001).

According to *The Bureau of Labor Statistics Handbook* for 2016-17, actors' work hours are extensive, irregular, and peripatetic, with actors often engaged in touring or regionally-based theatre companies and film actors working on location. Since the competition for jobs is intense (Pynoei, 2012), and many actors' incomes are unstable, there is pressure to accept any job offers that come along, regardless of the negative effects such decisions could have on other areas of their lives such as health, family or relationships (Hite, 2015).

When unable to book acting work, some actors take other low-paying but creatively satisfying jobs (e.g. directing, teaching, web design). They sometimes appear to make irrational decisions to prioritize high risk over low risk work. Upon closer analysis, these choices are not exactly irrational, though. While such jobs make notable demands on an actor's resources with very little financial compensation, research shows actors are drawn to this type of work because of the intrinsic creative satisfaction they receive in doing it (Freakley, 2002). Such work can also be career-building, not only because it develops skills and expertise, indicates status and improves reputation, but also because of the relationships that are made or reinforced along the way. Building a strong network of relationships is integral to a successful acting career. It often takes years to develop the relationships, skills, and reputation that allow for making a living exclusively as an actor. Nevertheless, since these potentially career-building jobs require intense commitment with next-to-no financial reward, the "starving artist" or "suffering for your art" are well-earned clichés.

Psychology of Actors

"Being an actor is a religious calling because you've been given the ability, the gift to inspire humanity. Think about that on the way to your soap opera audition."

-- Sanford Meisner (n.d.)

Psychologists have long been interested in the study of actors. Much of the research has contributed to the negative stereotypes many attribute to the *actor personality*. Kaplan (2003), cites a number of studies to support a laundry list of undesirable characteristics psychologists have assigned to actors, describing them as “neurotic (Hammond & Edelman, 1991), anxious (Barr, Langs, Holt, Goldberger, & Klein, 1972), self-centered (Fenichel, 1946), narcissistic (Barr et al., 1972; Manischewitz, 1983, Walsh, 1963), hypersensitive (Lane, 1959), emotionally unstable (Marchant-Haycox & Wilson, 1992), insecure (Lane, 1959), dogmatic (Marchant-Haycox & Wilson, 1992), immature (Lane, 1959), irresponsible (Marchant-Haycox & Wilson, 1992; Phillips 1991), and impulsive (Barr et al., 1972; Marchant-Haycox & Wilson, 1992)” (p. 2). They have been characterized as having low self-esteem (Hammond & Edelman, 1991) and weak egos (Henry & Sims, 1970), therefore experiencing significant identity confusion. Not all psychologists agree with this grim assessment, though.

In fact, there are some researchers who find much to admire and praise in actors, seeing them instead as masters of self-actualization (Maslow, 1971). These individuals seek a life of meaning, valuing what Maslow (1971) calls *being values* or *metaneeds* such as truth, wholeness, justice, completion, richness, transcendence, perfection, uniqueness, playfulness, truth, autonomy, and meaningfulness. Through the practice of their craft, actors can have highly developed cognitive, affective and behavioral skills such as introspection, empathy, compassion, self-awareness, imagination, spontaneity, intuition, and expression (Kaplan, 2003). Actors have furthermore been characterized as highly integrated individuals, experts of self-exploration, and able to live life fully, guided by their own internal compasses (Bates, 1988). Hamilton (1997) described actors as “preoccupied with self-actualization, holding on to a vision of who they want to become over time” (p. 54). Kaplan’s (2003) study, which assessed actors’ emotionality, self-

actualizing tendencies, and spirituality using correlational and comparative analysis of a wide variety of both qualitative and quantitative data, showed that actors do not generally have pathological personalities. However, while it is not unusual for people to identify strongly with their careers, actors are at exceptional risk because their jobs “inherently and regularly pose threats to their self-concept,” making their feelings of self-worth exceedingly vulnerable (Kaplan, 2003, p. 183).

A cost-benefit analysis of vulnerability

“Listen, acting is not surgery, it's entertainment. You're doing something to hopefully move people, to make them laugh, to transport them. But actors are vulnerable, and the reason we're vulnerable is that we're always trying to recreate human behavior.” -- Eddie Redmayne (n.d.)

“Acting is all about honesty. If you can fake that, you've got it made.” -- George Burns (n.d.)

Vulnerability may be one of the more important tools in an actor’s toolkit. There is a common belief in the importance of, and in some cases, an obsession with having the vulnerability to reencounter one’s deepest feelings and memories, even though they are painful (Brebner, 1990). But while vulnerability can elevate a performance to greatness, it also can lead to an actor’s undoing in his professional as well as personal life. Modern audiences expect this type of emotional access and truthful representation of human emotions. However, a realistic acting style is actually a relatively new convention. The Western acting technique we are most familiar with today, as conceived and developed by Russian director, Konstantin Stanislavski, is grounded in the *magic if* in which the actor is willing to suspend disbelief and embrace the truth of the moment through a *conscious means to reach the super-conscious* realm of creativity (Stilson, Clark, & McGaw, 2015). While Stanislavski initially suggested relying on personal experience or *affective memory* to create a performance (only later to shift his focus to the importance of playing physical actions), his student, Lee Strasberg, made affective memory the cornerstone of his interpretation of Stanislavski’s method. Strasberg’s approach became known

as *the method* (Stilson, Clark, & McGaw, 2015). Many actors, as well as the general public, seem to regard method acting with reverence. Actors like Daniel Day-Lewis, Ellen Burstyn, and Heath Ledger have given stunning performances through the method acting approach and have the Oscars to show for it. Sanford Meisner, a one-time student of Strasberg, developed an opposing interpretation of Stanislavski's original teachings. Whereas, Strasberg advocated the use of actors' private pain as motivation, Meisner stressed truthful behavior and reacting in the moment. He declared, "psychotherapy had no place in acting" (Ohikuare, 2014). Seton (2008) coined the term 'post-dramatic stress' to describe what actors experience in the pursuit of emotional authenticity, but also as a provocation to training philosophies, particularly the ones, such as Strasberg's method, that are based on emotion recall. Deborah Margolin, Obie-award winning performance artist and an associate professor in Yale University's undergraduate theater studies program, discourages romanticizing the manipulation of traumatic experiences offering,

I've gone to dark places in terms of the roles I've played, and I've also gone to dark places just living. There's this whole thing about suffering for your art and I think that's baloney.

I tell my students not to worry about the suffering. Suffering will find you—seek the joy (Ohikuare, 2014).

Some research suggests there can be a psychological cost to acting. According to Jung, there is "little difference between the mystic and the madman, as they both plunge into the same ocean (the unconscious). The mystic survives and thrives, however, because he knows how to swim back to shore, while the madman drowns." (Moore et al., 2015, p. 15). Many actors express an interest in alternative realities, consider themselves to be different from *normal* people, and are drawn to a career in acting as an escapist means to becoming someone else (Goldstein & Winner, 2009). Additionally, some actors are vulnerable to boundary-blurring with

their characters (Burgoyne, Poulin, & Rearden, 1999; Hannah, Domino, Hanson, & Hannah, 1994; Nuetzel, 2000). An interesting study explored actors' experiences in testimonial theatre-making -- a form of theatre based on participants' verbatim accounts of trauma for the purpose of integration and healing (Thomson & Jaque, 2011). This is accomplished through the storyteller's "oscillating between enlivening the painful event and distancing from it" in order to facilitate the healing power of stories (Thomson & Jaque, 2011, p. 230). The researchers tested whether this approach would lead the Stanislavski-trained actors in their study toward establishing or dissociating the self and found that the actors were more fantasy-prone than the control group. They concluded that the actors may be more vulnerable to identity destabilization, with 32% of the actors dissociating at pathological levels compared to 23% of the control group (Thomson & Jaque, 2011). There is speculation about whether acting causes these vulnerabilities or if people with these vulnerabilities self-select to become actors.

Regardless of the direction of causality or simple correlation, this globally sensitive population have ironically chosen and strongly identify with their careers in a business in which their self-concepts are regularly assaulted, further compounding their vulnerability (Kaplan, 2003). Many actors advocate harnessing vulnerability in performance, but developing a *thick skin* professionally. In an interview with *The Atlantic* (Ohikuare, 2014), Deborah Moller Kareman spoke of the many facades actors need to function in life, in order to protect the vulnerability they bring to the stage or screen. She offers,

In art you have to be responsive. Things have to get in so that they can get out, and you can't live the way you do your art or you'd be wounded every second... you do lose yourself in an artistic way, but less so than the layman might think (Ohikuare, 2014).
Seton (2004) speculated that actors' vulnerability might come at a cost to their overall

well-being. While the research suggests the formation of defense mechanisms enables actors to persist in the face of so much difficulty, Brebner (1990) asserts that these protective coping strategies can negatively affect the quality of an actor's work and impede performance.

Kaplan (2003) concluded that the disconnect between actors' passion for their craft and the negativity they experience regularly from casting agents, directors, agents, managers, the media and the public in their professions creates a sort of dissonance, confusion, self-doubt, and stress, making them a somewhat 'marginalized population.' Results of the self-evaluation scales in her study of actors' psychospirituality led Kaplan to describe the participants, and speculatively-- actors in general, as having high self-worth in theory, but not in reality. This may be a result of the necessity to constantly market and present themselves as having an extraordinary sense of confidence and self-worth when in reality they do not generally accept themselves. This conclusion was both confirmed and contradicted in the *Australian Actors' Well-being Study* [AWS], which found that while actors had significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress than the general population, they also highly rated their life satisfaction and were disposed to "finding the positive," "being optimistic", and maintaining "good energy," even when the challenges of their lives were negatively impacting their well-being (Maxwell et al., 2015, p.109). Whether such wildly contrasting perspectives are adaptive, pathological, or an example of a highly creative person's considerable range of emotions, it seems that the life of an actor is replete with cognitive dissonance. Inherent or reactive, this exceptional range of emotional states is certainly reflective of the rollercoaster ride that is a career in the entertainment business.

Actors' Health and Well-being

"Martyrdom was the price of enthusiasm for acting." -- *Bela Lugosi* (n.d.)

"Give me pain if that's what's real. It's the price we pay to feel" – *Diana in Next to Normal*

(Yorkey & Kitt, 2010).

With so much job insecurity, being chronically underpaid or unemployed, fierce competition, frequent rejection, and pressure to appear youthful and thin (especially for female actors), it stands to reason that depression, anxiety, migraines, shoulder-aches, substance abuse, and eating disorders are major health challenges for many actors (Hamilton, 1997; Marchant-Haycox, & Wilson, 1992). A landmark study through the University of Sydney in 2015, *The Actors' Well-being Study*, or AWS, which surveyed 782 professional actors was the first well-being study ever conducted with this population (Maxwell et al., 2015). The results confirmed what people in the industry have long known and discussed -- that actors are highly skilled, low-paid workers who experience anxiety, stress, and depression at significantly higher levels than the general population, in addition to engaging in dangerous amounts of substance use (Maxwell et al., 2015). The study also reports that along with the inevitable income woes, actors regularly encounter verbal abuse, sexism, and homophobia on set. According to the actors profiled in the study, many tend to self-medicate as a result of the long-term stress of their careers coupled with the acute stress of demanding roles, particularly as a way to “cool down” after a performance (Maxwell et al., 2015, p. 110). Maxwell et al. (2015) recommend that greater emphasis be placed on teaching acting students coping mechanisms, including “cooling-down” techniques, as well as focusing on financial training and healthy lifestyle choices. Finally, the AWS emphasizes the importance of the study of psychology for actors in training programs.

Historically, psychology has focused primarily on mental dysfunction and disease. This has been, and will always be a vital area of scientific study. However, while psychology set about the task of mitigating mental illness, there wasn't as much research invested in how to improve well-being above a baseline of mental functioning. With the new millennium, researchers began to

investigate and develop the processes involved in human flourishing – a *positive* psychology.

Positive Psychology

Maslow (1954) proposed one of psychology's most well-known theories, the hierarchy of needs, which leads to self-actualization. He contended that self-actualizing individuals (such as actors) commit themselves completely to a vocation as though it were a calling, rather than simply a way to earn a living (Maslow, 1971). He was also the first to use the term "positive psychology" when expressing his frustration with traditional psychology's myopic focus on the negative, pathological side of humanity stating that "psychology has voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, the darker, meaner half" (Maslow, 1954, p. 354).

Along with Maslow, Roger's (1961) concept of the *fully functioning person* was foundational to positive psychology. His theory described one whose sense of self was integrated with sensory experience, causing the individual to be open to new experiences, present in the moment, creative, self-efficacious, and aware of the benefits and responsibilities associated with this sense of freedom.

Inspired by the work of Maslow (1954), Rogers (1961), and their own discontent with traditional psychology's focus on pathology, Seligman and Csikzentmihalyi (2000) proposed the basic concept for positive psychology, outlining a holistic, comprehensive, eudaimonic approach to well-being. What would set this new field of study apart from the self-help literature was its reliance on a scientific foundation, empirically driven theory development, and evidence-based interventions (Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Luthans, 2002a, 2002b; Seligman, 2011). Psychology was finally beginning to resolutely investigate the other half of what Maslow deemed its rightful jurisdiction.

But what exactly *is* positive psychology? *Positive* means different things to different

people in different contexts. It is a term that embodies a sort of *fuzzy meaning*, which is to say -- it invites individual interpretation (Schneider, 2001). Furthermore, not unlike art, it is a subjective concept that is, to some degree, based on *fuzzy knowledge*, or factual uncertainty (Schneider, 2001). Pawelski (2013) emphasizes that happiness is not merely the absence of unhappiness, but rather, that it is much more complex. He emphasizes the equal importance of the absence of illness and the presence of health.

Beyond the philosophical interpretation of the term, to many researchers and practitioners in the field, positive psychology can be defined as “the ‘scientific’ study of what makes life worth living” (Lopez & Snyder, 2009, p. XXIII). Whereas psychology historically focused on disease and dysfunction, positive psychology is the exploration of what is *right* with people and what life can be above baseline functionality. By focusing on strengths (rather than weaknesses), resilience (rather than trauma), and how to enhance life on multiple levels, positive psychology investigates well-being and what it means to flourish. Referencing the profound impact of this relatively new field of scientific study, Moores et al. (2015) declared, “We call this recent development in the conversation about well-being, with its focus on the interdisciplinary investigation of the best things in life the ‘eudaimonic turn.’” (p. 3).

Eudaimonia is the word the Greeks used to describe human flourishing (McMahon, 2013). Many psychologists prefer this term to happiness as the latter is easily conflated with hedonic pleasure or some kind of *happiology*. *Eudaimonia*, however, is a much richer designation more akin to psychological well-being and thriving on multiple levels. As a model or framework, eudaimonic well-being has been articulated in various ways.

PERMA(V)

Martin Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model for well-being is a widely-known eudaimonic

approach to flourishing. Based on his own research and the findings of other psychologists, Seligman (2011) determined that positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment represent the essential components of well-being and are codified in this framework. The rationale behind these specific categories is that each component represents a concept that people pursue intrinsically and independently of the others. Seligman has since acknowledged the need for a category representing the somatic experience of life, or vitality as well (M. Seligman, personal communication, October 18, 2015). As PERMA heavily informs The Resilience Compass and is one of the more ubiquitous frameworks for well-being, I will explicate its elements individually before briefly mentioning other frameworks for well-being.

Positive Emotions

When we think of happiness, we might first consider our feelings. Barbara Fredrickson's (2009) work looks beyond the mere hedonic experience of positive emotions and suggests that they are highly complex. Her "broaden and build" theory suggests positive emotions like joy, hope, and gratitude, though fleeting, broaden our perspective, widen our focus, and can have delayed favorable effects like creativity, receptivity, mindfulness, better relationships, and serve to negate pessimism and negative emotions (e.g. Fredrickson, 2002). Negative emotions, conversely, may create an immediate response (e.g. escape, attack, expel) and they tend to narrow focus, inhibit cognitive functioning and stifle creativity (Fredrickson, 2001). Consequently, the more positive moments we experience (ideally a positivity ratio of approximately 3:1 for the highest well-being & positive affect), the more creative, resourceful and connected we become, creating an upward spiral of growth (Fredrickson, 2009). As being an actor requires mental agility and adaptability (Foster, Lloyd, & Kamin, 2009), cultivating positive affect and creating upward spirals of positive emotions toward well-being could help

actors specifically when learning complex dialogue and direction, responding to last minute edits or changes during filming, breaking through a challenging moment of characterization, and improving their coping strategies for handling future adversity (Fredrickson, 2002), all while “rolling with the punches” of being an actor.

Engagement

Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) elegant concept of flow highlights an optimal state of engagement where we are operating outside of time and emotion -- so effortless is our focused attention. Csikszentmihalyi's conceptualization takes root in the expansion of consciousness. He explains that consciousness can be ordered according to how we structure our goals and intentions. The representation of the “self” is at the heart of determining the organization of our consciousness. With so many things competing for our attention, we must endeavor to fight for the “self” in order to be in control of the direction and maintenance of our focus. Willful intention organizes consciousness, which produces flow, integrates the self, and results in complexity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). We are at our best when we set our aim toward a goal and are committed to stretching the limits of our consciousness in order to achieve it. It is this process that enables growth. Actors regularly report flow experiences and even seek them out as they seem to represent moments of great achievement in their lives and careers (Kaplan, 2003). Perhaps such experiences help to enhance resilience and buffer stress in the life of an actor. Csikszentmihalyi does not characterize flow as a transcendent experience that unexpectedly overwhelms a person, but rather as the cultivated practice of one who is in control of their consciousness, focusing attention at will, and impervious to distractions for as long as it takes to achieve a goal. Perhaps such dogged focus is fundamentally the same as the optimal state of consciousness for an acting performance described by Bates (1988; 1991) as the “controlled-

possession experience.” Regardless, regular and deliberate practice actually provides the conditions necessary for flow to occur. Those flow states then exponentially compound one’s skill level and lead to the ultimate achievement of long-term goals. As a creative and an educator, I commonly experience the misconception among artists that they can only create when inspired. On the contrary, successful actors, writers, dancers, painters, singers, and musicians consistently report the necessity of daily practice—whether they’re feeling inspired or not. The idea is that the discipline creates the space for flow. Practice invites inspiration. Malcolm Gladwell popularized the concept that it takes 10,000 hours of preparation to achieve mastery (2008). Some have disputed the accuracy and pervasiveness of that number but psychologists like Erickson and Charness (1994) have established this basic idea that one must log the hours in order to truly excel.

Relationships

Humans thrive in positive relationships. Multiple studies have shown that a life of seclusion causes poor cardiovascular, immune and endocrine health at best and increases our risk of early death at worst (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). We need love, attachment, and bonding from the beginning. But we also need one another in the form of close relationships and social networks throughout our lives. Wilson and Wilson (2007) argue that humans evolved for group rather than individual survival, biologically wiring us for connection. Our sense of belonging and degree of association with others shapes us and affects our well-being. Research suggests that happiness is actually contagious. It has been shown to spread among closely related groups, extending up to three degrees of separation (Fowler & Christakis, 2008).

Regardless of the setting, theatre is always about people (Wilson, 2014). It is an exploration of the human condition and the fundamental territory is relationships. A good actor

understands this essential driver of the human heart and allows it to inform characterization and performance. It is worth noting, however, that cultivating positive relationships in life is not merely a great laboratory for actor training, or simply a necessary endeavor for building and maintaining a successful career, it is absolutely essential for well-being.

Meaning

Our inherent desire for connection also drives us to align with something beyond individual experience. Perhaps we seek transcendence or want to contribute in some way. The quest for meaning creates a sense of “belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self.” (Seligman, 2011, pg 17). A meaningful life is one of purpose, inspiring the development of mastery, improving self-esteem and creating value in one’s experience (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Researchers have long wondered why, with such limited chances for success, actors risk everything and tenaciously pursue this career. Indeed, meaning and purpose are powerful motivators for actors as many consider their discipline to be a calling, and derive meaning from their profession that supersedes the simple desire to earn a living in their chosen career (Marinovic & Carbonelle, 2000). Maslow (1971) contented that self-actualized people are not drawn to a vocation based on a simple desire to ‘pay the bills’ but rather, consider their choice to be a calling and a source of great meaning. Muske (2000) offered, “A job is more than just a job to an actor and actress. It is more than the money or fame. It is the chance for transformation” (p. 116). This kind of driving passion is intrinsically motivated. It stands to reason that actors can become frustrated or even despondent when they feel that the ‘gatekeepers,’ (which is to say, the people who stand between them and opportunities to act), are preventing them from living their true purpose. Nevertheless, in *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl’s (1963) invocation of Nietzsche suggests that a meaning-driven person “knows the ‘why’

for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any ‘how’” (p. 80). This is noteworthy because the how is often challenging.

Accomplishment

Nevertheless, the pursuit of mastery is an important motivator for many people. We seem to intrinsically seek self-transcendence through pride of achievement. People often engage in activities for no other reason than the satisfaction it gives them to pursue and achieve excellence. This intrinsic motivation for goal attainment is the cornerstone of Snyder’s (1994) hope theory, which outlines the interaction of an individual’s beliefs in their ability and willingness to pursue meaningful goals (agency) and their capacity to determine how to achieve them (pathways). Research in self-determination theory (Brown & Ryan, 2015), self-efficacy (Maddux, 2009), self-regulation (Baumeister, Gailloit, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006), and goal setting (Locke, 1996), explores ways to cultivate mastery and operationalize achievement. The dream and drive to cultivate one’s craft and to achieve a successful acting career is at the heart of an actor’s persistence, not to mention the subject of many an Oscar acceptance speech.

(Vitality)

While PERMA comprehensively covered the cognitive aspects of life, Seligman’s students argued that the desire for proficiency is not relegated to the life of the mind. We experience the world through our physical bodies. Ratey’s (2008) extensive research on the positive effects of physical exercise and diet on the brain lends credence to the need for this category. Physical activity is not only beneficial for our physiological health, it improves cognition, making it easier to learn and retain information, a fundamental requirement for actors needing to memorize lines, blocking, and choreography. Ratey (2008) makes a compelling case for exercise working like a Prozac/Ritalin combo. Physical exercise increases production of brain-derived neurotrophic

factor [BDNF], which plays several pivotal roles in synaptic plasticity and neuronal survival (Teixeira, Barbosa, Diniz, & Kummer, 2010). Faulkner, Hefferon, and Mutrie (2015) prescribe a somatopsychic approach to well-being and underscore the many benefits of physical activity to prevent mental illness, increase positive emotions, and mitigate the effects of stress. They emphasize that regular engagement in physical activity improves our self-esteem and boosts our confidence -- two of the aforementioned challenging areas for actors.

Other Well-being Models

Seligman's (2011) PERMA is not the only empirically validated model for well-being. In 1989, Carol Ryff elucidated the concept of *eudaimonia* in her six-factor model which builds on the Aristotelean ideals of helping others, flourishing, and the commitment to excellence. The framework includes autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others. She cautioned, however, that even within her own model, there are opportunities to take self-realization to harmful extremes wherein the pursuit of self-improvement eclipses other areas of life at a great cost to others or in which unmitigated compliance with the expectations of others limits autonomy. Therefore she entreats scholars to appreciate the concept of balance in their efforts to study and operationalize well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2006). Ryff ultimately encourages striving to find the *golden mean* for each component of well-being, as Aristotle prescribed with the virtues (Melchert, 2002). The balance of these components (or virtues), and the knowledge of when and to what degree to use each one could be achieved through the Aristotelean master virtue of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom (Schwartz, & Sharpe, 2006).

Martha Nussbaum (1993) offers a compelling framework as well. Her functional capabilities approach is centered on the concept of individual human dignity and argues that the

basic necessities are a prerequisite for flourishing. “Human well-being, to an arguable extent, is dependent upon external conditions, but it is never reducible to them.” (Moore et al., 2015, p. 8). The ten culture-transcending universals of her framework include mortality, corporeality, cognition, imagination and thought, practical reason, affiliation with other human beings, relatedness to other species and to nature, humor and play, separateness (living one’s own life and nobody else’s), and strong separateness (doing so in one’s own surroundings and context) (Nussbaum, 1993). She contends that by exercising our functional capabilities, we can become self-actualized and develop agency through the freedom to make our own decisions.

Prilleltensky et al. (2015) acknowledged that much of the research on well-being was in service to its positive outcomes such as better physical and mental health, productivity, positive relationships, and longevity. In addition to overall well-being, Prilleltensky also wanted his I-COPPE Scale to include the principles of the two factor model, which suggests that complete mental health is achieved by reducing mental illness and enhancing flourishing (Keyes, 2005a, 2007). His I-COPPE theory illustrates six domains of well-being: Interpersonal, Community, Occupational, Physical, Psychological, and Economic, in addition to a seventh component -- overall well-being. The I-COPPE scale, a multidimensional well-being tool, assesses the construct validity of the theory by applying empirically validated comparison measures (Prilleltensky et al., 2015).

Theoretical frameworks for well-being are remarkably helpful for educating us about the areas in our lives that need attention. Once we’ve determined areas we would like to bolster, the question becomes, how?

Positive Interventions

Apart from any model developed to illustrate the construct, achieving eudaimonia, or at

least some degree of balance, is a constant negotiation. Enhancing well-being is not always achieved intuitively. Experts in positive psychology continue to research and develop ways to make flourishing more accessible and achievable. This empowering information is applied through the application of positive interventions. A positive intervention is an evidence-based, purposeful act that is employed to increase well-being. This is accomplished by amplifying the processes that enable human flourishing. Self-improvement is not something that simply happens to you. It begins with committed intention; the more intrinsically motivated, the better. This intention is brought to fruition through focused attention and determined action, ultimately yielding excellent habits. In other words, positive interventions serve to help us create better versions of ourselves -- a great incentive for the self-actualizing actor. That alchemy of intention, attention, action and habit makes it possible for us to develop the processes of self-regulation, self-determination, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence. Mastering these processes is a lifelong journey and their development is not only necessary for well-being, but absolutely foundational to the actors' resilience compass.

Self-regulation is the process through which we are able to exert control over our wants and impulses. Research has shown self-regulation to be adaptive and powerful -- a skill we can train like a muscle (Baumeister, Gailloit, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006). Self-regulation assumes the strength of our will is a limited resource that, once exerted, leads to ego depletion. And in the same way that our muscles strengthen and grow in the recovery time between exhaustive workouts, so does our ability to control our attention and behavior. Just as a work-out can be strengthening and preventative, developing focused attention and behavior can be protective against rumination and self-destructive thought patterns or behaviors after a high-stakes audition that didn't go as planned. Interestingly, self-regulation does not appear to be domain specific.

When self-regulatory skills are exercised and strengthened in one sphere, that sense of mastery positively influences self-regulation in other spheres as well (Baumeister et al., 2006).

Self-regulation focuses on *how* we manage ourselves but not *why*. Self-determination theory [STD], underlines the importance of autonomy (acting of one's own volition in accordance with their values), competence (feeling effective in one's pursuits) and relatedness (a sense of belonging and connection with others). SDT stresses the role our motivational orientations play in healthy behavioral regulation and in our psychological well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2015). If we conceptualize a continuum of extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, the intrinsic end is quite narrow. Extrinsic motivation is more immediate and easier to satisfy through action. Self-determination theory suggests, however, that we should strive for the more intrinsic end of the spectrum because intrinsic motivation positively correlates with creativity, enhanced task performance, and higher psychological well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2015, p. 107). What's more, the outcomes generated from an integrated, intrinsic motivation are more authentic and lasting. In Marinovic and Carbonell's (2000) qualitative study of actors' reasons for choosing their profession, nearly all of the respondents indicated that their career aspirations were intrinsically motivated, with three quarters of the respondents describing acting as a "way of life," shaping the way they function in the world (p. 247). Similarly, Kaplan (2003) found that actors generally chose their profession based on their love and passion for the craft of acting (intrinsic motivation), rather than for the glamour of show business (extrinsic motivation). Actors' dogged determination to pursue and remain committed to their careers in spite of negative messages from external sources such as family, friends and society further underscores strong internal motivation.

Neither self-regulation nor self-determination is possible without a modicum of self-

efficacy. Belief in our ability to produce desired outcomes through action is the nucleus of our endeavors. That belief is the birthplace of agency and the actuator of persistence. In order to adopt healthy behaviors or rid ourselves of unhealthy ones, we begin with the belief that we are capable of doing so. Self-efficacy appears to be domain-specific and fluctuates according to context. For example, I might feel confident about my ability to interpret and direct a play, but inept at organic chemistry. Self-efficacy is a state-like construct and can be developed through task mastery, vicarious learning or modeling, positive feedback and/or persuasion, and psychological, as well as physiological arousal (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is fundamental in self-regulation also, as it determines the goals we set, the choices we make in service to them, and the approach we take in decision-making and problem-solving (Maddux, 2009). Self-efficacy is undeniably gritty. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) postulate that a combination of passion, self-control and persistence in the face of adversity are crucial predictors of success with long-term goals. Unshakable belief gives us a feeling of control, fostering confidence, effort, and persistence. Duckworth et al. (2007) concluded that goal attainment was not solely based on talent, but rather -- sustained, focused self-discipline would triumph over innate ability time and again. The winning combination was talent plus effort -- with extra emphasis on effort.

In order to best develop self-regulation, self-determination, and self-efficacy, it is essential that we have the ability to accurately identify emotions in ourselves and others, so that we may correctly interpret the unique language of emotions. This is a vital skill for an actor. Emotional intelligence is not only useful -- it is necessary for flourishing. It helps us to better understand ourselves, to effectively assist psychological growth, and to maintain strong relationships. There are four branches of emotional intelligence: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate

thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions (Caruso, Salovey, Brackett, & Mayer, 2015). Conventional wisdom says that emotions interfere with decision-making. On the contrary, Caruso et al. (2015) suggest harnessing emotions produces “more effective problem-solving, reasoning, decision-making, and creative endeavors” (p. 548).

Understanding and managing our emotions leads to better self-regulation which bolsters our belief or self-efficacy, informing a more intrinsic motivation or self-determination, which fosters a deeper understanding of emotional intelligence. Though each of these constructs can be analyzed and applied independently, they do not exist separately in a vacuum. Rather, they are inter-related in a circular fashion. Improvement in any of these domains could initiate an upward spiral of personal development in the others, propelling one through the cycle.

The Resilience Compass

“But your vision will become clear only when you look into your own heart. Without, everything seems discordant; only within does it coalesce into unity. Who looks outside dreams; who looks inside awakens.” – C.G. Jung, Letter to Fanny Bowditch, October 22, 1916

The development and mastery of self-efficacy, self-determination, self-regulation, and emotional intelligence create a strong foundation for psychological well-being. Further, by cultivating a resilience mindset and toolkit, fostering self-compassion through mindfulness, and building a tightly knit community of like-minded artists that supports and provides opportunities to use one’s talent in service to others, The Resilience Compass has the potential to fortify resilience and enhance well-being on every level; ultimately empowering actors to reclaim their passion so that they may live their purpose.

Driven to Act – Passion and Purpose

“It was only in the theatre that I lived.” –Oscar Wilde (1908, p.113)

Calling

Answering the call allows you to *follow your bliss* and undertake what mythologist Joseph Campbell (1988) called *the hero's journey*. Not unlike the archetypal path described by Campbell, the journey of an actor can be characterized by trials, triumphs, miracles, moments of doubt, and deep meaning. A calling may feel like destiny or a mission. It is a sort of internal summoning that is energizing, uplifting, and elevates well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction (Baumeister, 1991; Dik, Byrne, & Steger, 2013; Wrzesniewski, Dekas, & Rosso, 2009).

Meaning

Pursuing a calling or vocation enhances meaning and purpose (Dik & Duffy, 2009). The importance of meaning for human flourishing is reflected in Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, as elucidated earlier. Frankl (1963) described three ways in which we can ascertain meaning in life. We can create a work or perform a deed in service to others. We can also be transformed by an experience or encounter. Finally, we could consciously cultivate our attitude toward unavoidable suffering. There is an authenticity to meaning that inspires an extension beyond the self toward a conscious choice to serve an important, positive, higher purpose (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012).

Purpose

A sense of purpose inspires us to develop mastery, improves self-esteem and creates value in our experience (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). According to McKnight and Kashdan (2009), purpose serves an important role in resilience. They define purpose as "a central, self-organizing life aim that organizes and stimulates goals, manages behaviors, and provides a sense of meaning" (p. 242). It is core to our identity and like a compass, purpose serves as an internal guide, directing life-goals and choices. Having a sense of purpose literally makes us feel better

by enhancing positive emotions, it's intrinsically motivated, somewhat effortless, and creates a foundation that makes us more resilient in the face of obstacles, stress, and strain (McKnight and Kashdan, 2009).

Living in alignment with one's purpose provides self-sustaining meaning as we pursue and achieve our goals. Having a guiding vision makes it easier to persevere in the face of ongoing challenges. Kashdan and McKnight (2009) outline three broad pathways to developing purpose in life. The first process requires proactive effort and slowly evolves over time. The second is the reactive response to a transformative experience. The third process emerges through social learning, by way of observation, imitation, and modeling. Additionally, McKnight and Kashdan (2009) contend that purpose produces behavioral consistency, creates more psychological flexibility, greater effectiveness in the allocation of resources, lower stress levels, involves higher-level cognitive processing, and leads to greater satisfaction with life.

Passion

Passion for one's work matters a great deal. What's more, the type of passion an individual has makes all the difference. Vallerand (2010) describes passion as a pull toward a self-defining activity that one loves and values, requiring much time and energy. His empirically validated model identifies two specific kinds of passion: harmonious and obsessive, which are distinguished by how one internalizes the passion within their identity. Harmonious passion extends from an autonomous, intrinsically motivated desire, while obsessive passion creates an uncontrollable urge to engage in an activity, with contingencies motivated by social acceptance. Obsessively passionate individuals are ego-invested and dependent upon the passion even as it overtakes other areas of their lives (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). Obsessive passion in the workplace results in conflict between work and other areas of life because the individual is unable to

disengage from the work activity. Conflict increases the possibility of burnout as well. Conversely, harmonious passion actually prevents conflict and increases work satisfaction. What's more, harmonious passion is correlated with flow and positive emotions during engagement with the passionate activity (Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, Donahue, & Lorimer, 2008; Mageau, Vallerand, Rousseau, Ratelle, & Provencher, 2005; Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, Rousseau, Grouzet, Dumais, & Grenier, 2006). Put simply, obsessive passion promotes burnout while harmonious passion prevents it (Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet, & Guay, 2008; Vallerand, Paquet, Philippe, & Charest, 2010).

The considerable research on passion verifies why it is crucial for an actor to release the outcome of auditions and invite more ease into the practice of their craft. Cultivating a harmonious passion with acting may not only allow the actor to be more open and less defensive about their work (Hodgins & Knee, 2002), but may actually increase the chances of booking a job by allowing easier access to flow and creativity. This chain reaction might even produce an upward spiral of life satisfaction. LaFrenière et al. (2012) found that for the obsessively passionate, life satisfaction was dependent upon success or failure of the passionate activity. Furthermore, the obsessively passionate individual's reaction to the outcome was usually out of proportion to the perceived activity importance.

An overview of the substantial research on actors and what drives their career pursuits overwhelmingly points to intrinsic motivation. Though calling, meaning, purpose, and passion are easily interchangeable terms for the layperson, the scholars and scientists above defined each one precisely in their research. These distinctions are a valuable resource when teasing out each construct's role in well-being and resilience. However, all distinctions aside, each one, by any name, is a guiding force for the actor. It is the source of inspiration and dreams. That is why the

other components of the resilience compass are in service to it and are absolutely essential to its fruition. The actor's calling/meaning/purpose/passion are of vital importance because the journey of an actor is often fraught with obstacles and complications.

Cultivating a Resilience Mindset

"I think I'll try defying gravity." – *Elphaba, in Wicked* (Schwartz, 2004)

The human spirit is remarkably resilient. Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, and Reed (2009) defined resilience as "patterns of positive adaptation during or following significant adversity or risk" (p. 118). Research on post-traumatic growth illustrates that we are capable of responding to tragedy by not only bouncing back, but by achieving a higher level of functioning in the process (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 1996; Masten, 2001; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Seligman, 2011). Optimism research has generally taken two paths. One approach was based on expectancy-value theory (similar to the construct of self-efficacy) and argued that optimism and pessimism are a result of individuals' expectations around important goals (Carver, Scheir, Miller, & Fulford, 2009). The other approach treated optimism and pessimism as a function of attribution (Weiner 1985; 1986) or explanatory style (Peterson & Steen, 2009). No matter the theoretical interpretation of the construct of optimism, the expectations we have about life and the way explain the good or bad things that happen to us undoubtedly shape our experience and are foundational to resilience.

Learned Helplessness and the Promise of the Hope Circuit

In response to Overmier and Seligman's (1967) landmark experiments with dogs and electric shocks, Seligman and Maier (1967) determined dogs that were initially unable to escape

electric shock eventually stopped trying to escape further shocks (e.g. lying down and suffering through them) even when escape became possible, because of the uncontrollability of the initial shocks. This condition is known as learned helplessness. Positive psychology's interpretation of optimism and pessimism actually developed out of learned helplessness theory, in which clinical depression and hopelessness result from a person's sense of having no volition in their own experience. (Hiroto & Seligman, 1974). Not all researchers agreed that repeated stress and trauma inevitably produced profound, lasting problems, however. Bonanno and colleagues (2005) found that resilience was actually a more common reaction, comprised of ordinary ingredients. Masten (2001) referred to this typical resilience response as "ordinary magic."

In a stunning development, Maier and Seligman (2016) have reported new research that collapses learned helplessness theory, fifty years later. In recent experiments with rats, Maier showed that the ventromedial prefrontal cortex could inhibit the Dorsal Raphe Nucleus, the source of the passive response. Seligman referred to the link between these two areas of the brain as *the hope circuit*. If this circuit is blocked, the rats will be passive, regardless of their ability to escape. But if this connection is robust, the rats will press on, even when they are repeatedly unsuccessful. What's more, this connection can be strengthened. While it is impossible to prevent catastrophe in people's lives, one of positive psychology's primary objectives is developing expectations of control and mastery. In other words, building the hope circuit.

Explanatory Style and Resilience

In *Learned Optimism* (1998), Seligman outlines the importance of transforming pessimistic explanatory styles by disputing negative beliefs. He demonstrated that even when the genetic and experiential deck is stacked against us, we have the power to alter our pessimistic explanatory style from *personal* (it's my fault), *permanent* (this always happens to me) and

pervasive (across domains), to a more *external* (not my fault), *unstable* (this is not representative of my general experience), *specific* (in this case) interpretation of negative events through disputation (along with the reverse process for positive events) (Seligman, 1998). Your explanatory style has a tremendous impact on your quality of life. People with optimistic explanatory style are less depressed, more resilient, healthier, live longer, are more successful at school, work, and sports, and have stronger relationships (Peterson, & Steen, 2002).

Research on resilience has generally taken two divergent approaches: variable-focused and person-focused (Masten, 2001; Masten et al., 2009). The first uses statistical analyses to examine relational factors and the second studies individuals who have demonstrated resilience (Masten et al., 2009). These different methodological approaches have produced results that generalize across populations. The term resilience has been interpreted differently among researchers. Resilience is a state-like construct that can be fostered through focused, direct intervention (Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009; Cornum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011; Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li, 2005; Waite & Richardson, 2004). Masten and colleagues (2009) conceptualized resilience as “patterns of positive adaptation during or following significant adversity or risk” (p. 118), while Bonanno (2004) described it as the ability to continue to function at current levels in the face of adversity. Everyone experiences stress and encounters challenging circumstances. This is certainly true for actors--as artists, humans, and business professionals. These times of trial can potentially be transformative and used to our advantage, though. Morgan and Garmon-Bibb (2011) observed that growth and self-improvement was possible as a direct result of successfully navigating adversity. Resilience not only allows us to grow and flourish in the face of challenges and disappointments, but it also empowers us to take calculated risks and make the most of opportunities. Being a resilient

individual is not based on platitudes like ‘having good energy’ or merely ‘hoping for the best.’ Some of the skills associated with resilience include: emotional competence, self-regulation, problem solving and decision-making, social awareness, social competence, self-efficacy, optimism, and a sense of purpose or meaning (Gillham et al., 2012). Resilience is malleable and each of these abilities can be measured, taught, and improved. These are not the qualities of an irrationally hopeful individual; rather, they represent what it means to have *realistic* optimism (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

Realistic optimism allows you to sustain a positive mindset without denying reality. It recognizes that positive outcomes can require problem-solving, effort, and planning. In other words, realistically optimistic thinkers are less likely to deny problems, more accurate about what they can and can’t control, and seek solutions for the factors they can control, while not ruminating over what they cannot. As an actor, so much is out of your hands, it’s easy to feel powerless to the whims of talent agents, managers, casting agents, producers, directors, unions, the network, the artistic director, the accountants, etc. You have to be able to focus on what you *can* control. Reivich and Shatté (2002) describe a winning combination for resilience and success – realistic optimism plus self-efficacy. This flies in the face of conventional wisdom regarding how to be an artist. It seems that in order to make a living as a professional actor, it actually does not pay to suffer for your art.

Applied Resilience Research

A broad array of interventions intended to develop and augment resilience have been implemented and empirically scrutinized with disparate populations (Brunwasser et al., 2009; Luthans et al., 2005; Waite & Richardson, 2004). There are two particularly effective applications that have been widely documented and successfully instituted on an impressive

scale: the U.S. Army's Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness [CSF2] (Seligman & Fowler, 2011; Cornum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011; Casey, 2011; Harms, Herian, Krasikova, Vanhove, & Lester, 2013; Gottman, Gottman, & Atkins, 2011; Lester, McBride, Bliese, & Adler, 2011; Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011) and the Penn Resiliency Program [PRP] (Gillham, Brunwasser, & Freres, 2008; Gillham, Reivich, & Jaycox, 2008; Gillham, Linkins, & Reivich, 2009; Gilham et al., 2012). The PRP, one of the more widely researched youth depression prevention programs, employs cognitive-behavioral techniques to promote well-being in school children. Over the years, studies evaluating the PRP's results have been contradictory. However, in a 2009 meta-analytic review, Brunwasser and colleagues (2009) found evidence that the PRP significantly reduced depressive symptoms in youth for at least a year, with PRP groups scoring between 0.86 and 1.75 points lower on the CDI (Children's Depression Inventory) than non-intervention control groups.

The CSF2 is an Army-wide initiative that takes a proactive approach to soldiers', family members', and DA civilians' (Department of Army civilian employee) psychological well-being in order to intentionally build "an Army that is just as psychologically fit as it is physically fit" (Cornum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011, p. 6). In an assessment of the effectiveness of CSF2, (Harms, Herian, Krasikova, Vanhov, & Lester, 2013) found that soldiers in the training condition had lower diagnosis rates for both mental health and substance abuse problems with 4.44% of soldiers in the training group receiving a diagnosis for mental health problems versus 5.07% in the non-training group and 1.16% of training participants receiving a substance abuse diagnosis, as opposed to 2.85% in the non-training group. Through a combination of assessments, feedback, universal resilience training, and individually targeted strengths-training, the CSF2 program (based on content from the PRP) employs a "train the trainer" model to promote resilience and

well-being for people at all levels of involvement in the Army (Cornum et al., 2011; Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011). While the results of these resilience programs may be moderate, they are nonetheless an effective step in the right direction toward overall well-being. What's more, most of the applications employed by the PRP and the CSF2 could be slightly modified for use with actors as well.

Resilience is unequivocally an integral element of well-being and is a fundamental skill set that an actor must master in order to thrive. An attempt to foster it in isolation, however, would be only marginally effective as resilience is an important component of a larger framework for flourishing. A lack of agency, or sense of control in life, can be a vexing conundrum for actors, as so much of their career is essentially beyond their control. Having so little agency in their work lives can produce mixed-results and seemingly maladaptive behavior. More than any other survival skill, researchers have found an external locus of control to be the most prominent means of coping for actors (Field, 1991). The belief that your career is basically out of your hands is not only true, for the most part, but a necessary mental framework for coping with rejection. Researchers have noted a number of ways in which it manifests. Actors rationalize the ups and downs of a career by attributing bookings to luck (Lane, 1959; Way, 1997) or the failure to land a role to reasons unrelated to their talent, such as not being the right type, not knowing the right people or the idea that *this one wasn't meant for me* (Phillips, 1991). These conclusions are often justified and while they may provide a temporary salve in some situations, they can produce unwanted consequences as well. The pervasive sense of being controlled by other forces rather than having career autonomy coupled with the industry-specific challenges regarding developing and sustaining meaningful relationships both in and out of the workplace (McGann et al., 2012) can potentially reduce self-determined motivation and can negatively impact

performance, further deteriorating the well-being/work cycle (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It certainly produces ambivalence and has the potential to, in effect, squelch an actor's passion to the point of bitterly abandoning their dreams. These actor-specific challenges illustrate that resilience is a piece of a larger puzzle and is, perhaps, not as effective when fostered in isolation. Best practices may necessitate widening the scope to include the application of other processes as well.

Psychological Capital : Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, Optimism

*“Into the woods--you have to grope,
But that's the way you learn to cope.
Into the woods to find there's hope
Of getting through the journey.” – Steven Sondheim, Into the Woods (1986/1993)*

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is a second order, core construct based on the concept of agency. It consists of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism--HERO (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). PsyCap outlines an individual's positive psychological development based on 1) the ability to change tactics or redirect the pathways in pursuit of goals when necessary to succeed (hope), 2) confidence to succeed in challenging endeavors (self-efficacy), 3) ability to bounce back in the face of adversity (resilience), and 4) attribution, or explanatory style, about succeeding in the present as well as the future, along with the grit to persevere in order to achieve that success (optimism) (Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007). More simply, PsyCap is having the psychological resources and the will to succeed.

PsyCap appears to affect an individual's awareness of basic need satisfaction (as defined in Self-Determination Theory as autonomy, competence, and relatedness), which then leads to psychological well-being. Research data connecting basic psychological need satisfaction to well-being, including studies with gymnasts (Gagne, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003) and other athletes (Gillet, Vallerand, Amoura, & Baldes, 2010), undergraduate psychology students (Reis,

Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000), physical education students (Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2003), workers (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Deci, Gagne, Leone, Usunov, & Kornazheva, 2001), and most recently with actors and stunt people (Hite, 2015), reinforce this argument. Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay (1997) found that high school dropouts had lower levels of perceived academic autonomy and competence than those of students who remained in school. Not surprisingly, dropouts displayed higher amotivation and lower intrinsic motivation as well. These findings may shed some light on how a perceived lack of autonomy and competence can lead actors to give up on their careers.

PsyCap theorists took the conceptual views of resilience from both Masten and colleagues (2009) and Bonanno (2004) (see previous discussion of resilience) and expounded upon them. They defined resilience as “the psychological capacity to rebound, to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress, and increased responsibility” (Luthans, 2002a, p. 702) and “the will to go beyond the normal, to beyond the equilibrium point” (Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007, p. 116). What made their interpretation of resilience unique is that they included factors such as potentially stress-inducing *positive* events, and the idea that growth and self-improvement were possible outcomes of successfully navigating adversity (Morgan & Garmon-Bibb, 2011).

While resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy have already been explored here, to best understand PsyCap, a more thorough look at hope is necessary. Snyder’s (1994, 2002) hope theory suggests that hope results from a combination of one’s beliefs about their ability and commitment (agency) to pursue a desired endeavor (goal), and aptitude to strategize to achieve it (pathways). The more hope a person has, the better equipped they are to create different approaches to goal-fulfillment and spontaneously respond to obstacles along the way (Irving,

Snyder, & Crowson, 1998; Snyder et al., 1991). This theory is consistent with a technique actors are trained to employ during rehearsal and performance. Having a clearly defined, actionable objective (or goal) is essential to good acting. In pursuit of that goal, the actor must change their tactics (pathways) as often as is necessary (e.g. to persuade, to challenge, to plead for help) in order to achieve the character's objective. In life, as well as in drama, hope can be developed via goal setting and following through with specific, meaningful, challenging goals (Snyder, 2002).

Actors might benefit from employing an empirically verified visualization technique developed by Snyder and colleagues (1996), shown to bolster agency through memories of success and follow through. In the aftermath of a disappointing audition or failure to book a job, actors could practice mentally walking through a memory of a specific time when they achieved a goal they had worked hard to accomplish. Doing so not only re-connects the individual to a sense of efficacy and a state of hope, but also abates rumination over failure, which as Seligman (1990) warned, can lead to depression.

Though the concept of Psychological Capital came out of organizational scholarship as companies sought to improve their bottom lines by investing in employees' sense of agency, its basic principles could readily be leveraged by actors for self-empowerment and, I believe, ultimately advance their careers. Gould (2009) suggests that performers (e.g. actors) can bolster and sustain self-confidence by looking to Bandura's (1997) work for self-efficacy, Seligman (1998) for increasing optimism, and Snyder (2002) for enhancing hope. Hite's (2015) study of psychological well-being and performance in actors and stunt people revealed positive correlations between PsyCap and autonomy, competence, relatedness; psychological well-being; and performance. The survey data was based on self-reports of the participants' performance, defined as "how well individuals feel they have executed the requirements of their job over the

past week” (Hite, 2015, p.17). He concluded, “As actors’ levels of psychological well-being increased, so did their levels of performance” (p.129). Mitigating negative thoughts (or amplifying positive thoughts), connecting actors to successful peers, offering goal-setting techniques and performance feedback that allow the actor to experience success, and utilizing positive explanatory style are all techniques for increasing an actor’s psychological capital--all of which may contribute to the global confidence necessary for optimal performance in actors (Hite, 2015). Developing psychological capital is a vital component of the resilience compass.

Grit

“Good times and bad times, I’ve seen them all. But I’m still here.”
-- *Carlotta in Follies* (Sondheim, 1971)

There is virtually no denying the necessity of grit to enable an actor to survive in the entertainment industry. It is an essential ingredient of a successful acting career. In Angela Duckworth’s words, “Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1088). Success as an actor demands persistence in the face of failure. It is simply not possible for a professional actor to book the job at every audition. I asked Dr. Gordon Goodman, a psychologist who specializes in treating audition anxiety, how actors can overcome the disappointment of rejection. He offered,

Because looks, body type, and personality are not mutable factors, the only thing that can be judged by the performer during an audition is whether they performed to the extent of their ability. Whether they get the job is beside the point entirely. They are a professional performer because they bring a professional level of ability to the table every time.

Expecting to get the job without having any of the required factors is unrealistic, childish,

and an example of magical thinking (personal communication, Jan 30, 2016).

Many struggling actors indeed get caught up in magical thinking. One's skill level must match the requirements of the role. If it doesn't, a growth mindset (the belief that abilities can be developed through perseverance and hard work)(Dweck, 2006) is required to continue building that skill so that preparation eventually meets opportunity. But to internalize the idea of being a failure, when not booking a job was simply a matter of needing to continue to develop the craft, is certainly a trap of magical thinking and must be acknowledged for what it is. The disappointment of not "landing the gig" need not be internalized as evidence of worthlessness but rather, an opportunity to become grittier. Besides, rumination over whether one is 'talented enough' is not only self-destructive, it is also unsupported by science. Duckworth's considerable body of research on grit underlines how tenacity and self-control will triumph over talent time and again (Perkins-Gough, 2013).

Toolkit

"You have to learn certain skills to present magic." -- David Copperfield (in Negi, 2015)

According to McNight and Kashdan (2008), "People with access to a large set of self-regulatory tools, with an ability to flexibly apply them, are in an optimal position to navigate life challenges and sustain high levels of healthy functioning" (p.247). There are currently no published research studies on resilience-focused interventions with actors. There are, however, abundant possibilities for applying what we know about enhancing well-being and boosting resilience for this unique population. To that end, the following section focuses on developing a resilience toolkit.

Leveraging Character Strengths

Aristotle placed tremendous value on an individual's moral character and saw eudaimonia

as the happy result of wisdom and virtue. It would be very difficult indeed to experience genuine eudaimonia while having unsound or poor character. With positive psychology still in its infancy, Peterson and Seligman (2004) set out to create an empirically-based, scientifically rigorous theoretical framework that would categorize an individual's strengths as a counter to the disease and disorder-focused *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). Character strengths, or positive personality traits, are inherent, pervasive, intrinsically valuable and fulfilling. They provide pathways to well-being. The VIA classification of character strengths and virtues is the result of a 3 year project involving 55 social scientists who studied character traits throughout time and across cultures (VIA Institute on Character, 2016). This diagnostic tool enables users to discover their "signature character strengths" (those most essential to who we are), in order to capitalize on them toward leading happier, more authentic, and fulfilled lives (VIA Institute on Character, 2016). For instance, using a signature strength to bolster a lesser strength has been shown to increase happiness and decrease depression for up to six months (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Each person has a unique cluster of character traits. The way they work together shapes and expresses who we are. Knowing our strengths is valuable because we can learn to leverage them to improve our well-being, enhance relationships, heighten resilience, increase life and work satisfaction, elevate our sense of meaning and purpose, and achieve our goals (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan & Minhas, 2011; Niemiec, 2013; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The VIA classification outlines six overarching virtues under which each of the 24 character strengths are grouped: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Within those classifications, the VIA assesses 24 character strengths: creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, perspective, bravery,

perseverance, honesty, zest, love, kindness, social intelligence, teamwork, fairness, leadership, forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Conceptualizing any given strength on a spectrum illustrates the possibility to underplay or overplay a strength at the extremes. Aristotle spoke of a *golden mean*, which is achieved by drawing on the right strengths, to the right degree, at the right time in order to achieve goals (VIA Institute on Character, 2016). Upon completing the VIA, there is a 3-step process for strengths recognition and development called *Aware, Explore, Apply* (VIA Institute on Character, 2016).

Determining your strengths is the first step. It is then helpful to become *aware* of them by establishing what strengths you demonstrate in a given situation. Strength-spotting creates mindfulness around strengths use. The *explore* phase, involves examining your life, past and present, to connect the newly identified strengths on a deeper level. This might involve journaling, conversations with a coach, colleague or loved one, and personal reflection on how individual strengths show up in life. The *apply* part of the process involves intentionally putting strengths to use and developing an action plan. Using a strength in a new way every day is recommended, though many more applications are possible.

VIAstrengths.org compiles years of research and offers many resources to further develop one's signature strengths. The *Aware, Explore, Apply* process is an easily accessible, practical approach to strengths development. There is always a new way to put our strengths to use. By focusing on how to improve the areas in which we already excel, it is possible to boost well-being while enjoying the process.

Actors already have an intuitive understanding of character strengths. The process of embodying and transforming the writer's vision from the printed page into a three-dimensional

human being in real life involves in-depth analysis, in which an actor identifies the character's desires, obstacles, friends and foes, fears, personal histories, foibles and, apropos to this application, character strengths. For example, in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, by Alfred Uhry (1997), Joe uses his signature strengths of humor, judgment, perseverance, spirituality, and perspective to persuade Sunny to embrace her heritage and to win her heart. Sunny, in turn, uses her signature strengths of kindness, love of learning, humility, prudence, and social intelligence to re-appraise her life and to embrace her future with Joe. Approaching character development by consciously employing the classification and concepts from the VIA (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) not only adds multiple dimensions to this process, but has the potential to heighten an actor's awareness toward the development of their own strengths as well.

ATC and Thinking Traps

"...for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."-- Hamlet: Act 2, Scene 2 (Shakespeare, 1603/1987)

Beck's (1979; 1991) cognitive therapy was based on the idea that thoughts, feelings, and behavior were all connected and that we could transcend challenges and achieve our goals by altering unconstructive, erroneous thinking and disrupting maladaptive behavior and/or upsetting emotional reactions. Ellis' (1973; 1991; 1993) Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy posited that how we react to having (or the anticipation of having) our goals blocked is a result of our beliefs. His ABC model detailed a three-step process in which an event activates a belief, which determines our response. The therapy involves identifying the first three components and then *disputing* the beliefs in order to change the reactive behavior, or ABCD. One can also conceptualize the process by replacing "beliefs" with "thoughts," since a thought, whether it is a reflection of a belief or not, precedes a behavioral reaction to an event.

As an acting instructor, I teach a thought-based approach inspired by the teaching

philosophy of my mentor, the ingenious Lesly Kahn. The process is always 1) *listen*, 2) *have a thought* about whatever was just said or done and 3) *respond* truthfully (Kahn, 2016). When I see actors behaving in an unspecific, unmotivated fashion I'll ask, "What was your thought there?" I'll inevitably get "I don't know... I guess I didn't have one," as a response. This is an example of bad acting because we are, as humans, always having thoughts — always. What *is* truthful in this scenario is that we are not always aware of how our thoughts drive our reactions. In other words, in life, we can often be as disconnected from the thoughts/consequences relationship as are bad actors.

In Stanislavski's concept of physical actions, he outlined the order in which we process and respond to activating events in our lives as "Stimulus > Internal Feeling > External Expression (Action)," whereas in the process of *acting* it's "Stimulus > External Expression (Action) > Internal Feeling" (Stilson, Clark, & McGraw, 2015, p.67). In order to behave truthfully, Stanislavski instructed actors to respond to a stimulus with an action or behavior in order to genuinely produce the internal feelings. He didn't have the benefits of cognitive-behavioral therapy to back up this process but he understood human nature. He had to restructure the order in which actors process and react to stimuli to authentically produce and make them aware of their characters' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.

According to Reivich & Shatté (2002), an endless stream of background "ticker-tape beliefs" (or thoughts) dictates how we respond to activating events (which in and of themselves are objective). It is within our power to choose how we will react. By mindfully processing our thoughts and beliefs, we can better navigate challenges and disappointments, both big and small, toward enhancing our effectiveness and well-being. Ellis' ABC model (activating event/beliefs/consequences) (1991, 1993, 2004), or the revised ATC model (activating

event/*thoughts*/consequences) (Reivich & Salzberg, 2016) is a useful tool for recognizing your thoughts about an event and therefore, their consequences. The process begins with identifying the trigger (a challenge, adversity, or positive event), your thoughts or interpretations of the activating event (what you say to yourself in the heat of the moment), and their resulting consequences (emotions and physiological reactions). This process can be used *proactively*, to rehearse how we might respond in a productive way, *in the moment*, to facilitate a productive response, or *retrospectively*, to diagnose where our inaccurate thinking led us astray.

Stanislavski's re-structuring of the order in which we process is in many ways true to life because we are so often unaware of why we respond to stimuli with knee-jerk reactions. Perhaps he intuitively understood that we often react before truly understanding the connective tissue of our (often misguided) thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that produced the response.

There is more information buzzing by us than we could possibly begin to analyze. Thankfully, life has taught us to use *heuristics*, or mental shortcuts, in order to be functional human beings (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). This works beautifully -- except when it does not. Sometimes we immediately make assumptions about people and events based on heuristics, rather than evidence. These otherwise helpful mental shortcuts gone awry mutate into *thinking traps*. Examples of thinking traps include personalization (self-blaming, regardless of evidence of external factors, decreasing self-efficacy), generalization (making always and everything judgments), blaming (the opposite of personalizing--ignoring internal factors) maximizing/minimizing (blowing things out of proportion/failing to give proper weight to evidence), mind-reading (belief in knowing another's undisclosed thoughts), jumping to conclusions (making assumptions without having relevant data), tunnel vision (not seeing the larger picture--usually based on a negativity bias), and emotional reasoning (drawing false

conclusions based on our feelings, rather than evidence) (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Thinking traps impede resilience and damage well-being. It is easy to fall prey to this error. Our inherent confirmation bias compels us to see the evidence that corroborates our assumptions while ignoring the evidence that does not (Kahneman, 2011). This pattern becomes stronger every time we make this error.

One of the positive interventions I've implemented to apply the ATC/thinking traps process in an acting class or rehearsal scenario is by playing a game of "freeze the scene." As actors rehearse together, I stop the scene during highly charged moments and have the observing class members diagnose which thinking traps and *icebergs*, or unconscious underlying beliefs, were driving the individual characters' reactions and further explicate what's happening through the ABC/ATC model (Ellis, 1973; 1991; 2004; Reivich & Shatté, 2002). This has been very effective for teaching and applying this technique in the actors' craft as well as their personal lives.

The Practices: Cultivating Self-compassion through Mindfulness

Gratitude

"Once in a while I experience an emotion onstage that is so gut-wrenching, so heart-stopping, that I could weep with gratitude and joy. The feeling catches and magnifies so rapidly that it threatens to engulf me."

— Julie Andrews Edwards (2008, p.254)

Gratitude has been described as an emotion, a moral virtue, a philosophical outlook, a habit, a personality trait, and even a coping response. It often helps to "hunt the good stuff" to enhance positive emotions because people who feel and share their gratitude are healthier, sleep and perform better (Seligman, 2011). In their study of the effectiveness of gratitude interventions, Emmons and McCullough (2003) found that an 'attitude of gratitude' produced more positive and optimistic appraisals of one's life, more time spent exercising, fewer reported

physical symptoms, higher levels of positive affect, and reductions in negative affect. Further, the gratitude interventions they tested inspired people to be more likely to report helping or offering emotional support to another, increased optimism, and a sense of connectedness to others. Their research indicates that gratitude is effective in increasing well-being while amplifying psychological, social, and spiritual resources. In alignment with Fredrickson's (1998, 2000) broaden and build theory, gratitude seems to extend the scope of cognition and enable flexible and creative thinking. It also facilitates coping with stress and adversity (Aspinwall, 1998; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

In a 6-group, random-assignment, placebo-controlled internet-based study, Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) tested five happiness interventions, alongside one plausible control exercise. The results showed that writing and presenting a gratitude letter improved happiness for up to one month--the most successful positive change among the interventions tested. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) tested a six-week intervention in which participants kept a gratitude journal. Those who listed up to five things for which they were grateful on a weekly basis had an increase of well-being. Ultimately, Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, and Sheldon, (2008) found that participants who were motivated to increase their happiness experienced the most benefit from the gratitude exercises. Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) found that the "three good things" exercise (writing about three positive occurrences from each day) produced beneficial effects one month following the posttest. At that time, participants were happier and less depressed than they had been before the intervention, and they remained happier and less depressed when evaluated at the three-month and six-month follow-ups.

In preparation for this paper, I conducted an informal (and highly unscientific poll) with

colleagues ranging in levels of profession from students to accomplished celebrities of Broadway, television, and film. I asked them what was working for them and to share what they did to maintain well-being and resilience as an actor. One unexpected metric that emerged was that many actors who participated offered (in follow-up conversations) that they felt a sense of elevation after verbalizing and sharing what was working for them. Some spoke to a newly engaged appreciation and passion for what they do and how well they do it. It seems that what you appreciate indeed appreciates. This reminded me of Cooperrider's observation of Appreciative Inquiry causing a "Heisenberg 'observer effect' on steroids" (2013, p. 11). It was a happy consequence and a poignant reminder of the power of everyday gratitude.

Mindfulness and Meditation

In the previously mentioned Australian Actors' Well-being Study (2015), more than a quarter of responding participants reported experiencing debilitating performance anxiety at some point in their career--debilitating. Furthermore, having formally trained as an actor appears to increase the likelihood of reporting performance anxiety. This data profoundly illustrate the dire need for well-being and resilience-centered curriculum in actor-training programs and performing arts departments in colleges and universities world-wide.

It is not uncommon for an actor to wear this type of anxiety as a sort of badge of courage, once again demonstrating the pervasive belief that one has to suffer in order to be a worthy artist. There is hefty body of scientific research showing that mindfulness and specifically, meditation, strengthens immunity, decreases anxiety and depression, enhances relationships, and globally improves health and well-being (Davidson et al., 2013; Sears & Kraus, 2009; Goyal et al., 2014; Sedlmeier et al., 2012). Thanks to neuroplasticity, it literally changes your brain (Gladding, 2013). Meditation improves working memory and actually

increases the size of the pre-frontal cortex, while simultaneously shrinking the amygdala—the source of panic and rage (M. Baime, personal communication, October 4, 2015). Meditation also raises vagal tone, which is the degree to which your breathing pattern affects your heart rate. Increasing heart rate variability reduces cortisol levels, anxiety and high blood pressure (Davies, 2014). Loving kindness meditation enhances positive emotions and improves sociability, empathy, and compassion (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Mindfulness practice also strengthens self-regulation and is an effective treatment for managing psychological disorders (Hölzel, Gard, Schuman-Olivier, Vago, & Ott, 2011). In addition to the many physiological health benefits it provides, meditation has also been shown to increase emotion regulation, interpersonal communication, cognitive abilities and creativity (Baas, Nevicka & Ten Velden, 2014).

Kelly McGonigal (2014) studies how mindsets about stress impact health and well-being. Her research shows that yes, stress will indeed kill you -- if you believe it will. She recommends conscious reframing from negative perceptions of stress to more empowering perspectives (e.g. shifting audition anxiety to excitement). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggests that optimal experience or *flow* is a state that we consciously make happen. Meditation practice allows performers to consciously direct their awareness at will and has been linked to improved overall quality of performance with musicians (Oyan, 2006). It follows that such a practice could be productive for actors as well. I sometimes lead actors through a visualization technique that anchors them in the physical actions of the scene to facilitate focusing their attention during performance. Regular engagement in mindfulness meditation and creative visualization can facilitate flow states and may be one of the more beneficial practices performers can cultivate offstage.

Stanislavski, whose method is the basis of modern acting technique said, “Tension is the actor’s occupational disease” (Stilson, Clark, & McGraw, 2015, p. 19). The college students I work with are engaged in a demanding performing arts program and are consequently remarkably stressed. I endeavor to incorporate meditation into my classes as often as possible. The student response is nearly universally positive. Requests for an in-class meditation are a daily occurrence. This result is entirely anecdotal and my students are an admittedly small sample of the population, but I believe this hunger is representative of a burgeoning interest and need for mindfulness practices for actors to be integrated into arts education.

Self-Compassion

“You have suffered enough and warred with yourself, it's time that you won.”—Falling Slowly in Once (Carney, Hansard, Irglová, & Walsh, 2008)

Rumination, along with self-criticism and feelings of separation are not only unpleasant activities, but can also lead to depression (Blatt, Quinlan, Chevron, McDonald & Zuroff, 1982; Bowlby, 1980; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Because a career in the entertainment business demands that actors be self-focused, the tendency to attempt to disentangle the possible reasons why a booking didn’t pan out, with very little information to base it on, compounded by very little agency in the process, can be powerfully self-defeating. As some of the previously mentioned research suggests, actors who engage in such thought processes might be described as having low self-esteem. According to Neff (2003), however, self-esteem is a problematic term as it heavily relies on evaluation (by the self and others) and is difficult to improve. Additionally, an overabundance of self-esteem could potentially lead to narcissism, self-centeredness, a lack of concern for others, and self-absorption (Damon, 1995; Seligman, 1995).

Self-compassion, conversely, meets instances of failure, suffering, or disappointment

with kindness towards oneself (rather than harsh judgment and self-directed criticism), common humanity (a sense of oneness with others rather than separateness and isolation), and mindfulness (creating a mental space for being present with painful thoughts and feelings without over-identifying with them) (Neff, 2003). Unlike the self-centered orientation of self-esteem, self-compassion also enhances feelings of compassion and concern for others, acknowledging that suffering, failures, and personal foibles are a common element of the human condition, and that all people, oneself included, deserve compassion. Self-compassion does not enable one to dissociate from personal failings, but rather to be with and address these circumstances with gentleness and patience. In *Fully Present*, Smalley & Winston (2010) share a story about an actress who uses the self-compassion she learned through mindfulness training to process an audition experience in a positive way. While it is tempting to become engrossed with feelings of failure and inadequacy, self-compassion assists in the jettisoning of harmful behaviors and patterns of thought.

Previous definitions of mental health focus on individuation and separation, which may have limited our conception and study of what mental health actually is (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). Self-compassion entails an “integration between concern with oneself and concern with others, a state that researchers are increasingly recognizing as essential to optimal psychological functioning” (Blatt, 1995 in Neff, 2003, p.96). McGonigal’s (2014) application of the tonglen meditation practice suggests that we must be present with suffering if we are to alleviate it. The process is to breathe in the suffering, let it transform inside us and breathe compassion out into the world (McGonigal, 2014). This philosophy is an empowering approach to being simultaneously a source of comfort and a witness to the suffering of another.

If we can counter harmful tendencies to be hypercritical of ourselves, balance our

emotions, and recognize our connections to others, we may be better able to live life more fully and pursue our passions more effectively. For these reasons and more, I posit that self-compassion might be the key to resilience for people (like actors) who face rejection on a regular basis. Re-contextualizing mindfulness in this way has much broader implications as well. As Neff (2003) concluded “A culture shift which recognized the value of self-compassion could also benefit society, as it would encourage a kinder, less self-absorbed, less isolated, and more emotionally functional populace” (p. 96).

Talent in Service

“The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don’t wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope.” --Barack Obama (in Chima, 2013)

Helping others feels good. In addition to developing practices such as leveraging character strengths, increasing psychological capital, applying ATC, diagnosing thinking traps and icebergs, practicing grit, nourishing gratitude, and cultivating mindfulness and self-compassion toward improving resilience and elevating well-being, I hypothesize that actors would benefit greatly from the transformational experience of volunteering--or more specifically, using their talent in service to others.

Seven years ago I took a leap of faith and for the first time in my professional life I chose to not earn my living as a performing artist, but rather, as an educator. The college students I began teaching were not like so many of the jaded professional actors I had previously taught in Hollywood. They were hopeful, enthusiastic and determined to make a difference in the world. Of course, this is no ordinary college. The educational model of the organization I work with (The Young Americans College of the Performing Arts) consists of two parts: the college program, a general education and performing arts curriculum, and the touring outreach program

which brings music and performing arts education to schools around the globe -- with our students as the teachers. I introduce each new class to acting technique, endeavor to guide them through their blocks, and excitedly witness their breakthroughs. I strive to imbue the work with positive psychology principles and life lessons as well. I partner with the students on their journeys through the seminal freshman year, hoping they will remember what they learned and will incorporate those classroom experiences into their interactions on the road as they tour the world with the Young Americans. While on tour, our students teach and perform in 3-day to week-long workshops with kids everywhere from tsunami-ravaged Northern Japan, to special needs schools in Germany, in which Syrian refugee children comprise a large percentage of the participants, to juvenile detention centers in Los Angeles. When they return as sophomores after their first outreach tour, these students are transformed -- profoundly changed. They have used their talent in service to others. They have experienced a life-altering awakening as a result of working face to face to educate, inspire, and empower kids all around the world. They begin their sophomore coursework from a more whole, more integrated perspective, knowing what is possible in the world when you're guided by a greater purpose. They have seen the power of their talent. They have used that talent toward empowering others as well as themselves. It is my mission to ensure that actors are aware of and have an opportunity to experience this kind of communion with others, by using their talent as an agent of positive change.

A Case for Volunteering

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." – Gandhi
(in Ashoka, 2012)

Cialdini has made a strong case that we are socialized to experience positive emotions as a result of helping others (Cialdini & Fultz, 1990; Cialdini, Kenrick, & Baumann, 1982). It stands to reason that the act of volunteering could not only improve depressive symptoms, but

according to psychoneuroimmunologists, also strengthen the immune system, consequently reducing disease and mortality (Piliavin, 2003). In other words, sociological and psychological theories predict that volunteering will produce benefits for the volunteer.

Volunteering is loosely defined as unpaid work performed by individuals or a group for the purpose of benefitting others (Loeser, 1974; Scheier, 1982; Van Til, 1988). About 50% of Americans participate in volunteer work (Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1990; Sundeen, 1992). Ultimately, 70% of adults report volunteering at some point in their lifetime (Hodgkinson, 1995). Volunteer work, as opposed to other altruistic behavior like donating blood or writing a check is highly associated with happiness along with better physical and mental health (Borgonovi, 2008). Furthermore, volunteering has been shown to improve access to social and psychological resources, ultimately increasing self-reported happiness while countering depression and anxiety (Musick & Wilson, 2003; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001; Wheeler, Gorey, & Greenblatt, 1998; Whiteley, 2004). Volunteer work has been shown to have intrinsic and non-monetary motives as its main reward. (Borgonovi, 2008). Intrinsic motivation is particularly linked to sustained volunteering (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993). These motives are described by Midlarsky (1991) as: being a distraction from one's own troubles, amplifying meaning and perceived personal value, enhancing mood, improving social integration based on social skills and interpersonal connections, and positively affecting self-evaluations. In fact, Keyes (1998) reported that respondents who had volunteered in the past year reported greater social well-being (e.g., a belief that they were in contribution) than did those who had never volunteered, or had not done so for a year or more. People who believe their contributions to the welfare of others have a positive impact on the recipients of those contributions are more committed to volunteering than people who do not share these values (Matsuba, Hart, & Atkins, 2007). Simon (1997) asserts that the

meaning volunteers attach to their role identities may mediate the effect of those roles on their psychological well-being.

The majority of the research on the benefits of volunteering, which is vast and unequivocally positive, focuses on the elderly. Volunteering lowers depression levels for people over 65 (Musick & Wilson, 2003). The overwhelming conclusion is that the more an elderly person volunteers, the higher his or her life satisfaction appears to be (Piliavin, 2003). The results have not been as robust for young or middle aged volunteers. One method of engaging youth volunteers has been particularly successful, however. During the 1990s, “service learning” became de rigueur for elite high schools and colleges. Service learning is usually defined as “academic experiences in which students engage both in social action and in reflection on their experiences in performing that action” (Piliavin, 2003, p. 234). The reflection component and educational context of the community service activities were key to the students experiencing optimal benefits. It is noteworthy that formal but not informal social interaction improves mental health. As demonstrated though the data on service learning, if volunteering increases access to social support, information, guidance, and secondary ties, its beneficial effects will be felt (Musick & Wilson, 2003). In terms of self-enhancement, or feeling better about oneself, the empirical evidence indicates that personal efficacy, self-esteem, and confidence are buoyed by service learning (Giles & Eyler, 1994, 1998; Williams, 1991, Yates & Youniss, 1996). Snyder, Clary, and Stukas (2000) found that for students who struggled with stress, feelings of alienation, or guilt, service learning gave them an outlet for working through these challenges with positive results. Because student volunteers were able to compare themselves with others who had greater challenges, Follman and Muldoon (1997) concurred that service learning could be more beneficial for “at risk” students who were able to put their own problems into perspective. If this

is the case for students who are at risk, it would be of great interest to explore whether such experiences might have a similar effect on actors who are “at risk” for abandoning their passion for acting as a career if they were able to use their talent in service to communities in great need of their contributions. Furthermore, if reflection is a mediating factor, how might it benefit actors to volunteer through an actors’ community group that incorporated reflection into the volunteer opportunities?

A person-activity fit for community service

Research on the benefits of volunteering is robust. Whether the suggested pathways are macro (integration into society) or micro (psychoneuroimmunologic), both theoretical approaches suggest that the impact of community service on the helper will vary based on the degree of “fit” between the volunteer’s needs and the type of service work performed (Piliavin, 2003). Additionally, both approaches agree that having a sense of agency will enhance the positive effects. Adam Grant, author of *Give and Take* (2013) stresses the importance of contribution to others and suggests people should craft their giving as a skillset and invest energy where it really counts, while avoiding the drain of giving when it’s not a match to what fuels them (A. Grant, personal communication, May 4, 2016). Community service can be energizing or depleting based on whether it serves the volunteer’s objectives. Given a choice, volunteers prefer tasks with benefits that align with their individual motives. Snyder, Clary, and Stukas (2000) have researched volunteer motivation and identified six functions that volunteering serves: value-expressive, social, knowledge, defensive, enhancement, and career. Findings consistently show that volunteers who choose the type of service they perform based on their motivational needs have positive, satisfying community service experiences (Piliavin, 2003). Similarly, Clary et al. (1998, Study 6) found that college students whose service learning projects

provided complementary benefits were not only more satisfied with their volunteering experience, but were more likely to continue volunteering in both the immediate and long-term future. Thus, the empirical evidence suggests that matching volunteers' motivations with benefits has real-world results; namely, a more positive experience for everyone involved. (Houle, Sagarin, & Kaplan, 2005). Clearly, not all tasks are equal.

These findings are echoed in positive psychology research in the subject of positive interventions with individuals, which suggests that the most effective and beneficial activities are a result of *person-activity fit*, (based on an individual's strengths, weaknesses, goals, needs, and/or lifestyle) (Lyubormirsky, 2007). These types of positive interventions significantly enhance well-being and reduce depressive symptoms (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). In the case of volunteerism, the subject of helper motivation seems to warrant person-activity fit. For these reasons, the specific act of using one's talent in service to others may be more effective for actors' well-being than other types of volunteering (e.g. cleaning a park or collecting books for underprivileged children).

Because volunteering seems to benefit the mental health of the elderly but not the younger population, Musick and Wilson (2003) argue that volunteer work is elevated in significance among populations whose other roles have been diminished. The introduction of this paper addressed the broken cycle of communion for actors who offer their creation only to be unceremoniously dismissed. If volunteering benefits populations whose roles have been diminished, what might it do for actors who feel depressed about not having an outlet to meaningfully share their art in an environment in which it can be received – where it may actually have a positive impact on others? Nakamura and Yorks (2011) argued that, “being assured of and recognized for one's worth as an individual and a member of a social group

provides not only emotional support but also public acknowledgement of one's claim to certain resources" (p. 229). As the research clearly shows the positive effects of an advantageous match between a volunteer's specific motivations to a volunteer opportunity, I hypothesize that actors who are able to specifically use their talent in service to others might experience a boost in positive affect, renewed passion for their craft, and a revitalized sense of meaning and confidence as a result. The entertainment business, and in some ways, the craft of acting necessitate an actor develop an inward focus that can backfire when that point of view distorts an actor's perception in other aspects of life. Community service provides an eye-opening reality check and has been shown to reinforce volunteer satisfaction and gratitude for what they have in comparison to what the recipients they serve may lack (Borgonovi, 2008). The resulting outward focus can powerfully remind an actor that, in the words of Chris Peterson, "other people matter" (Peterson, 2012). Of course, the primary purpose of volunteering is to give of oneself to uplift another who is in need. It is a welcome consequence that doing so can greatly benefit the giver *and* the recipient.

An individual actor could discover volunteer opportunities through an online search or communities of actors could organize to create specific programs, produce a website, or plan local meet-ups to match service opportunities to actors' skills and personal preferences. One exemplary model is Sing for Hope, a volunteer organization committed to bringing the arts to underserved communities in New York City. It utilizes an extensive roster of actors, singers, dancers, musicians, painters, and puppeteers that the organization mobilizes to volunteer their time and talent at schools, hospitals, and community centers throughout the five boroughs. According to the website "Sing for Hope believes that the arts have unmatched power to uplift, unite, and transform lives. And we believe that all people deserve access to them" ("What we

do,” 2016).

It is possible that using one’s talent in service may be a pathway for not only honoring one’s passion, but to volitionally engage in one’s purpose. The service component of The Resilience Compass enables an actor to supersede the limitations of the gatekeepers to offer their craft in a receptive environment. I hypothesize that this type of performing may engage an actor’s harmonious passion (since a potential booking is not contingent upon audience approval), and therefore improve performance, which could then increase self-efficacy and well-being, subsequently boosting resilience, which may ultimately result in a higher booking rate. Obviously, future research should be conducted to test this hypothesis.

Community

Haidt (2012) suggests that happiness is to be found in between ourselves, others, our work, and something larger than ourselves. He speaks to our capacity to transcend self-interest and temporarily lose ourselves in something greater by activating *the hive switch*. This can be achieved through synchronous movement, awe, group singing or shared artistic performance (Haidt, 2012). Part of the challenge for actors in the entertainment industry is that their careers are entirely individual. The whole process can seem to convey it’s “every man for himself” in a zero sum game. Too often, an actor only experiences the sense of a strong community while working on a project.

Hammond and Edelman (1991) found that *working* actors expressed average to above-average self-esteem. Conversely, when actors are *unemployed* and not preparing for a project, they report low self-esteem. As Barron (1972) observed, the roller-coaster ride that has an actor exhilarated and engaged in a tightly-knit community while working often produces a depression-inducing crash once a project is over. I believe actors would be well-served by involvement in a

community of like-minded peers. Hite's (2015) research showed that psychological capital positively influenced psychological well-being and performance, in part, because it enhanced perceived relatedness, which is a social, interpersonal construct. A sense of belonging to a community with a shared purpose on an ongoing basis, regardless of one's work status, might enhance these benefits further.

Nakamura and Yorks (2011), describe social capital as potential and actual social networks of individuals or groups united by a combination of business and social interactions. Studies in organizational settings suggest having social capital enhances performance (Mu, Peng, & Love, 2008; Somaya, Williamson, & Lorinkava, 2008; Burt, 2007). Having high social capital affords an actor access to information, opportunities, and advantageous relationships that actors with low social capital would not have access to. The often-nomadic nature of an acting career creates particular challenges around informing, connecting, and empowering actors as they function independently and have no formal organizational structure. The representative labor unions (e.g. SAG-AFTRA, Equity) negotiate pay rates and working conditions but don't provide a framework for social connection. By heightening social capital through involvement in an active community of like-minded peers, actors may be more likely to consistently perform at or even broaden their potentials. What's more, if the community is united in service to something greater, rather than solely on their shared experience of frustration in their careers, there may be a greater likelihood of improving the subjective well being of the participants.

Taking the possibilities of this concept one step further, a community of this kind has the potential to radically transform the entertainment industry by giving well-being a place at the metaphorical table. In a business that inevitably leads actors to become self-involved by nature of survival, it is possible to engage in a way that moves them beyond passion and into purpose.

Harnessing a powerful intention of this kind could shift the focus so completely that it eclipses the problem (Cooperrider, 2012). It is possible that by creating a ‘positive core affect,’ this uniting sense of hope would begin to transform *willpower* into *waypower* (Snyder, 1994; Luthans, & Jensen, 2002; Cooperrider & Godwin, 2015). Based on a shared foundation that aligns principles, purpose, and practices, a community of this kind could create a tectonic shift (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2011) in the way we view well-being in the entertainment industry, with full awareness of the power such a shift has to enable society to flourish; connecting us as humans, uniting us through art.

A few possible elements or outcomes of this community might be: 1) having a website that reinforces and develops ideas, provides resources, and keeps the group informed of events and opportunities, 2) a mentor program, 3) subgroups to organize talent-based volunteer opportunities, mindfulness meet-ups, wellness workshops on various topics and resilience training, 4) a social media platform-based group that would keep community members connected and provide a forum for sharing stories and resilience strategies, 6) a reciprocity ring where members commit to helping one another with specific goals or requests (Grant, 2013), and 7) ambassadors (group members who book work in other cities) could assist fellow actors in creating similar communities in their respective locations. I believe it is possible to create a living, breathing community committed to a noble profession; dedicated to great art and thriving artists.

Challenges for Future Application

So far, I’ve found virtually no research on resilience training or interventions to increase well-being *specifically* for actors. There is literature that suggests a need for this kind of research, but actual data on the subject has either eluded me, has yet to be published, or simply

doesn't exist. I have postulated a number of ways I believe actors can improve their well-being, increase resilience, and enhance performance and career success. Areas for future study might include an investigation into whether volunteering (specifically, using one's talent in service) does, in fact, enhance meaning, increase social and psychological capital, and bolster booking rates for actors. Studies on the cultivation of self-compassion and mindfulness and their impact on resilience and performance would be illuminating as well. Determining whether engagement in a community of like-minded peers positively impacts well-being and career success is also a subject warranting inquiry. Creating and empirically testing positive interventions for actors is an area in great need of research and development. Finally, integrating a well-being and resilience-based philosophy and application into actor training programs and performing arts curricula is fundamental.

The existing research on resilience training is clear--it works. Many of the applications discussed throughout this paper have successfully enhanced resilience, psychological capital, meaning and subjective well-being, while lowering depression. A few minor tweaks to programs instituted in other domains make application specific to the life and career of an actor. There is much to learn, but I'm already seeing how these existing techniques, in addition to the interventions I'm developing, can powerfully influence actors' well-being, enabling them to flourish as they pursue their calling to mirror and elevate humanity. There is great opportunity here and I hope to be involved in developing this area for future research.

Conclusion

"Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! (Pause. Vehemently.) Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late!"
- *Waiting for Godot, Act I, Samuel Beckett (1952)*

Due to the instability of their careers and the somewhat precarious nature of acting as an art

form and craft, the research examined in this paper indicates that actors are likely to benefit from cultivating harmonious passion, learning to determine what is within and out of their control (and focusing their efforts on the former), determining specific goals and creating multiple pathways to bring them into fruition, identifying their character strengths and leveraging them to overcome the challenges of life as an actor, developing and maintaining a regular mindfulness practice that enhances gratitude and self-compassion, volunteering their time and using their talent in service to others, becoming a part of a community of like-minded peers, and facilitating a supportive social and professional network.

Volunteering improves mental health and increases meaning in the lives of volunteers whose roles have been diminished in society. Self-compassion and mindfulness improves our health and can powerfully shift our outlook and way of being with ourselves and the world – for the better. A combination of well-being education coupled with positive interventions that employ PsyCap principles, resilience and mindfulness training, along with using one’s talent in service may empower actors to have volition in their experience, improve their performance and consequently their careers, while enhancing their well-being and contribution on every level. I fervently believe that the arts matter and so do the artists. In a society where the arts are the last domain to receive funding and the first to be cut from curricula, actors (and other performing artists) are relegated to the sidelines in terms of their worth and legitimacy. I believe their well-being and resilience are no less important than that of soldiers and insurance salesmen (Seligman, 2002) -- the foci of previous high-profile resilience research. They are a population very much in need and deserving of this work.

If there’s any truth to the stereotype, we artists can be a sensitive, self-critical lot. Perhaps the most powerful epiphany I’ve had in this work is that self-compassion may be the key to

resilience. Even when your carefully crafted plan goes awry, the way you process it determines the true success of its implementation. Will you grow from it, be paralyzed by failure, or neglect to examine the learning? This realization will continue to profoundly influence the way I build resilience curricula for actors and eventually, other performing artists as well.

How many Meryl Streeps, Morgan Freemans, Kate Winslets, and Lin-Manuel Mirandas abandoned their dreams and walked away from their calling to be an actor because their extraordinary talent was not enough to withstand the veritable “slings and arrows” of the entertainment business? Through cultivating the mindset, practices and tools outlined in The Resilience Compass, actors may be able to become more resilient without compromising their vulnerability, so that they may engage their passion and live their purpose on their own terms. I am committed to empowering actors and shining a light on the idea that perhaps one need not suffer for their art. I firmly believe that when artists thrive, society flourishes.

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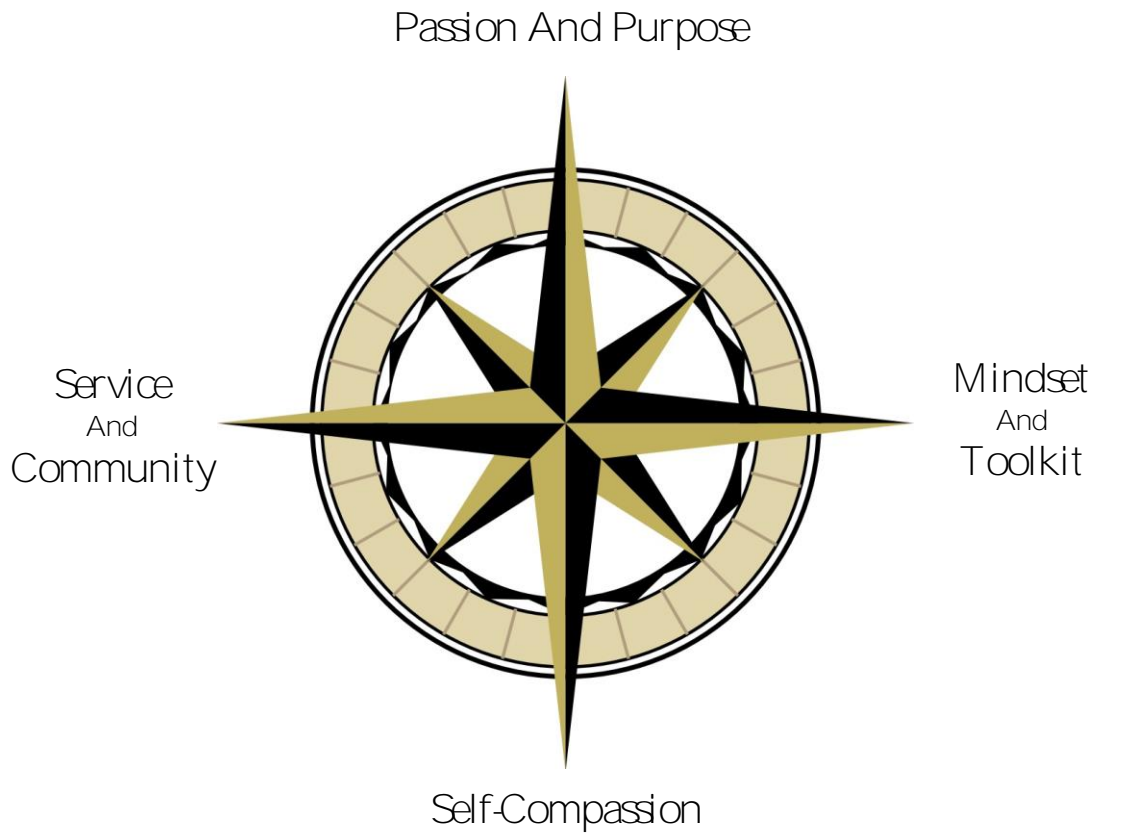
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Appendix

The Resilience Compass



Self-Compassion	Passion And Purpose	Mindset And Toolkit	Service	Community
Mindfulness		Realistic Optimism	Talent-based	Likeminded
Meditation		PsyCap	Volunteering	Peers
Gratitude		Character Strengths		Social Capital
		Grit		
		C-BT		

Wimmer Totty, 2016