

How Leaders Can Encourage Post-Traumatic Growth

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Though the Chinese calendar says it's the Year of The Rat, a large segment of the world may look back on 2020 as the Year of The Trauma. If you're not touched in some way by unemployment, death of a loved one, anxiety, depression, financial wounds, or losing your mind in quarantine—congratulations. You just skateboarded through a hurricane without getting wet.

For the rest of us, there's going to be a lot to process.

And if we do that, it will be a good thing. Because that word—process—is the act that makes the difference between PTSD and its nobler cousin, Post-Traumatic Growth.

Surprising as it may sound, research indicates that nearly twice as many people who go through a trial or accident will come out the other side of it having become *better* rather than worse. Just as often, people emerge from hardship no different at all. The difference in outcomes has less to do with the severity of the trauma than the story a victim of traumatic events tells themselves about it.

“Science shows that hardship leads to something better when it is used as an opportunity for self-assessment,” writes neuroscience author Jonah Lehrer in [A Book About Love](#). In the book he quotes social psychologist Dr. James Pennebaker of University of Texas at Austin, who writes that “Confronting a trauma helps people to understand and ultimately assimilate the event... By talking or writing... people can better understand and ultimately put it behind them.”

[Dr. Daryl Appleton](#), a mental health and wellness consultant for C-Suite executives explained to me in an interview this week that if we don't take the time to put into words what we're going through and what we could be learning from it, our brains tend to jump to conclusions that don't serve our own growth.

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