

Ready to Be Ready

– *adversity is fertiliser for growth*

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Every leader and every organisation faces adversity. A market that turns. A customer who disappears. A pandemic that shuts down the country. Or a personal loss that knocks your legs out from under you.

The question is not whether adversity will come. It is what it does to us when it does. Some become paralysed. Others weather the storm and return to where they started. And a few use adversity to grow.

This article is about the difference – and about what I call Inner Readiness: the ability to be ready to be ready.

When everything stinks

We all know the feeling. Nothing seems to work, and everything just feels like a mess. You can sit down and sulk, you can try to look falsely positive on social media – or you can learn that “crap” is actually a natural manure that enhances growth.

It may sound provocative, but the idea comes straight from nature. Living organisms produce waste, and we use it as fertiliser in the fields to create better conditions for growth. The same applies to people – and to the large organisms we call organisations.

Every situation we genuinely cannot stand holds an opportunity to consciously choose our response and meet it proactively. That is easier said than done. So let me start by telling you what it looked like when I had to take my own medicine.

My own 2020

In February 2020 I started work on my second book, “Ledelse i nye højder” (Leadership at new heights). About a third of the nearly 40 planned interviews with top executives, entrepreneurs and young people had been completed when Denmark locked down in March. On day one, DKK 100,000 in revenue disappeared. Within 14 days the figure was a quarter of a million, and by the end of the year it was approaching one million kroner in postponed, cancelled or on-hold assignments.

In May I lost my beloved mother. She, more than anyone, had known adversity in life – a world war, a childhood in a children's home, hard jobs – and yet she held a family together. From her I learned the artistic and the holistic, and the urge to create came with my mother's milk. The pain of saying goodbye to a part of yourself felt utterly meaningless.

But it was also there that I understood something important. The meaning of life cannot be to die, but to leave a mark on those we have meant something to. For the rest of the year, my time with my father became far more intense. We talked, went to museums and flew together to see more of the world. I used the summer's involuntary extra time to finally write the cookbook about the island of Anholt that I had carried around for ten years. And the many flights in my Piper Dakota to Sweden, Germany and Norway made me a better pilot.

By the end of the year, agreements for 2021 were already in place – including with new clients who had come precisely because the extra effort in adversity created new opportunities. The adversity had not gone away. But it had become fertiliser.

What made the difference was not luck. It was something I had trained for many years – and had given a name more than 25 years earlier.

Inner Readiness – response-ability

In 1998, shortly after returning from two and a half years of war and humanitarian work in Bosnia, I formulated the concept of “Inner Readiness”. The point was that it is the human aspect – our assumptions, deeper resources, emotions and courage – that determines whether we dare to step in and put things right when it really matters.

Today I describe [Inner Readiness](#) as the capacity built over time to consciously mobilise your mental, emotional and practical resources when the situation demands it. It is not about performing at maximum intensity all the time. It is about having the capacity to step up when it matters – and to step down again afterwards.

There is a fine point hidden in the word responsibility. When life calls on us, we respond. Inner Readiness is, in other words, our response-ability – also when it is inconvenient, overwhelming or painful.

Inner Readiness is not the absence of adversity. It is the ability to respond when adversity comes.

Many would call it robustness or resilience. That is true – but it is only one half of the story.

Resilience is only one half

The Danish professor Steen Hildebrandt has written about how sustainability and resilience meet in a company's inner orientation: Behind all the actions and decisions that characterise a company lies something that begins with the individual human being. That idea struck something central for me.

Resilience is the reactive side of the matter. The ability to withstand a blow, get back on your feet and weather the storm. It is important, and every organisation should be able to muster it. But what about the forward-looking, creative side? Where does an organisation's capacity for innovation come from?

My answer is: the same place. If you have learned to go the distance in genuinely difficult situations, where you have put fear aside because the cause is bigger than yourself, you can mobilise enormous strength – also to create something new. In return, you must humbly accept that you are not perfect. Because that is precisely why there is untapped potential waiting.

Far too many leaders become paralysed in difficult situations or push the problem away, because they have not built a fundamental inner readiness that gives them the courage either to put a finger on the wound and close it – or to shape the future they want.

But if Inner Readiness is so crucial, how do you find your own? The answer is surprisingly simple: You look at what has already worked.

Find the pattern in what already works

Most of us have an idea of what we are good at. But that idea is often coloured by our self-image. That is why, in the [Success Analysis](#), we ask a different question. Not “What do I think I am good at?”, but: “What did I actually do when I succeeded at something genuinely difficult?”

When you examine several such situations, a pattern emerges: the way you typically mobilise yourself and act when you are at your best under demanding circumstances. We call it the High Performance Pattern. Where Inner Readiness is the capacity, the High Performance Pattern is your personal code for accessing it.

The Success Analysis in four steps:

- **Challenge:** What were you facing – and why was it difficult?
- **Action:** What did you actually do? Not what you should have done, but what you did.
- **Result:** What did you achieve – and how could you tell?
- **Pattern:** What recurs across your strongest performances?

Once you know your pattern, you can activate it deliberately when it matters – instead of hoping it will show up by itself. But in an organisation, it is not enough for the individual leader to be ready. The readiness must also exist in the team.

From I to WE – readiness in the team

A team consists of people with their own strengths and success patterns. When the individual patterns are made visible, they can be translated into [Shared High Team Standards](#) (SHTS): concrete agreements on how we make decisions, handle pressure, follow up and hold each other mutually accountable.

But there is a difference between a standard and a pattern. A standard is something we have agreed. A pattern is what we actually do. The path from one to the other goes through training – with head, hands and heart, as we describe in [3H](#) – and through repetition over time. Then the shared standards can develop into the team's shared High Performance Pattern.

What matters is when the training takes place. Readiness is not built when things are on fire. It is built when they are not – so that it is there when they are. Every firefighter and pilot knows this – and it applies just as much to a leadership team facing a new strategy or a crisis.

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And this brings us back to the fertiliser. A team that has trained its readiness does not experience adversity as a threat to be survived – but as a condition that can be put to use.

Human capacity drives business performance

My own motto is that a surplus mindset creates a surplus on the bottom line. It is not a claim that Inner Readiness automatically produces a particular financial result. It is a leadership logic: Human capacity strengthens the quality of the decisions, collaboration and action on which the strategy ultimately depends.

The leadership logic – from inner readiness to results:

- **Inner readiness** provides clarity, calm, courage and decisive action in the individual.
- **Better decisions** come when you can think clearly under pressure.
- **Stronger collaboration** comes when the team dares to hold each other accountable.
- **Strategy execution** becomes possible when the organisation can act – even when reality does not follow the plan.

Capacity, by the way, is not only about what we can create for ourselves. It is also about what we have the capacity to give to others. From 2015 to 2017, in the project “Fremtidens Lederberedskab” (Future Leadership Readiness), we trained 32 young people on expeditions around Europe so they could build their own inner readiness. I personally financed around DKK 300,000 and put some 1,600 voluntary hours into the project. It was our gift to the village – and a reminder that we must start much earlier than most people think.

Conclusion – adversity is a gift in ugly wrapping

Adversity is unavoidable for people and organisations alike. But it does not have to be wasted. With trained inner readiness, adversity can become the fertiliser that creates the conditions for new growth – personally, in the team and in the business.

It takes leaders who have learned to respond, teams that have trained their readiness before things catch fire, and an organisation that understands that resilience and the capacity to innovate spring from the same source.

Remember that even ugly-wrapped and foul-smelling surprises are gifts. The only question is what you choose to use them for. What has your latest setback made you ready for?

This article builds on my LinkedIn articles “Det indre beredskab” (Inner Readiness, 2015) and “Modgang er gødning for vækst” (Adversity is fertiliser for growth, 2020).

Want to build a readiness that makes you ready to be ready?

Cronquist Consult ApS works with Inner Readiness as an integrated part of leadership development, leadership teams, High Performance Teams and strategy execution. Read more here:

<https://cronquist.dk/en/inner-readiness>

<https://cronquist.dk/en/high-performance-teams>