

Victoria's speech

This is my year. I was born in The Year of the Pig. Superstition says that I am more vulnerable this year. That I will be more susceptible to illness, more prone to accidents, this year more than others. Seeing as I am about the clumsiest person I know, I can't imagine how I could be more prone to accidents, but the old ways - they still worry me. There are a lot of worries this year.

One of the things that I know people have been discussing, if not discussing, at least thinking, is, "How do we deal with this? How do we keep going? Amidst all the political uncertainty? How do I not feel like a pawn in some game that I did not consent to playing?" Many of us took Federal jobs because they were secure, because they were stable. But now, they're not. What was once secure, is now insecure. What was once stable, is now unstable.

And I've been asked more than once over these last days: how are you, Victoria? How are you doing? What they're really asking is: How are you holding up?

What they're really asking - of me and of themselves is: How do we bounce back from this? How can we be resilient? Most of you have just come back from furlough, just reacclimated, and just restarted your work, and here we are again - possibly preparing for another shutdown. How can we be resilient in the face of that discouraging situation?

Merriam Webster defines resilience as "an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change". "Adjust easily". Look, I'm a word nerd and I live by the dictionary but I think that part of the definition is wrong. Being resilient doesn't mean that you "adjust easily." No.

Being resilient means that first part - an ability to recover.

Well, that's great. But HOW do you recover? How do you become resilient?

And I've been asked this more than once. How do you recover from this? What is the formula? What is the recipe? My initial answer is: I don't know.

I want to be honest with you. This has been a hard year for me in some respects. A lot has happened to me and my loved ones. I've attended more funerals in the past 18 months than I have in all my years before combined. There have been times that I wonder: how can we, how can I, recover from this? And remember: this is my year! Crappy stuff is supposed to happen to me this year!

When you talk to people who are going through a rough time, sometimes they seek to compare their misfortune to others less fortunate. More than a few times, a friend has said to me, "I shouldn't be feeling this way. At least, my child doesn't have cancer. Or at least, I have a roof over my head. Or at least I'm not fleeing unspeakable horrors in my country of origin, trying to cross a border and having my baby ripped from my arms."

I think it's natural to make these comparisons. I know I've done it. How, I wonder, can I compare my mundane trials, to theirs?

Of course, it is always sobering to put our own problems into perspective. Getting a parking ticket is nothing compared to getting a cancer diagnosis. But. The danger in comparing our trials with those of others is that it diminishes our own very real, very present, pain.

So, let's start over then, with that premise: That in some way, sometime we are all struggling. And at some point, we are all in pain. Whether it is family. Whether it is work. Whether it is health. Whether it is recovering from the last shutdown or bracing for the next possible shutdown. Whatever it is: there will always be times when we feel down, when we are struggling.

How can we be resilient in the face of that? I have thought long and hard about this and I have finally hit upon this. Here is Victoria's recipe, here is Victoria's formula for resilience:

Titrate out the toxins.

Surround yourself with love, including of yourself.

Focus on a higher purpose

First, titrate out the toxins. To the extent that you can, eliminate the toxins from your life. Some people stop drinking or quit smoking. Some people take a break from others who wear them out. Some people stop accepting being treated badly. If you can't eliminate the toxins, do what you can to minimize them.

Second, surround yourself with love. Seek out the company of others who renew you, who reinvigorate you, who inspire you, who love you and who want the best for you.

This includes loving yourself enough to practice acts of self-care. For some, that's having a cocktail (I might fall into this category). For some, it's practicing yoga (I might also fall into this category most days). For some, it's watching videos of cute puppies and kittens. I most definitely fall into this category. But, I know people who love to volunteer to mentor underprivileged children. Or who have to run 5 miles a day. Or who take a walk in the Smithsonian gardens every day. Or who listen to music every day. Or who finally call EAP and make that appointment with the grief counselor or the marriage counselor or just a regular therapist. Whatever it is that makes you happy, find time to do it. Whomever it is that you love and who loves you back, find time to be with them. And tell them. Don't ever let the opportunity to tell people you love them pass you by.

Finally, focus on a higher purpose. For some people, that's found in your religion. For some, that's in nature. For me, what keeps me going in life is my family, my husband and my daughter. And here at work, that higher purpose is the mission: to ensure the safest, most efficient air transportation system in the world.

Those of you who work in ATO Management Services heard me say this when we came back from the shutdown. Don't focus on the politics. We will not work under a dark cloud. We do not serve a politician. We do not serve a political party. We serve the American people and we serve the flying public. We are mission first, and people always. That is what keeps me going. And I know it's what keeps you going too.

This is a maddening time. This is a crazy time. We have had unprecedented events occur that we are still reeling from. It's ok. We're going to be ok. We have each other. We have our mission. We have each other. That's comforting to me. Especially in The Year of the Pig.

Thank you.