

Lead like a girl – Turning pain into purpose



From vulnerability to resilience, the final part of Avi Liran's article explores how adversity can fuel growth, transform challenges into strengths, and inspire change.

In my previous article, [Braving the Black Holes: First Aid Against Toxicity](#), I introduced the emotional black holes—toxic people—and shared strategies for protecting yourself from their gravitational pull. This time, let's look at how you can use adversity to fuel growth and transformation, inspired by [Dalia Feldheim's](#) remarkable story.

A TALE OF TWO TISSUE BOXES

Dalia Feldheim's career as a top marketing executive at Procter & Gamble flourished. She led campaigns like [Always #LikeAGirl](#), which empowered millions and promoted gender equality. P&G's culture embraced authenticity and passion.

One day, after a tough meeting, Dalia felt tears welling up. Her manager noticed, handed her a tissue, and said, "Don't ever be embarrassed by tears; it's a sign of your passion, not a weakness. Passion fuels greatness. If you ever work for someone who does not see that, walk away. They do not deserve you." These words reinforced her belief that vulnerability was a strength, crucial for leadership.

However, years later, the culture was starkly different when Dalia transitioned to a new role as CMO at a large consumer electronics company in Asia. Her new boss prioritised numbers over people and creativity. After another tough meeting, Dalia was handed a tissue box with a label reading "Dalia's Tissue Box," a cruel, sexist joke meant to humiliate her for expressing emotion. The contrast from her previous experience was jarring, and the workplace environment became toxic.

Dalia tried to adapt, suppressing her emotions and working harder to meet unreasonable expectations. Yet, her health declined, exhaustion set in, and her confidence shattered. The breaking point came when she realised she was losing herself. She knew she had to reclaim her wellbeing and self-worth.



FINDING STRENGTH IN THE STRUGGLE

Not everyone has a supportive manager and many face environments that challenge their confidence. Dalia's journey illustrates how adversity can be a powerful catalyst for growth.

"You are refined by the adversities you face and defined by how you handle them." – Avi Liran

Adversity can either break you or propel you forward.

Post-traumatic growth, as Dalia experienced, involves finding meaning in hardship and using it for personal and professional transformation. It can be manifested in five key areas.

FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

Post-traumatic growth can be like an unsolicited gym membership for the soul. You didn't choose it, but it's there. The choice is to let adversity defeat you or use it to build resilience.

"Do not bounce back only to hit the same spot. Bounce forward with a smile towards a wiser and stronger version of yourself." – Avi Liran

Dalia's recovery began with small steps. Here's how she did it.

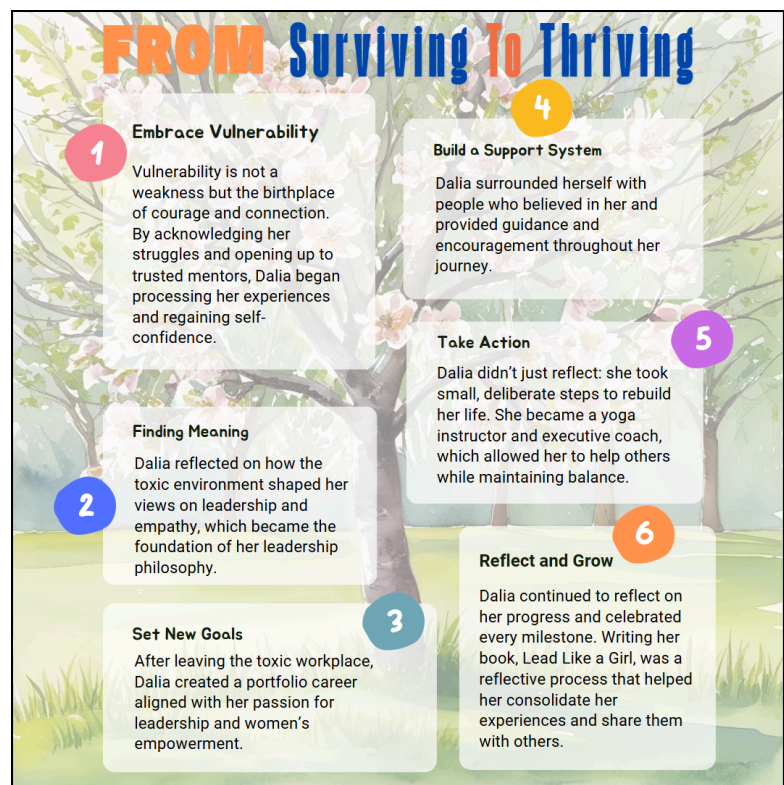
Word of caution: While you can demonstrate bravery by learning from your mistakes, this does not mean you should act in a foolhardy and irresponsible manner. Skateboarding across an open traffic intersection with cars zipping around you to discover the probability of being hit is likely to bring more trauma than growth.

Instead, it is about reframing your priorities and making the (most likely hard) decisions that will allow you to emerge stronger and more equipped to thrive than ever before. This means re-examining your relationship with yourself. Before you can do right to others, you need to do right for yourself. For inexplicable reasons, we can often be kind to everyone but ourselves.

SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES

Post-traumatic growth is not about quick fixes or instant transformation. It is a process that requires time and patience. Here are some practical steps to facilitate your growth:

"My leadership journey is a testament to the transformative power of post-traumatic growth. By embracing vulnerability, finding meaning, setting new goals, building a support system, taking action, and reflecting on growth, individuals can turn their pain into purpose and experience profound personal and professional growth." – Dalia Feldheim





Since leaving her corporate job after enduring a toxic boss, Dalia has built a career as a leadership expert, author, educator, and advocate for workplace wellbeing. She wrote *Lead Like a Girl* with a foreword by Sheryl Sandberg, inspiring leaders to embrace empathy and resilience. She now teaches happiness and resilience at Singapore Management University and consults globally to help organisations create thriving, psychologically safe workplaces.

Dalia's journey shows that every experience, no matter how difficult, holds the potential to build something greater. Strength grows in the moments when you decide to rise, to learn, and to reclaim your voice. By taking the small and intentional steps that Dalia suggests, you create something powerful. Post-traumatic growth is an invitation to reshape your future, recycling wastewater into drinking water. Challenges, once filtered with wisdom through resilience, transform into opportunities for you to thrive. The path unfolds step by step, leading to an upgraded and more resilient version of yourself.

About the Author:



Avi Liran is an author, writer, C-level mentor, and one of Asia's top motivational and inspirational keynote speakers. Avi is a thought leader and expert in creating delightful customer and employee experiences, fostering appreciation, and building authentic resilience.