

Introduction:

Creative resilience > creative brilliance

Let's face it. If practitioners can't steadily produce successful outcomes in any professional creative domain they won't stick around long. Take the field of Graphic Design for example: According to the Princeton Review, "of the nearly 25,000 people who try to enter the field of graphic design each year, only about 60 percent last the first two years, and about 30 percent remain in the field at five years."¹ And yet, we've all seen the cliché creative type—carefree and infinitely inspired by that cup of coffee glued to their hand. While some of that myth might be true (ahem...the coffee part), this serving up unlimited brilliance with a smile persona creates unrealistic expectations for creative practitioners. And don't ya know it, expectations rarely equal reality. Creative practitioners—*we're talking about anyone that leverages their creativity for a living*—are experts at avoiding this uncomfortable disconnect, but it's no joking matter. Practitioners often find themselves making serious mental and physical sacrifices behind the scenes just to keep up. And things aren't getting easier in a world where the fundamentals of how humans communicate technically and culturally is in a rapid state of flux—and that's not hyperbole! So, how do we creative types navigate these treacherous waters while keeping our sanity intact? We have to totally re-orient the way creativity is practiced by incorporating consistent mind + body maintenance as a key component of any regular creative practice—this approach is the only viable path to growing sustainable creative resilience.

So, how is resilience built? For us, it all starts with considering creative practice as a form of performance. Performance can be defined academically as "the production of successful outcomes, on demand in a specified time window."² This is exactly what creative practitioners do every day! Stress and pressure caused by a creative deadline triggers the same fight / flight / freeze mechanisms in the mind and body a gymnast, musician, or even a surgeon might experience while operating within their performance domains. It is well documented that what happens when the mind and body are under stress has the potential to cause performance interference regardless of knowledge, skills, or abilities³. Sport Psychologists have been working with athletes and other performance populations for about a gazillion years now to mitigate effects of stress on performance through various forms of mental skills training. We can literally see LeBron James practicing mindfulness breathing techniques from the bench courtside during an NBA game. These techniques (such as mindfulness and breathing practices) are exercised daily by performers to increase abilities/capacities to pay attention and conserve precious energy. Mental muscle building techniques can just as easily be applied with success in creative domains—with a little discipline and good old-fashioned elbow grease mental fitness can be built over time just as one might think of building physical fitness, one rep at a time.

These ninja skills are applicable regardless of the creative domain you are operating within. Whether you're in UX/UI, Experience Design, Graphic Design, Web + App Development, an Architect or even a Ceramicist we've got you covered. In fact, we really don't even like throwing around labels all that much. That's why we're using the term "Creative Practitioner" in hopes of accurately capturing the broad range of folks we're hoping to connect with. Long story short, if you're using creative skills to get through school or bring home the bacon we're talking to you! Our goal is to present you, dear reader with a custom-tailored road map for building your own Mental Fitness. We invite you to consider this book as a trusty sidekick you can take with you wherever you go and refer back to whenever you feel it is needed. In addition to loads of helpful information, there are repeatable exercises and activities in every chapter. We're both honored

and excited you've chosen to spend your valuable time with us and look forward to embarking on this exciting journey with you!

Parting Words:

Disruption is the new norm, and you are a vanquisher of adversity

As creative practitioners, we're all surfing unruly waves of constant change. Continuously riding these waves require mega-levels of mental stamina and resilience. This is highly unlikely to change anytime soon—we must assume that disruption and complexity is the new norm. Having killer creative instincts and sweet software skills are a great start, but they aren't enough to support a sustained career in professional creative domains. Like in other performance domains, talent + resources are not enough. Even great training still leaves a lot on the table. Being the best takes putting in a little training in the mental gym, too with the same tools we've covered here. Career sustainability in this era demands so much more from us, both professionally and personally. We must be excellent communicators, listeners, colleagues, adversity vanquishers, time managers, and most importantly, strong advocates for ourselves. Developing Mental Fitness can provide an edge in an ultra-competitive industry that software or new equipment can't. However, it's important to learn and respect your limits—everybody has them and that's ok! Nothing read here should constitute or substitute for professional mental health counseling, and we strongly recommend anyone experiencing mental or emotional concerns seek professional counseling or medical consultation.

Everything in this book can only be practiced, not mastered. When we think about Creative Practice as a discipline, a robust Mental Fitness regimen must be seamlessly baked in—this might mean that we need to alter habits or process grooves we've developed over long periods of time. Heck, it might even mean we have to have some hard conversations with colleagues, supervisors, or even family members about why things need to change to support our Mental Fitness. If you're new to any creative discipline and are reading this book, congratulations! You can start from square one building a foundation for your creative practice with Mental Fitness as a key pillar. For the rest of us, old habits tend to die hard. When we fall off the Mental Fitness wagon we need not waste valuable creative fuel and precious time hating on ourselves—jumping right back in the saddle with a renewed sense of self-awareness will keep the party going just fine. Happy making, everyone.

<https://www.princetonreview.com/careers/74/graphic-designer>

2: P10, Portenga et al. (APA Division 47 Committee) (pdf on computer)

3: P11, Portenga et al. (APA Division 47 Committee) (pdf on computer)