



by Michael Philbert

I knew it would be hard, but I decided I would try anyway.

I looked up, anticipating the energy it would take to jump and grasp the bars above. Could these tiny legs get this 200-pound body off the ground? I coiled my body and sprang upward, quickly gripping the bar. As I hung from the pull-up bars, I realized I felt ok; I could do this.

I set a goal in my mind to complete ten repetitions.

One, two, three, four... I mentally counted them out as I effortlessly pulled my chin over the bar each time.

Five, siiiixxxxxx.... "what's happening?" I thought my arms felt fine, but my hands were burning, and my grip on the bar began to loosen.

Sevvveennn, I barely made it over the bar this time, and I was holding on by just my fingertips.

As quickly as the effort started, so did it end. I let go of the bar and came flying back down to the ground. I stood there looking at my hands, red, burning, and swollen. I thought I was prepared, it felt so easy at first, but one important part between me and the bars was not prepared, my hands.

They had never endured such hardship before; I have never demanded a degree of performance that would build up their resilience. Everyone else around me seemed to complete the task of achieving ten so easily, but how?

I watched the other Soldiers, and they confidently came flying off the bars. One was wearing leather gloves, one had straps on his wrist, and one guy had calluses padding his hands. That is when I realized that there was something more to be done to conquer my challenge.

Reflections and Lessons Learned

Life is not always going to be easy, especially in today's COVID environment. Trying to grasp onto new challenges can be like a Soldier trying to hold onto a pull-up bar; it will be difficult, and it may burn at first, but it can be achieved. We may feel prepared for future challenges in many aspects of our life such as finances, job stability, or fitness level. Still,

often, just around the corner, there is that one challenge requiring that one enabling attribute that needs toughening. Today's challenges may include feeling isolated, stressed dealing with remote learning, helping your family cope, weight gain, feeling bored, or the onset of anxiety/depression.

I titled this piece "Life Calluses" because we all likely have areas in our lives where we have not built up our resilience, but we will never identify these areas until we jump into the arena and feel the burn. If we observe the people around us, we will see varying degrees of calluses (resilience) because they have walked certain roads and scraped against experiences that have enabled them to learn how to respond gracefully.

When some feel bored, others see an opportunity to improve.

When some feel exhausted from a long shift, others see a normal day.

When some feel isolated, others have gotten accustomed to engaging remotely.

These are simple examples meant to illustrate the idea that as we engage in challenges, we learn how to cope or normalize the experience. Alternatively, we can take a short cut and ask others how they achieve the heavy lifts. Like the Soldiers who used the gloves, straps (short-term solutions) or took advantage of the calluses (long-term resilience). We can gain perspective from others who are living or have lived through the experience we are encountering.

I have formed some quick circumstantial calluses in life, such as adapting to a 38-day Warrant Officer Candidate School designed to induce stress and feel like two months. Everything was new and difficult at first with prescribed wake-up times and routines that consisted of 100 guys rushing to stage their rooms according to the Warrant Officer SOP, complete personal hygiene, get dressed, and make it to formation in the span of about 20 minutes. After a week, I had the process down, and it felt like business as usual.

On the personal side, my grandmother died in a house fire at 85 years old. I had never dealt with such loss before, but as the days passed and the event became further in the rearview mirror, I gained the perspective that death is a part of life. I began to focus more on how she lived than how she died. I spoke to my battle buddies who experienced parents' or siblings' loss, and I noticed that they seemed "ok." The pain was still there, but they learned how to cope, and so did I.

Forming life calluses is all about gaining a new perspective. Looking for the silver lining sometimes helps us cope and accept what seems to be difficult in the moment. We must accept that perspective may not always originate within our own minds, sometimes it's ok to seek help. The toughness that we build over time are tools that will enable future success. As we can all see, the world can be quite unpredictable, but with the right resources, repetitions, and desire to pull up over the bar, we can build the resilience needed to thrive.

CW3 Mike Philbert works in the field of cyber security and has 18 years of active service. He is a sought-after leader who is very involved in his community as the Vice President of the North Bayern Warrant Officer Association, Chairperson of the local School Advisory Council, and founder of a mentorship outreach program called Military Mentor. He started an initiative within the 2nd Cavalry Regiment called "Always Ready Mentors" aimed at reviving the art of steady state mentorship.

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