

BOOK CLUB SYNOPSIS

Option B:
Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy
Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant

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Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy

When tragedy or misfortune derails your plans—personally or professionally—how do you find the courage to pursue a new path and the strength to make decisions that you’d hoped never to make? That is the question Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, found herself asking after the sudden and unexpected death of her husband. In seeking an answer, she joined forces with close friend and researcher Adam Grant, Wharton’s top-rated professor.

Option B is their joint effort to chronicle the winding, unpredictable road that grief creates and how Sandberg was able to use the support of her friends and family—and Grant’s research-based recommendations—to build resilience and forge forward on a path of her own design toward healing and success. Often touching and always personal, *Option B* combines inspiring stories of hope and perseverance with practical, insightful advice that will resonate with any reader.

“Life is never perfect,” Sandberg says. “We all live some form of *Option B*. This book is to help us all kick the shit out of it.”

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• intro

In May 2015, Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, and her husband Dave Goldberg, CEO of SurveyMonkey, were attending a friend's birthday celebration in Mexico. While there, Goldberg passed away. In the weeks following his death, Sandberg fell into what she calls "the void."

Seeking a way to escape her grief, she reached out to Adam Grant, a top-rated professor at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, who had become a close friend of the family after Goldberg invited him to speak at SurveyMonkey about his book *Give and Take* two years prior. "Adam flew back across the country to convince me there was a bottom to this seemingly endless void," says Sandberg. "He wanted to tell me ... there were things I could do to lessen the anguish for myself and my children." Most importantly, he used data to back up his advice.

During their conversations, they struck upon the idea of resilience. Grant told her, "Resilience is the strength and speed of our response to adversity—and we can build it. It isn't about having a backbone. It's about strengthening the muscles around our backbone." *Option B* is Sandberg and Grant's attempt to share what they have learned about the essential nature of perseverance.

Says Sandberg, "This book is about the capacity of the human spirit to persevere. We look at the steps people can take, both to help themselves and to help others. We explore the psychology of recovery and the

challenges of regaining confidence and rediscovering joy. We cover ways to speak about tragedy and comfort friends who are suffering. And we discuss what it takes to create resilient communities and companies, raise strong children, and love again.”

She closes the introduction with a conversation she had with Phil, the friend whose birthday she and her husband were celebrating in Mexico. “I was talking to Phil about a father-child activity. We came up with a plan for someone to fill in for Dave. I cried to Phil, ‘But I want Dave.’ He put his arm around me and said, ‘Option A is not available. So let’s just kick the shit out of Option B.’”

“Life is never perfect,” Sandberg says. “We all live some form of Option B. This book is to help us all kick the shit out of it.”

01

CHAPTER ONE

BREATHING AGAIN

The chapter opens with psychologist Martin Seligman's "three P's," which often end up slowing the recovery of those suffering tragedy or trauma:

1. **Personalization:** "the belief that we are at fault"
2. **Pervasiveness:** "the belief that an event will affect all areas of our life"
3. **Permanence:** "the belief that the aftershocks of the event will last forever"

Sandberg cites the example of insurance salespeople who performed better by overcoming the three P's: "When they didn't take rejections personally and remembered that they could approach new prospects tomorrow, they sold more than twice as much and stayed in the job twice as long as their colleagues."

In Sandberg's case, she personalized her trauma with self-blaming for not being able to save her husband—whether by wishing she'd found him sooner after he had collapsed or by helping him live a healthier lifestyle and thus preventing the coronary artery disease that caused his death in the first place. She also blamed herself for allowing her husband's death to be such a disruption to her own life and the lives of those around her who depended on her. Along with this self-blame came a constant habit of apologizing, she says. "Over the next few months, the thing I found myself saying the most often was, 'I'm sorry.' I apologized constantly to everyone."

It was then that Grant convinced her to stop expressing or feeling regret. He “explained that by blaming myself, I was delaying my recovery, which also meant I was delaying my kids’ recovery.” In refusing to give in to personalization, things began to change for Sandberg: “I realized that Dave’s doctors had not prevented his death, so it was irrational for me to believe that I could have. I hadn’t interrupted everyone’s lives; tragedy had. No one thought I should apologize for crying.” And in the process, “I started to notice that not *everything* was terrible,” she says.

In battling pervasiveness, Sandberg found returning to work helpful. “In my first meeting all I could think was, *What is everyone talking about and why on earth does this even matter?* Then at one point I was drawn into the discussion and for a second—maybe half a second—I forgot,” she says. Beyond that, she credits the support of her colleagues with providing her a place where she could feel more like herself.

She contrasts her experience with that of other private-sector workers, 40 percent of whom do not get any paid time off after the death of a loved one; for the 60 percent who do, it is often just a few days. But the cost may be even greater to employers: “In the United States alone, grief-related losses in productivity may cost companies as much as \$75 billion annually,” says Sandberg. “Those losses could be decreased—and the load lightened for people who are grieving—if employers provided time off, flexible and reduced hours, and financial assistance.”

Sandberg confesses that the hardest of the three P’s for her to overcome was permanence: “For months, no matter what I did, I felt like the debilitating anguish would always be there.” This feeling, she says, is quite common after tragedy. “Studies of ‘affective forecasting’—our predictions of how we’ll feel in the future—reveal that we tend to overestimate how long negative events will affect us.” Seligman, the psychologist behind the three P’s, tied the use of “never” and “always” to permanence, so Sandberg tried to eliminate those words from her vocabulary, replacing them with “sometimes” and “lately.” She also engaged in a cognitive behavioral therapy technique in which she noted beliefs that gave her anguish and then wrote down why they were false.

A psychiatrist friend explained to her that “humans are evolutionarily wired for both connection and grief: We naturally have the tools to recover from loss and trauma. That helped me believe that I could get through this. If we had evolved to handle suffering, the deep grief would not kill me,” she says. In seeking help, she turned to the rabbi who conducted her husband’s funeral, who encouraged her to “‘lean in to the suck’—to expect it to be awful. Not exactly what I meant when I said ‘lean in,’ but for me it was good advice,” she says. By embracing the inevitability of suffering, she found it easier to deal with. She created rule No. 1 for her household: “‘Respect our feelings—it’s okay to be angry.’ ... When I stopped fighting those moments, they passed more quickly.”

Grant encouraged Sandberg to imagine worst-case scenarios, indicating “that it was a good idea to think about how much worse things could be. ‘Worse?’ I asked him. ‘Are you kidding me? How could this be worse?’ His answer cut through me: ‘Dave could have had that same cardiac arrhythmia driving your children.’” By refocusing on what she was grateful for, she was able to fight the despair, and she encouraged her children to do the same by describing one thing they were thankful for every day at dinner.

In counting her blessings, Sandberg notes how thankful she was for her financial stability, even after the death of her husband. “Sixty percent of Americans have faced an event that threatened their ability to make ends meet and a third have no savings, which leaves them constantly vulnerable,” she says. Further, the financial consequences are worse for women who lose their spouses. “Widows are often left without money for basic needs,” and they are more than twice as likely as married women to live in poverty. She concludes, “We need stronger social insurance policies and more family-friendly business practices to prevent tragedy from leading to more hardship. Single parents and widows deserve more support, and leaders, coworkers, families, and neighbors can commit to helping provide it.”

The chapter closes with a potential cancer scare that she experiences and the immense relief she feels when her doctor informs her that the test results were false-positive. “I felt more appreciation for my health and what was good in my life than I ever had before.” Through the grief, she says, “I learned that when life pulls you under, you can kick against the bottom, break the surface, and breathe again.”

02

CHAPTER TWO

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Two months after her husband passed away, Sandberg went on a weekend trip to see his college roommates. There she saw her friend Jeff, who had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis years earlier. It occurred to her that she had never actually spoken with him about his condition, so she asked, “How are you? I mean, really, how are you? How are you feeling? Are you scared?” He tearfully thanked her and shared his personal struggles and how relieved he felt to be able to express them to her.

She recounts how hurt she felt by friends not asking her how she was doing, as though she were invisible to them. After her conversation with Jeff, she realized that she had sometimes done the same to him in the past. “I had failed to ask him directly about his health not because I didn’t care, but because I was worried about upsetting him. Losing Dave taught me how ludicrous that was. It wasn’t possible for me to remind Jeff that he was living with MS. He was aware of that every day.”

“Avoiding feelings isn’t the same as protecting feelings,” she says. “Author Mitch Carmody said after his nine-year-old son Kelly died from a brain tumor, ‘Our child dies a second time when no one speaks their name.’” Psychologists have coined this the “mum effect.” Sandberg quotes Facebook Head of Diversity Maxine Williams, who believes this applies to race, as well: “For the victim of racism, like the victim of loss, the silence is crippling. The two things we want to know when we’re in pain are that we’re not crazy to feel the way we do and

that we have support. Acting like nothing significant is happening ... denies us all of that.”

“Unlike the non-question-asking friends,” who never mention the elephant in the room, “openers ask a lot of questions and listen to the answers without judging. They enjoy learning about and feeling connected to others. Openers can make a big difference in times of crisis, especially for those who are normally reticent,” says Sandberg. Perhaps surprisingly, “openers are not always our closest friends,” she says, but rather they are often people who have experienced similar adversity. For Sandberg, even some close friends did not ask how she was doing, and she began to believe that they were not asking because they did not care.

“[Grant] was certain people wanted to talk about it, but they didn’t know how,” she says. “I was less sure.” She felt unable to truly share how she was doing when presented with small talk and pleasantries. “As hard as it was to bring up Dave with friends, it seemed even more inappropriate at work. So I did not. And they did not.” The interactions that did take place at the office felt cold and distant, and soon work began to make her feel even worse. So she drafted a Facebook post thanking her family and friends for their support, yet detailing how much it hurt to hear, “How are you?” because “it did not acknowledge that anything out of the ordinary had happened.” Instead, she requested for people to ask her, “How are you today?”

The post inspired many people to share their stories and offer encouragement to others via Facebook, and it prompted her friends and colleagues to begin asking her how she was doing each day. “[Grant] pointed out that I would often answer ‘How are you?’ with ‘Fine,’ and that didn’t encourage people to ask further questions. He said if I wanted others to be more open with me, I needed to be more open with them.” This prompted her to encourage her co-workers to ask any question and talk about how they felt, too. She learned that one colleague felt paralyzed by the fear of saying the wrong thing, while another had driven by her house multiple times debating whether to knock on the door. “Instead of making assumptions about whether or not someone wants to talk, it’s best to offer an opening and see if they take it,” Sandberg says.

After Grant and his wife experienced two miscarriages in quick succession, they did not tell their friends or family what had happened for fear of burdening them. But they began to consider how things could be worse, and their grief became easier to talk about. His wife began sharing her story with friends, finding that others had also experienced miscarriages but had never spoken about them, providing an opportunity to bond. The death of a loved one is not the only experience that isolates people who are grieving, Sandberg argues, referencing research by Anthony Ocampo on the risks the children of immigrants take when coming out as LGBTQ to their parents. “Anthony saw the paradox of immigrant parents knowing the pain of exclusion yet inflicting that same pain on their LGBTQ children.”

Sandberg concludes the chapter with reflections on the elephant in the room: “By ignoring it, those who are grieving isolate themselves and those who could offer comfort create distance instead. Both sides need to reach out. ... You can’t make the elephant go away. But you can say, ‘I see it. I see you’re suffering. And I care about you.’”

03

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLATINUM RULE OF FRIENDSHIP

In August of his first semester teaching at University of Pennsylvania, Grant had a bright, outgoing football player named Owen in one of his classes. Gregarious and talkative, Owen was admired by everyone in the room. But in April, he committed suicide. Grant was deeply upset by Owen's death. He thought back to a meeting two months prior, when Owen had come into Grant's office to talk about securing an internship, and the professor wondered if he could have done anything more to help the student.

Grant began sharing his personal cell phone number with every class on the first day, telling students they could call at any time if they needed help. He was inspired by a psychology study, in which participants were tasked with solving a puzzle while being randomly exposed to loud, sudden noises. Predictably, the students performed poorly. But when told that they could press a button to make the noises stop at any time, all of them did far better—despite the fact that none of them actually pressed the button.

Few students have called Grant, but by offering an extra resource, he is providing another “button.” “When people are in pain, they need a button,” says Sandberg. “When people close to us face adversity, how do we give them a button to press? While it seems obvious that friends want to support friends going through a crisis, there are barriers that block us. There are two different emotional responses to the pain of others: empathy, which motivates us to help, and distress, which motivates us to avoid.”

Sandberg uses the example of a young woman named Alycia to illustrate the distress response. Shortly after arriving on her college campus, Alycia was raped in her dorm room by a campus administrator, who was supposed to help her set up a chapter of a nonprofit dedicated to combatting poverty in Africa. In the aftermath, Alycia's closest college friend spurned her requests for support. Sandberg quotes Alycia's recollections: "Before, we were inseparable. ... But when she found out about the rape, she said, 'I can't talk to you.'" Fortunately, with support from her high school friends, Alycia transferred schools and found new roommates who helped her recover and pursue her dreams.

"For friends who turn away in times of difficulty, putting distance between themselves and emotional pain feels like self-preservation," Sandberg says. Some may be worried about being dragged under by a friend's pain, while others are overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness. "But what we learn from the stress experiment is that the button didn't need to stop the noise to relieve the pressure," she says. "Simply showing up for a friend can be a huge difference."

Showing up can take many different forms. For Sandberg, her mother and sister were there for her every night to hold her as she cried herself to sleep, as being in the bedroom that she formerly shared with her husband was the most painful part of each day. Friends and family who could not be with her in person would call or text every day, telling her how much they truly enjoyed helping, making her feel less like a burden. "My brother David called me from Houston every single day for more than six months," she says. "When I thanked him, he said that he was doing it for himself because the only time he felt okay was when he was talking to me. I learned that at times, caring means that when someone is hurting, you cannot imagine being anywhere else."

She admits that this is not always easy, citing a study describing that humans tend to underestimate the impact of suffering when they are not personally experiencing it. In the experiment, participants placed their arms in either a bucket of warm or ice-cold water and were then asked to estimate how painful it would be to sit in a freezing room for five hours. Those in the ice-cold water believed that the room would be 14 percent more painful than those in the warm water. But after removing their arms from the ice-cold water for just 10 minutes, their

estimates matched the warm water participants. “Once the icy water was behind them, even for just minutes, they couldn’t quite fathom what it felt like to be cold,” she says.

In light of her experience, Sandberg endorses the “Platinum Rule” for when people are suffering: “treat others as *they* want to be treated.” She describes friends and colleagues who would ask, “Is there anything I can do?” and how unhelpful that turned out to be. She quotes author Bruce Feiler, who believes “the problem lies in the offer to ‘do anything.’” He writes that ‘while well meaning, this gesture unintentionally shifts the obligation to the aggrieved. Instead of offering “anything,” just do something.’” For example, when Sandberg’s colleague was at the hospital with his ill child, a friend texted, “What do you NOT want on a burger?” The friend was specific with his actions—picking up a burger—but gave Sandberg’s colleague “the dignity of feeling in control.” Says Sandberg, “Specific acts help because instead of trying to fix the problem, they address the damage caused by the problem.”

Psychologist Susan Silk offers a helpful exercise. “She suggests writing down the names of people in the center of the tragedy and then drawing a circle around them. Next, draw a bigger circle around that one and write the names of the people who are next most affected by the loss. Keep drawing larger circles for people based on proximity to the crisis,” Sandberg says. “Wherever you are in the circle, offer comfort in and seek comfort out. That means consoling the people who are closer to the tragedy than you are and reaching out for support from those who are farther removed.”

She also found that her husband’s death reshaped how she thought about her relationships. “Before, I defined friendships by what I could offer,” she says. “But this all changed and I needed so much help. I did not just feel like a burden ... I truly was a burden. I learned that friendship isn’t only what you can give, it’s what you’re able to receive.”

Sandberg reminds readers to remember that “grief doesn’t share its schedule with anyone; we all grieve differently and in our own time,” so be patient with those who are grieving, and let them process their suffering on their own terms. She discusses the five stages of grief and how experts have discovered that they do not form a progression.

“They are five states that don’t progress in a linear fashion but rise and fall. Grief and anger don’t just evaporate like flames doused with water. They can flicker away one moment and burn hot the next.”

Sandberg personally struggled most with anger. “My anger scared me—and made me need the comfort of my friends even more,” she says. “Like the people in the stress experiment who were consoled by the simple presence of a button, I needed friends who let me know that even if I was difficult to be around, they would not abandon me.” What helped her the most was when friends told her they were in it together with her. As she slowly began to feel better, she made an effort to let her friends know that she was there for them, too, sharing their burdens as best as she could. “I wanted those close to me to know I was there to help carry their troubles too,” she says.

To let her friends and family know how much she appreciated their support, she sent them all a poem on the six-month anniversary of her husband’s death. Originally a religious parable, the poem tells the story of a person asking God why there were only one set of footprints in the sand during the hardest times in their life. “I used to think there was one set of footprints because my friends were carrying me through the worst days of my life,” Sandberg says. “But now it means something else to me: when I saw one set of footprints, it was because they were following directly behind me, ready to catch me if I fell.”

04

CHAPTER FOUR

SELF-COMPASSION AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

In her 20s, venture capitalist Catherine Hoke decided to start a nonprofit to help ex-convicts start and operate their own businesses. Within five years of its founding, the program had graduated 600 students and led to 60 startups. Then her husband asked for a divorce, taking her by surprise, and her personal life unraveled. She eventually had affairs with multiple participants in her program, and her nonprofit was no longer welcome in state prisons.

The first step in her recovery was forgiving herself, and in a bid to make things right, she penned a letter to the 7,500 volunteers and supporters of her nonprofit admitting her mistakes and asking for forgiveness. As positive responses flooded in, she began to feel self-compassion, which psychologist Kristin Neff defines as “offering the same kindness to ourselves that we would give to a friend.” Sandberg firmly believes in the importance of self-compassion in enduring hardship, citing studies that found self-compassion to be instrumental in breeding resilience after trauma, such as divorce and even war.

Important to note, however, is that “self-compassion often coexists with remorse. It does not mean shirking responsibility for our past,” says Sandberg. “Blaming our actions rather than our character allows us to feel guilt instead of shame. ... Guilt keeps us striving to improve,” she says. “Shame has the opposite effect: it makes people feel small and worthless, leading them to attack in anger or shrink away in self-pity.”

“Writing can be a powerful tool for learning self-compassion,” she says. Health psychologist Jamie Pennebaker demonstrated the positive effects of journaling, showing that college students who wrote about trauma experienced an immediate, though temporary dip in happiness, but six months later they showed marked improvement in emotional and physical health. Journaling can also provide a space for people to label their negative emotions. “By putting feelings into words, we give ourselves more power over them,” says Sandberg. It can also identify self-limiting thoughts. In Hoke’s case, she replaced beliefs like, “Relying on other people makes me weak and needy,” with thoughts like, “I can allow other people to care for me—and I need to take care of myself.”

As important as self-compassion is self-confidence. “When we lack it, we dwell on our flaws,” Sandberg says. “We fail to embrace new challenges and learn new skills. We hesitate to take even a small risk that can lead to a big opportunity.” She shares that throughout her career, she had suffered from impostor syndrome, the belief that her successes were flukes and living in fear that one day she would be discovered for being the incompetent person she believed herself to be. Overcoming this was the inspiration for her book *Lean In*, but after her husband’s death, she realized that “trauma can also lead to self-doubt in *all* aspects of our lives. This loss of confidence is another symptom of pervasiveness: we are struggling in one area and suddenly we stop believing in our capabilities in other areas.”

She began to experience self-doubt at work: She suspected she was not contributing meaningfully during meetings and worried that she was making a fool of herself whenever she spoke. She confided in Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, and he encouraged her by noting the valuable contributions she had made in the meetings he had been in—which she didn’t even remember. “He went on to say that neither he nor anyone else expected me to be able to hold it together all the time. This comment helped me set more reasonable expectations and stop being so hard on myself,” she says.

In fostering self-compassion and self-confidence, journaling became a key part of Sandberg’s recovery. “Journaling helped me process my overwhelming feelings and my all-too-many regrets,” she says. Grant

also encouraged her to focus not just on how she felt but also to write down three things she had done well each day. “It made me realize that for my entire life I’d gone to bed thinking about what I’d done wrong that day,” she says. “Just the act of reminding myself of anything that went well was a welcome shift.”

Grant and his colleague Jane Dutton have found that such lists are more useful than lists of things you are grateful for. “Gratitude is passive: it makes us feel thankful for what we receive,” Sandberg says. “Contributions are active: they build our confidence by reminding us that we can make a difference.” At work, she slowly began to regain her confidence, bolstered by encouragement from colleagues who praised her when she made beneficial contributions rather than making excuses for when she didn’t.

Informed by her own experience and that of Grant’s colleague Jenessa Shapiro, who faced similar self-doubt at work after being diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer, Sandberg has changed her reaction to co-workers experiencing difficulties. “I still always start by offering them time off,” she says. “But now I understand the importance of treating them as regular members of the team and praising their work.”

Sandberg also felt the lack of self-confidence at home, which she acknowledges is just as important as self-confidence at work but is often ignored. As someone who had never before been a single parent, she faced uncharted territory, and she realized the blind spot she’d had when she wrote *Lean In*. “My understanding and expectation of what a family looks like has shifted closer to reality,” she says, citing the fact that since the early 1970s, the number of single mothers in the U.S. has nearly doubled and that 30 percent of households with children are led by a single parent.

As a single parent, Sandberg now sees how much change is needed: “The United States is one of the only developed countries in the world that does not provide paid maternity leave,” she says. And Grant’s research has shown that “offering support through personal hardships helps employees become more committed to their companies.” Being a single parent also made her realize how many school events assumed

that children had two married heterosexual parents, such as father-daughter dances and parents' nights.

But most of all, not having a partner made Sandberg realize that she didn't need to have all the answers all the time. She just needed one answer at a time, especially when faced with helping her children process their emotions. And when she needed another's perspective, her friends and family were available to provide feedback—positive or negative.

On what would have been her husband's 48th birthday, she wrote one final journal entry. In it, she reaffirmed how far she had come: *"We all need other people—and I do more than ever. But at the end of the day the only person who can move my life ahead, make me happy, and build a new life for my kids is me."*

05

CHAPTER FIVE

BOUNCING FORWARD

The chapter begins with the story of Joe Kasper, who lost his teenage son to a rare and fatal form of epilepsy. In dealing with his own tragedy, Kasper discovered the work of professors Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, whose research focused on grieving parents. While they found the expected negative effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), they also found that a number of parents experienced some positive effects of grief. Previous research had uncovered two types of people dealing with trauma. The first experienced PTSD, debilitating depression and anxiety; the second were resilient, returning relatively quickly to their previous emotional states. But the psychologists discovered that there is a third group of people: those who bounce *forward*.

Grant broached the topic of post-traumatic growth with Sandberg four months after her husband died. “He told me that more than half the people who experience a traumatic event report at least one positive change, compared to the less than 15 percent who develop PTSD,” she says. “Then he did something super annoying: he quoted me to me. ‘You often argue that people can’t be what they can’t see. ... That women don’t reach for leadership roles because they don’t see enough women in leadership roles. This is the same thing. If you don’t see that growth is possible, you’re not going to find it.’”

According to Tedeschi and Calhoun, there are five forms post-traumatic growth can take:

1. Finding personal strength
2. Gaining appreciation
3. Forming deeper relationships
4. Discovering more meaning in life
5. Seeing new possibilities

Sandberg quotes their definition of personal strength: “I am more vulnerable than I thought, but much stronger than I ever imagined.” Surviving grief revealed to Sandberg just how much strength she had. “As excruciating days turned into weeks and then months, I realized that I *could* imagine because I was living it. I had gained strength just by surviving.” Without her husband to reassure her when dealing with her children’s challenges, she found comfort in the “ordinary” problems her children faced. “Now I think, ‘This is great. A normal kid problem! What a relief to be in a normal-problem zone.’”

Sandberg uses the story of her childhood friend Brooke Pallot to illustrate the second form of post-traumatic growth: gaining appreciation. Pallot endured a long and difficult process of adopting a baby. Shortly after the adoption was complete, she bonded with a woman named Meredith, who’d had similar troubles conceiving a child. One day, Meredith discovered a lump during a routine mammogram, and she was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer. Pallot felt compelled to have a mammogram as well, and she also discovered that she had stage 4 breast cancer. While Pallot’s cancer responded to treatment, Meredith’s did not, and she passed away three years later. Sandberg quotes Pallot: “I went through chemo and buried my young friend. ... The little things don’t stress me out. I am much stronger, much more centered and reasonable now.”

Sandberg tells the story of Kevin Krim, whose 6-year-old and 2-year-old were killed by their nanny in 2012. Krim called Sandberg less than a month after her husband died to offer words of encouragement and support, and she asked him how he had gotten through the death of his children. Sandberg quotes Krim’s reply: “I heard this quote that I

think is very important here. It goes, ‘He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.’” Krim and his wife decided to have more children, and they started a nonprofit dedicated to helping disadvantaged kids express themselves creatively. “[They] are finding post-traumatic growth by adding more love and beauty to the world ... which is an act of love and beauty itself,” says Sandberg. For her, she has discovered more gratitude after the trauma of losing her husband. “I have at my fingertips this unbelievable reservoir of sadness. ... But alongside that sadness, I have a much deeper appreciation for what I used to take for granted,” she says. The days she feels OK make her appreciate that she has those days at all.

Trauma can negatively impact our ability to form relationships, but it motivates some to seek out and establish new, deeper friendships. This is the third form of post-traumatic growth. “When people endure tragedies together—or endure the same tragedy—it can fortify the bonds between them,” Sandberg says. She tells the story of Stephen Thompson, the eldest of five siblings who were frequently homeless and neglected by their mother. After their mother abandoned them, the siblings went into the care of child protective services, an experience which Thompson believes was something like a blessing: “It was almost a gift—a new beginning for us.” He suggests that “his resilience came from learning at a young age to view this extreme trauma as a chance to form new relationships,” says Sandberg. He would go on to make close friends and spend holidays with their families, until one day a friend’s mother asked him to stay permanently.

Trauma can also lead people to find greater meaning in life, the fourth form of post-traumatic growth. Sandberg quotes Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl: “In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning.” Sandberg found some meaning in religion: “Rabbi Jay Moses, who married me and Dave, told me that ‘finding God or a higher power reminds us that we are not the center of the universe. There is much we don’t understand about the world and human existence, and there is order and purpose to it anyway. It helps us feel that our suffering is not random or meaningless.’”

NFL veteran Vernon Turner learned the power of finding purpose when his mother and stepfather both died before he turned 20 years

old. He had been told he was not cut out for the NFL, but with his whole family depending on him, he found the strength to train harder than ever before. Sandberg quotes Turner: “I put myself through brutal hell preparing for the NFL. I had workouts I would not wish on my worst enemy—I was ready to die on the football field. ... When they measured my stature, they failed to measure my heart.”

For Sandberg, work became a source of purpose. “I connected with the Facebook mission of helping people share in a way that I never had before,” she says. More people than she knew used Facebook to share all the ways that her husband had touched their lives for the better. Five different studies Grant has published demonstrate how meaningful work protects people from burning out. “He finds that the more people believe their jobs help others, the less emotionally exhausted they feel at work and the less depressed they feel in life,” Sandberg says. “And on days when people think they’ve had a meaningful impact on others at work, they feel more energized at home and more capable of dealing with difficult situations.”

The final form of post-traumatic growth is seeing new possibilities. Sandberg’s friend Jeff Huber lost his wife to colon cancer, so he quit his job and became CEO of GRAIL, a company dedicated to detecting cancer in its earliest stages. “‘It’s like you’ve been through a portal,’ Jeff told me. ‘You can’t go back. You’re going to change. The only question is how.’” “Trauma often makes it harder to pursue new possibilities,” says Sandberg, but she notes that it’s not impossible. “The disappearance of one possible self can free us to imagine a new possible self.” She quotes Helen Keller, who once said, “When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.”

“It’s my deepest desire that something good will come from the horror of Dave’s death,” Sandberg concludes. “When people say they have found comfort or strength in what I’ve shared, it honors the life Dave lived. He did so much to help others, and I hope this book reaches people and becomes part of his legacy.”

06

CHAPTER SIX

TAKING BACK JOY

In the autumn of 2015, just months after her husband died, Sandberg attended the bat mitzvah for a close friend's daughter. At the celebration, "September" by Earth, Wind & Fire came on, and a friend pulled her onto the dance floor. "Just like high school we let go, dancing and singing," she says. "And then I burst into tears." Why? "Dancing to an upbeat song from childhood had taken me to a place where I wasn't filled with loneliness and longing," she says. "I actually felt *happy*. And that happiness was followed immediately by a flood of guilt."

The next day, she and her children went to see Grant's family, and she told him about her experience. "He wasn't surprised. 'Of course this was the first moment you were happy,' he told me. 'You haven't been doing a single thing that brings you joy.'" Sandberg admits he was right: "For more than four months, I'd been completely focused on my kids, my job, and just making it through each day. I had stopped doing anything Dave and I had done together for fun."

Her reaction, called "survivor guilt," affects many people after they experience grief, like the death of a loved one or layoffs at work. In the latter, those who were not laid off can believe that they should have been laid off, then feel glad that they weren't, which leads them to feel ashamed for being happy at the expense of others. For Sandberg, it wasn't until that moment on the dance floor that she realized she had been an obstacle to her own happiness. "Then one day on the phone, Dave's brother Rob gave me a true gift. 'Since the day Dave met you, all he ever wanted was to make you happy. ... He would want you to be

happy—even now. Don't take that away from him.” Her sister-in-law also helped her see how much her unhappiness was affecting her children, who said they were feeling better because, as they described it, “Mommy stopped crying all the time.”

So Sandberg started trying to have fun *for* her children by having fun *with* them. “‘We take it back’ became our mantra—rather than give up the things that reminded us of Dave, we embraced them and made them an ongoing part of our lives,” she says. This meant everything from rooting for his favorite sports teams to playing the games they used to play with him and watching *Game of Thrones* again. “We want others to be happy. Allowing ourselves to be happy—accepting that it is okay to push through the guilt and seek joy—is a triumph over permanence. Having fun is a form of self-compassion,” she says. “Seeking joy after facing adversity is taking back what was stolen from you.”

But joy wasn't found in only the big moments and celebrations. “Happiness is the frequency of positive experiences, not the intensity,” says Sandberg, citing an Australian study that found that during the course of 12 years, 26 percent of the bereaved spouses found joy as often as they had before the loss of their partners—but only by re-engaging in everyday things. Grant recommended that Sandberg replace her daily “three things done well” list with a “three moments of joy” list. “Doing this makes me notice and appreciate these flashes of joy; when something positive happens, I think, *This will make the notebook*. It's a habit that brightens the whole day,” she says.

One of her mentors, Larry Brilliant, lost his 24-year-old son Jon to lung cancer. Finding peace in their religious studies, Brilliant and his wife worked to turn their sadness into gratitude for all the joy they had experienced when their son was alive. He told Sandberg: “A day of joy is fifteen minutes. A day of pain is fifteen years. ... No one pretends this is easy, but the job of life is to make those fifteen minutes into fifteen years and those fifteen years into fifteen minutes.”

There is an evolutionary reason why this is not easy, Sandberg notes. “Bad events tend to have a stronger effect on us than good events. This made sense in prehistoric times: if you weren't haunted by the memory

of the time someone you loved ate the poisonous berries, you might nibble on them yourself.” Identifying and celebrating positive emotions and experiences can help combat this natural bias, as can sharing them and reframing how we define positive experiences: “As we get older we define happiness less in terms of excitement and more in terms of peacefulness,” she says. Sandberg quotes human rights advocate Shannon Sedgwick Davis: “Joy is a discipline.”

Breaking free from routines can be another effective tool for fighting negative emotions and despair. Sandberg has found solace in playing the piano. “Playing music at the edge of our capabilities is what psychologists call a ‘just manageable difficulty.’ This level requires all of our attention, giving us no room to do or think about anything else.” These activities can also help people achieve state of “flow,” or total absorption in a task. But it’s not just practicing music that can produce flow—so, too, can activities like reading or exercise. For Wafaa Abour, it was something a little different.

After Abour’s husband was arrested in Syria and never seen again, her 16-year-old son was killed by shrapnel. She fled to Turkey, where shortly after, she learned that her grandson was killed by a sniper just days before his second birthday. Forced to live in a foreign country where she could not speak the language, she felt exceedingly lonely. Then she found a community center in Istanbul, where she met other Syrian refugees. In her new community, she found peace through prayer. And when one of her neighbors became sick, she found flow in cooking Syrian food for her. Sandberg quotes Abour: “It filled me with happiness to think I could help her with food—and Syrian food! It was my way to say, ‘Take this from my homeland. I have nothing else to give.’”

“Even when we’re in great distress, joy can still be found in moments we seize and moments we create. Cooking. Dancing. Hiking. Praying. Driving,” Sandberg says. “All of these can provide relief from pain. And when these moments add up, we find that they give us more than happiness; they also give us strength.”

07

CHAPTER SEVEN

RAISING RESILIENT KIDS

At the age of five, artist Tim Chambers began wearing hearing aids. In high school, he lost his sight. At age 30, his doctor suggested that he should find a new profession, but despite being 70 percent deaf and legally blind, Chambers persisted. He began teaching art lessons on the internet, which grew into a worldwide online art school. He learned resilience from his father, who taught him to frame conditions positively using humor. For example, when Chambers' elementary school classmates made fun of his hearing aids, he pretended to be listening to a Chicago Cubs game, which they found enviable. "He discovered that his own reaction to his disability influenced how others reacted, which meant he could control how he was perceived."

Sandberg's biggest concern after the death of her husband was how her children's lives would be affected. Agonizing over how to tell them that their father had died on her way back from Mexico, she turned to her close friend Carole Geithner, a social worker who counsels grieving children. Geithner encouraged Sandberg to be honest and direct with her children by answering their questions candidly and acknowledging that while some things in their lives would change, many things would stay the same. Reflecting on it, "Nothing has come close to the pain of this moment," she says. "Still, as truly horrific as this was, we got through it."

She acknowledges that her children were more fortunate than others to have the means and support to mitigate the disruption of their father's death. She points to the need for programs like the Nurse-

Family Partnership, which provides home visits and counseling to parents and children from birth through the first two years of their lives. The Nurse-Family Partnership has proven just how valuable investing in and building resilience in children can be, showing a significant decline over time in child abuse, neglect, arrests and financial instability in their families. “We owe all children safety, support, opportunity, and help finding a way forward, especially in the most tragic situations.”

To build resilience, there are four core beliefs that adults can help children develop:

1. They have some control over their lives.
2. They can learn from failure.
3. They matter as human beings.
4. They have real strengths to rely on and share.

To illustrate the first belief, Sandberg describes Kathy Andersen and her work helping victims of sex trafficking. One 15-year-old girl named Johanacheka Francois was one such victim. She was part of Andersen’s program, during which she shared that her dream was to be a great mother to her 1-year-old child. Andersen helped Francois understand that finishing high school was a necessary step, and Francois eventually graduated and attended college. “‘I feel like now my future is in my hands,’ [Francois] says. ‘It’s all about being a great mother for my daughter and giving her a good future.’”

The second belief is learning from failure. Psychologist Carol Dweck makes the distinction between a growth mindset and a fixed one. Those with a growth mindset believe abilities are improvable with hard work and effort, while those with a fixed mindset think abilities are static and innate. Children with a growth mindset cope better with adversity, and which mindset children develop depends on factors such as the type of praise they receive. In one study, “the kids who were praised for being smart did worse on later tests because they viewed their intelligence as a fixed attribute,” says Sandberg. “But when kids were praised for trying, they worked harder on the challenging test and made more of an effort to finish it.”

While this is a simple concept to grasp, putting it into practice is a different matter, she admits. “Former Stanford dean Julie Lythcott-Haims advises parents to teach children that difficulties are how we grow. She calls this ‘normalizing struggle.’ When parents treat failure as an opportunity to learn rather than an embarrassment to be avoided, kids are likely to take on challenges.”

The third belief is mattering: “knowing that other people notice you, care about you, and rely on you.” While many parents do this naturally, children in stigmatized groups often struggle with mattering and do not receive this kind of affirmation. LGBTQ children and teens, for example, often find themselves without this kind of support. Sandberg points to the Trevor Project’s success in filling this critical gap by offering a 24/7 hotline for LGBTQ youth—a “button” to press. Adults other than parents can show children that they matter, too. The son of one of Sandberg’s friends had trouble fitting in at school, so a teacher encouraged him to take concrete and specific steps to make friends, following up with him and helping him develop the confidence to overcome his anxiety.

“The fourth belief held by resilient kids is that they have strengths they can rely on and share with others,” says Sandberg. She uses the example of Girls First, a program that helps Indian girls to “identify and practice different strengths of character—from courage to creativity, justice to kindness, humility to gratitude.” It helped one eighth grader, Ritu, stand up to a boy harassing her friends, and it helped her prevent a coerced marriage for her ninth-grade sister designed by her father. In six years, the program has helped 50,000 girls. “The girls often say that no one had ever told them they had strengths.”

But it’s not just children who benefit from a growth mindset; teachers can and do as well. “Since the 1960s, researchers have demonstrated that when teachers are told students from stigmatized groups have potential to bloom, the teachers begin to treat them differently,” says Sandberg. “They set high expectations, give students extra attention, and actively encourage them to develop their strengths.”

For her, setting up new family rules was crucial to establishing stability in her children's lives after the death of their father. These rules included not suppressing feelings, giving themselves permission to take breaks to cry, accepting that they would sometimes feel anger and jealousy, that it was OK to tell people that they did not want to talk about things, and that they did not deserve any of the tragedy they were experiencing. Sandberg saw the ways in which her children cycled in and out of emotions quickly due to their young age—and greater neural plasticity—and she emphasizes the importance of using sleep to maintain energy levels during emotionally exhausting times.

She and her children learned to apologize and forgive quickly, in addition to being kind to themselves. “I came to see teaching them self-compassion as part of nurturing a growth mindset. When they didn't dwell on yesterday's grief, they could approach today as a new day.” She also learned that asking for help is at the heart of building resilience, as she leaned on her close friends and family for parenting advice and emotional support—as when one friend cajoled her daughter into hiking and another comforted Sandberg.

Sandberg also made sure to try to preserve the memory of her husband. “I have a deep desire to keep Dave's memory alive, and when I mention him he remains present,” she says. She does this to remember the happy times her family spent with him as much as she does to make sure her children don't forget them. She made video recordings of her friends and family sharing fond memories of her husband and recorded her children sharing their own recollections, all to preserve the remembrances in a way that they can be revisited again and again.

“When children grow up with a strong understanding of their family's history,” she says, “they have better coping skills and a stronger sense of belonging. Talking openly about positive and even difficult memories can help develop resilience.” Doing this also reinforces a shared sense of connectivity, allowing children to feel part of something larger than themselves. Research on nostalgia has even shown that “after people reflect on an event, they tend to feel happier and more connected to others. They often find life more meaningful and become inspired to create a better future.”

Grant reassured Sandberg with research, discussing a program at Arizona State University focused on helping children recover from losing their parents. “One of its key steps is to create a new family identity so kids feel that the people left make a complete unit.” For Sandberg, this means setting time aside to have fun together with her kids in an active—not passive—way. “We called it FAF, which is short of ‘Family Awesome Fun,’” she says. “As individuals, we feel weaker on some days than others. But as a family we are stronger together.”

08

CHAPTER EIGHT

FINDING STRENGTH TOGETHER

Spencer Harrison, a colleague of Grant, studied and interviewed the survivors of a 1972 plane crash in an attempt to understand how the survivors persisted. After combing through their journals and even visiting the crash site in the Andes, he discovered that “every survivor’s story shared a common theme: a key to their resilience was hope.” Sandberg quotes one of the survivors, Roberto Canessa: “Some people say, ‘If there’s life, there’s hope.’ ... But for us, it was the opposite: ‘If there’s hope, there’s life.’”

Hope enables people who have suffered trauma to imagine new possibilities, which helps them resist the idea of permanence and instead actively seek new options. “They find the will and the way to move forward,” says Sandberg. “Psychologists call this ‘grounded hope’—the understanding that if you take action you can make things better.” And most crucially, resilience is not simply built in individuals. “It is built *among* individuals,” she says, “[and] it is also fueled by shared experiences, shared narratives, and shared power.”

For Sandberg and her children, finding connections with people who had experienced similar loss was instrumental to their recovery. They went to Kara, a local grief support center, meeting people who reassured her family that the grief they felt would not last forever. Her children attended Experience Camps, a weeklong program with activities designed to help kids confront and process their emotions, in addition to providing a community for children who have experienced loss.

my hate. ... I will not give you the satisfaction of hating you.” After reading and reflecting on his words, Sandberg felt a peculiar emotion, which Grant told her was called “moral elevation,” or “the feeling of being uplifted by an act of uncommon goodness.” It inspires people to focus on similarities over differences, to see the potential for good in others and to combat injustice.

This is precisely what happened in the wake of the white supremacist attack on Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, which took the lives of nine people. In their grief, the Charleston community found common purpose, hosting conferences on violence prevention and mobilizing political leaders to close the loophole that allowed the terrorist to purchase a gun. The Charleston Area Justice Ministry, a network of faith-based congregations from multiple religions, took up the cause of preventing racial profiling in an effort to overcome differences that had held them back in the past.

“Resilient communities have strong social ties,” says Sandberg. She saw this firsthand working at the World Bank on leprosy eradication in India. By reducing the shame and stigma that people—particularly women—felt because of their illness, communities could build and sustain early prevention practices that improved health outcomes and provided support. In China, Lean In Circles have created networks for unmarried women, who are highly stigmatized in Chinese society.

When Sandberg went to Beijing to speak to them, she heard how these women had developed compassion for themselves and one another, and how some had changed careers and found the strength to stand up to the pressure of their families. The women “spoke of action they were taking together that they never would have dared to take alone,” she says. “We find our humanity—our will to live and our ability to love—in our connections to one another. Just as individuals can find post-traumatic growth, so can communities.”

09

CHAPTER NINE

FAILING—AND LEARNING—AT WORK

In April 2016, Sandberg and her children visited SpaceX on the day that the company was attempting a sea landing for one of its rockets. After meeting CEO Elon Musk—and bonding with him after she learned of the loss of his two-and-a-half-month-old baby—she sat in the building’s foyer to watch the launch. The rocket landed on the drone ship, tilting precariously to one side before righting itself—a noteworthy success after three previous failures.

After studying space missions going back to the launch of Sputnik I, researchers found something surprising about what contributed most to a mission’s success: Past failure, not past success, predicted success. “Also, their chances of success increased after a rocket exploded compared to a smaller failure,” Sandberg says. “We learn more from bigger failures because we scrutinize them more.” For SpaceX, its first rocket exploded midair, the second failed due to the 11th most likely risk (after Musk had asked for the top 10 risks), and the third would have succeeded but for a software bug.

“Just as all people need resilience, all organizations do too,” says Sandberg. “To be resilient after failures, we have to learn from them.” For organizations, this requires creating a culture at work that keeps people from being defensive over their shortcomings and encourages them to acknowledge mistakes and regrets. Sandberg found a simple way to do this at Facebook after experiencing basic training at Marine Corps Base Quantico as part of the company’s annual management

team offsite. During the training, she learned that the Marines do formal debriefs after every mission and training session, publicly recording the lessons learned.

“The Marines taught me the importance of creating a culture where failure is seen as a learning opportunity,” she says. “When done insensitively, debriefs feel like public flagellation, but when expected and required, they no longer feel personal. ... When it’s safe to talk about mistakes, people are more likely to report errors and less likely to make them.” When your organization doesn’t encourage this broadly, there are still ways to implement it personally. For example, when Grant first started teaching, he made it a point to do guest lectures and solicit candid feedback in an attempt to overcome his fear of public speaking. And when he started teaching his own classes, he did the same, but also shared the anonymous comments with the whole class, analyzing themes and discussing how he could concretely address student feedback.

Gaining feedback in this way allows us to see our own blind spots. “The people who have taught me the most in my career are the ones who pointed out what I didn’t see,” says Sandberg. At both Google and Facebook, for example, her colleagues have encouraged her to listen more before speaking in order to be more persuasive. Four months after Goldberg’s death, a former colleague at Facebook, Chamath Palihapitiya, even checked in on her career, pushing her to consider whether she was maintaining ambitious professional goals. “Chamath knew me well enough to recognize that his blunt encouragement would provide a needed jolt of confidence—and remind me that I could fail by refusing to try,” she says.

In a similar vein, Sandberg quotes Chicago Cubs General Manager Theo Epstein, who said after leading his team to a World Series win, “We will always spend more than half the time talking about the person rather than the player. ... We would ask our scouts to provide three detailed examples of how these young players faced adversity on the field and responded to it, and three examples of how they faced adversity off the field. Because baseball is built on failure. The old expression is that even the best hitter fails seven out of 10 times.”

The key to using feedback effectively is not to take it personally. Law professors Doug Stone and Sheila Heen advise people to give themselves a “second score,” stating, “Even when you get an F for the situation itself, you can still earn an A+ for how you deal with it.” At McKinsey & Company, Sandberg worked with Director Byron Auguste. “[He] had a calmness about him that allowed him to see feedback as, in his words, ‘purely anthropological,’” she says. After a drunk driver killed his 10-year-old brother, left his father in a coma and broke both of his legs, Auguste “vowed that he wouldn’t become a problem for his grieving mom,” eventually earning a Ph.D. in economics and becoming the first African American director in the firm’s history. His tragedy also granted him perspective on failure. Sandberg quotes Auguste: “I say to myself and to others all the time, ‘Is anyone gonna die?’ That’s the worst—not failure.”

One final strategy Sandberg uses is the “hard conversation,” which promotes the practice of honesty at work in service of being better. “I set a goal that we would all have at least one hard conversation each month.” Carolyn Everson, head of Facebook’s global sales team, even shares her performance reviews on Facebook. “She wants her entire team to see how she’s working to improve,” says Sandberg. But for herself personally, one of the hardest conversations she had was at an annual leadership day for women at Facebook. In opening up about her struggle with grief and her lack of understanding for single parents before becoming one, among other things, she hoped to inspire an openness among the women in the room.

One of those women was Caryn Marooney, who had recently been offered a promotion to run the company’s global communications team. She was hesitant to accept because she was awaiting the results of a test for breast cancer. Although Marooney had decided not to accept the promotion should she receive a positive diagnosis, Sandberg spoke with her and assured her that the company would support her no matter what. Marooney took the job, and she and Sandberg created a plan for what that would look like. Marooney had to abandon the idea of being a “fearless leader,” and she shared her diagnosis and personal challenges with her team. “Being more open personally led people to be more open professionally,” says Sandberg, which ultimately made the team more cohesive, efficient and willing to discuss failure openly as a group.

10

CHAPTER TEN

TO LOVE AND LAUGH AGAIN

When Sandberg and her husband married, they signed their *ketubah*, the traditional Jewish wedding contract, before the ceremony. It hung in their bedroom with the vows they had written, next to her husband's closet. After several months of realizing the pain it brought her to see it every night on her way to bed, she decided to do something. Though she couldn't bring herself to take down the *ketubah*, she did start to clean out his closet.

In the middle of the process, her husband's mother and brother came upstairs to help her finish. It was during a conversation then that her mother-in-law stunned her, saying, "You are not only going to live, but you are going to get remarried one day—and I am going to be there to celebrate with you." It wasn't until that moment that Sandberg had thought about finding love again. A few months earlier, her brother-in-law had discouraged her from putting a photo of her husband in the bedroom, telling her that it was her bedroom and that she would successfully move on. She had listened to him, and she had also moved her wedding ring to her right hand. "I really couldn't bring myself to consider the possibility of dating, let alone talk about it," she says. "It felt disloyal and just reminded me how much I wanted Dave back."

One study Sandberg cites found that among 24,000 participants followed for 15 years, marriage hardly improved people's long-term average happiness, with a 0.1 point boost on a scale of one to 10 appearing at the time of marriage and shortly thereafter; even people

who lost a spouse and did not remarry found their happiness lower by as little as 0.15 points. “At the same time, I had never wanted to be alone,” Sandberg says. And she had never discussed with her husband what he would want her to do if he died.

“Love is the third rail of grief—a topic so charged that it is untouchable,” Sandberg says. A childhood friend of hers, who is now a rabbi, told her that the mourning period for spouses is 30 days—as opposed to a year for a child, parent or sibling—for a reason. Her brother encouraged her to start dating, believing that it would distract her in a constructive way. “He also pointed out that if I were a man, I would have started dating already.” This is in large part due to the stigma that many societies reserve for widows. For example, in India, widows are sometimes cast out by their own families; in Nigeria, some are stripped naked and forced to drink the water used to bathe the bodies of their dead husbands.

After she began to date and the news was publicly reported, she found herself the target of online hate. “People who have lost a spouse feel enough grief and guilt on their own,” she says. “Judging them makes those feelings worse. It’s kinder to see dating not as a betrayal but as an attempt for them to break through the sorrow and find some joy.” While dating did not erase her grief, it did feel like a step forward for Sandberg, bringing humor back into her life as yet another “third rail of grief.”

Making jokes, even at her husband’s expense, “pushed away the overwhelming darkness of the moment,” she says. And studies back up humor’s ability to create resilience: “Surgery patients who watch comedies request 25 percent less pain medication. ... Couples who laugh together are more likely to stay married.” Humor can even provide moral satisfaction. “When you take a horrible situation and add a punch line to it, for at least a moment you have shifted the balance of power: the helpless become the victors and the underdog gets the last word.”

But being able to date and laugh doesn’t mean that Sandberg is over her husband’s death, and that’s something she encourages everyone to remember when dealing with the loss of a loved one. Her husband’s

death has also shown her “how deeply you can still love someone after they die. You may not be able to hold them or talk to them, and you may even date or love someone else, but you can still love them every bit as much,” she says.

As Sandberg and Grant studied resilience, they thought about how to apply the same lessons to relationships. “To build resilience in a loving, long-term relationship, we need to pay attention to the everyday interactions we have with our partners,” she says. She cites a study of 130 newlyweds who spent a day at the “Love Lab.” There, researchers studied their behavior and interactions, finding that each conversation started with one person’s “bid” for attention, affection, support or laughter. Whether the other person turned “toward” or “away” with their response predicted whether the couple’s relationship would last: The researchers accurately predicted divorce within six years 83 percent of the time. “It’s more than two resilient individuals connecting—resilience becomes a feature of the connection itself,” says Sandberg.

“Part of protecting and nurturing a bond is doing small things together,” she says. For her and her husband, Scrabble was one of those activities. Another part of deepening relationships is dealing with conflict in a constructive way. One study found that successful couples, when asked to talk about an ongoing disagreement in their marriage, “sent signals that even though they were fighting, at a deeper level, they were okay,” using humor and affection to promote compromise and accountability.

While love from spouses and partners is necessary, it is not always sufficient for solving all problems. Sandberg uses the example of her friend Jennifer Joffe, who had struggled for decades with compulsive eating, triggered in part by the death of her father at a young age. After her daughter was struck by a car—thankfully, without injury—and seeing the grief that Sandberg’s children were managing after the death of their father, things clicked for Joffe. She told Sandberg, “I looked at your daughter and wanted her to know her world changed forever, and it was so unfair, but it wasn’t her fault. ... I wanted her to love herself. And I wanted my daughter to love herself. But how could I

expect her—and my son—to do that when their own mother did not?” She overcame her eating addiction and now coaches other women in doing the same.

“Resilience in love means finding strength from within that you can share with others,” says Sandberg. “Finding a way to make love last through the highs and lows. Finding your own way to love when life does not work as planned. Finding the hope to love and laugh again when love is cruelly taken from you. And finding a way to hang on to love even when the person you loved is gone.”

“At Dave’s funeral, I said that if on the day I walked down the aisle with him, someone had told me that we would have just eleven years together, I would still have walked down that aisle,” she continues. “The world is better for the years Dave Goldberg lived. I am better for the years we spent together and for what he taught me—both in life and death.”

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