

Resilience and Complacency by David Singer

I do a lot of work with architects and engineers in New York and New Jersey, and I attend many events and conferences related to those professions. Quite a few of the events I attended during the past year were focused on the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy.

In February, I listened as a mayor, a congressperson, an engineer, and others reported on their first-hand experiences with Sandy at a gathering of the ACEC of New Jersey.

In April, I listened as then-New York City Economic Development Corporation president Seth Pinsky told attendees at a New York Building Congress forum the Bloomberg administration “will not forsake the residents and businesses that populate the City’s 520 miles of coastline.”

In June, I listened to a panel at the spring conference of ACEC of New York, including a member of the NYC mayor’s office and a commander from the Army Corps of Engineers, report on a combination of first-hand experiences and plans for the future. The timing of this panel was perfect as it came (coincidentally) on the day after the mayor released his administration’s report proposing a \$20 billion system of flood barriers to protect New York.

At the end of that panel, the moderator asked each of the panelists what their greatest concern was going forward. The first one to answer, Tokumbo Shobowale of the Bloomberg administration, said he worried that as time went on complacency would set in. The next panelist echoed that concern. What they meant was this: in the immediate aftermath of a disaster such as Sandy, everyone rallies for change, but as time goes on, and the disruption to our lives fades into the past, we settle back into our routines. The pain hurts less, the memories fade, and the sense of urgency diminishes.

My mind immediately went to the time after 9/11. For a while, we were all concerned. We were all vigilant. We looked around for trouble. Then we went back to our routines. I stopped being scared as I drove over the George Washington Bridge from New Jersey to New York. I stopped scrutinizing everyone on the airplanes I boarded.

Resilience is a good thing. Time heals wounds. It allows us to get on with our lives; to not get stuck in a moment that we can’t get out of; to move on. But, it’s also important to keep learning from our experiences and not let resilience turn into complacency.

It’s similarly important to stay vigilant about keeping happiness top of mind—ours and of those around us—for example, keeping the idea of helping others top of mind, not just after a natural disaster such as Sandy; keeping the love of family and friends top of mind rather than taking them for granted; and remembering there are many ways we can impact our own happiness rather than being complacent about our lives.

The same is true in all aspects of our personal and professional lives. To always focus on quality, not just for a short while after a client yells (or sues); to treat clients and staff as the critical parts of your business that they are at all times, not just for a short time after they threaten to leave you; and to be sure to live the famous cliché, “work/life balance,” instead of waiting for a health or relationship scare.



David Singer is the CEO of Singer Nelson Charlmers, an insurance firm for architects & engineers. He is also the author of *Six Simple Rules for a Better Life*, available on Amazon. You can find David on LinkedIn.