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# **COSTCO** **Connection**®

THE MAGAZINE FOR COSTCO MEMBERS

## Cultivating resilience

A look at what it takes  
to grow through  
adverse experiences



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**FOR YOUR HEALTH**

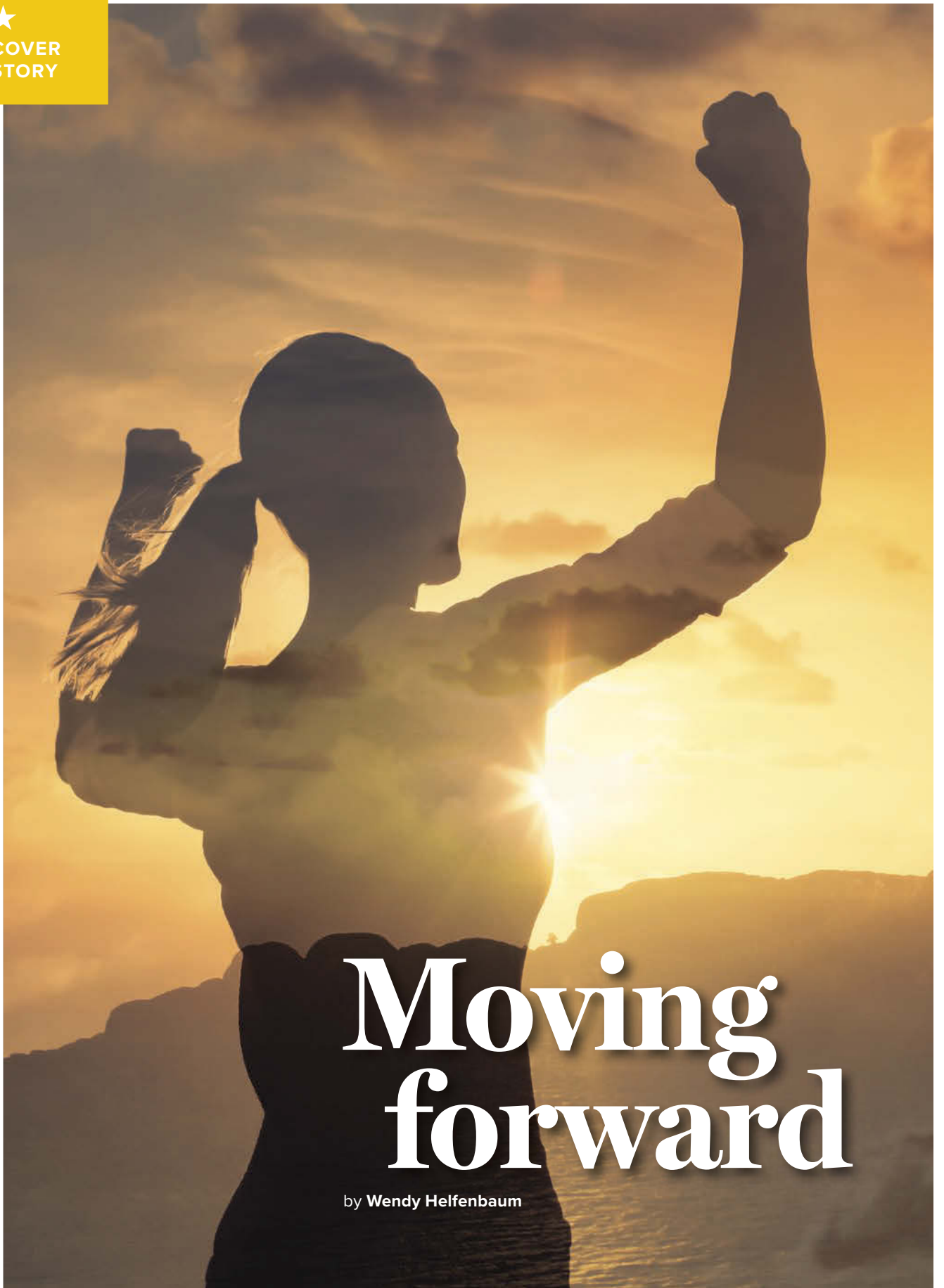
Buying Smart: Exercise gear

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And more ...



COVER  
STORY



# Moving forward

by Wendy Helfenbaum

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*“Just as trees grow their branches towards the sun, spend more time with the people who are your source of light.”*

— DR. AMIT SOOD, RESILIENT OPTION CEO ★

**N**avigating our hyperconnected and stress-filled lives requires increasing amounts of resilience—the ability to withstand emotional or physical difficulties. With practice, patience and persistence, resilience can be learned.

Costco member Kevin Rempel is literally a walking example of resilience. After a 2006 motocross crash instantly paralyzed him, doctors doubted he would walk again. Undaunted, he powered through a year of grueling physical therapy and proved his doctors wrong. He not only regained his mobility but went on to win a bronze medal with Team Canada’s sledge hockey team at the 2014 Paralympic Games.

After developing the Sledge Hockey Experience, a team-building program that shifts workplace biases about disability and inclusion, Rempel went on to create The Hero Mindset workshops ([kevinrempel.com](http://kevinrempel.com)), which teaches participants how to tap into resilience.

“You grow and change through resilience, just like a muscle that’s torn apart—it’s through the repair that the muscle becomes a stronger version of itself” says Toronto-based Rempel.

#### **What makes us resilient and why it matters**

Once defined as bouncing back from difficult situations, leading experts who study resilience now see it as a catalyst for transformation. Costco member Michael Ungar, Ph.D., a family therapist and resilience researcher at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia,

compares resilience to a roller coaster. He believes that unless we change the patterns of behavior putting us at risk of adversity, we’ll always end up back where we started—unable to handle a crisis.

“People talk about resilience as an inner quality or a stable trait, and that’s not the way the science is going,” says Ungar, the founder and director of Dalhousie’s Resilience Research Centre ([resilienceresearch.org](http://resilienceresearch.org)). Ungar holds the Canada Research Chair in Child, Family and Community Resilience and is the author of several books, including *Change Your World: The Science of Resilience and the True Path to Success* (Sutherland House Books, 2019; not available at Costco).

“If we say you’re ‘bouncing back,’ the idea is that somehow, you’re returning to normal. But nobody ever goes back to the same normal; you’re changed by your experience,” says Ungar. “What we now understand is you are more or less resilient depending on the circumstances and resources you have around you.”

Sometimes, rushing to recover after experiencing stressful situations can make things worse, notes Taryn Marie Stejskal, Ph.D., founder of the Resilience Leadership Institute ([resilience-leadership.com](http://resilience-leadership.com))

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## COSTCO CONNECTION

From healthful foods and exercise gear to candles and health and beauty products, a variety of items to help you take care of yourself are available in Costco warehouses and at Costco.com.



in Philadelphia and author of *The 5 Practices of Highly Resilient People: Why Some Flourish When Others Fold* (Hachette Go, 2023; not available at Costco).

“We live in a culture where there’s such pressure on everyone to be OK that we’re at a funeral or have surgery on Friday, and we think it’s a big win to be in the office on Monday,” says Stejskal.

“But we don’t bounce back; we bounce forward. Resilience is the ability to effectively face challenge, change and complexity—what I call the three C’s—in a way that ultimately enhances us, not diminishes us.”

Stejskal’s book outlines a road map to resilience that includes five practices: vulnerability—the foundation of authenticity and empathy; productive perseverance—knowing when to pivot; connection to ourselves and to others; gratiosity—a term she coined that blends gratitude and generosity; and possibility—how we navigate and manage risk.

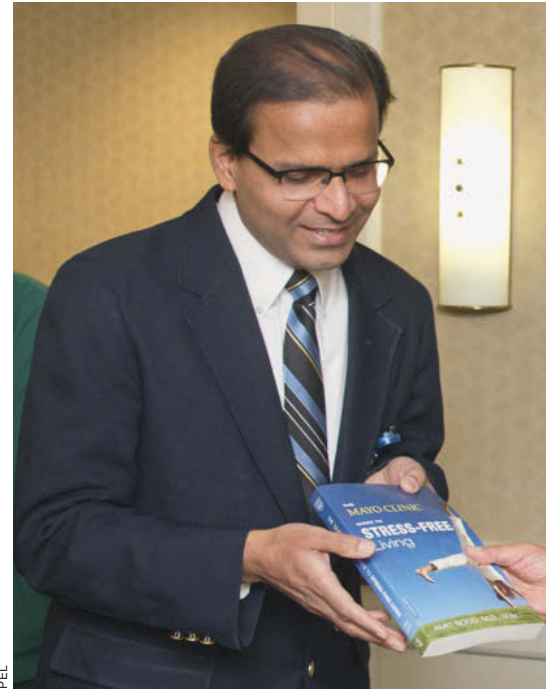
“When we face challenges or feel deeply alone, afraid, confused and unbalanced, these five practices show us what we’re going to do next,” explains Stejskal.

“Just like a muscle or our cardiovascular capability, resilience is something we can increase through training over time. It’s not just that you get dealt a particular amount of resilience and that’s all you get,” she says.

### It’s a marathon, not a sprint

Costco member Dr. Amit Sood describes resilience as the core strength we use to lift the load of life, leveraging the brain’s ability to change itself with experience. He says what makes one person more resilient than another depends on three factors: genetic makeup—the type of brain we inherit; adverse early childhood experiences; and life circumstances.

“If someone’s struggling, it’s not because they’re choosing it. Just as you don’t blame yourself for high cholesterol genes, don’t blame yourself for stress-related genes,” explains Sood, formerly a professor of medicine at Mayo Clinic and now CEO of the Resilient Option ([resilientoption.com](http://resilientoption.com)), a program to improve resilience.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF AMIT SOOD; MATTHEW MURNAGHAN / CANADIAN PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE; SHIRLEY REMPEL





**Clockwise from top:** Dr. Amit Sood discusses resilience with the Dalai Lama; Kevin Rempel became a medal-winning sledge hockey player; Rempel after an accident left him paralyzed.

“If we say you’re ‘bouncing back,’ the idea is that somehow, you’re returning to normal. But nobody ever goes back to the same normal.”

— MICHAEL UNGAR, RESILIENCE EXPERT ★

Leveraging the Stress Management and Resilience Training (SMART) program Sood developed after two decades of testing and clinical trials, his team helps participants understand and navigate difficult situations through awareness, attention and attitude.

“We teach awareness of what’s challenging you; paying attention; and the five principles of attitude: gratitude, compassion, acceptance, meaning and forgiveness,” Sood, the author of several books about resilience, tells the *Connection*.

#### Small improvements, big impact

According to a 2021 study in *Frontiers of Psychology*, if you improve your resilience by just 5%, you lower the risk of a mental health diagnosis by 10% to 15%. After all, resilience can be learned and enhanced over time, according to a 2022 study conducted at the Princeton Neuroscience Institute.

“Resilience takes a lot of effort, but the beauty is that if you’re able to move resilience even by a little bit, you can have significant impact,” reports Sood.

Supporting the well-being of your staff has a significant impact on productivity, engagement and retention, says clinical psychologist Jo Burrell, CEO and co-founder of Ultimate Resilience ([ultimateresilience.co.uk](http://ultimateresilience.co.uk)), which provides well-being and resilience training to promote healthy working environments in Nottingham, England.

“In the U.K., stress, anxiety and depression account for around 50% of all sickness absence, and that’s increasing,” says Burrell. “Workplaces are starting to recognize that they have a duty of care to be assessing stress, understanding what the sources

#### Small steps

Dr. Amit Sood has these five micro-practices that build resilience:

- Wake up thinking about what or who you’re grateful for and send silent gratitude to that person.
- Send a silent, good wish to someone you’re connecting with. “I do this all day, which makes me feel uplifted,” says Sood.
- Be present instead of being physically here and mentally elsewhere.
- Try to notice one new thing every day.
- Greet at least one person every day as if you haven’t seen them for a month—with enthusiasm and energy.—*WH*

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might be and doing something about it.”

When combined with an overall well-being program, resilience training can have a positive impact on employee mental health, says a 2015 study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*. Burrell cites a 2020 Deloitte report showing the return on investment for every dollar invested in employee mental health, including resilience training, was fivefold.

“The main improvements are staff performance and lower rates of absence. Research shows that resilient people are much less prone to chronic stress because they’re using skills and strategies,” says Burrell, who teaches employees how to regulate threat emotions.

“Resilient people are good at recognizing when they’re experiencing anxiety, anger, irritability, impatience and frustration. They put strategies in place to help calm the sympathetic nervous system arousal that happens when we’re stressed.

“We teach people the slow, rhythmic breathing technique, and we know from the research that if we do this even for a couple of minutes, it helps us feel calm,” explains Burrell. “Then, we’re able to think more clearly and problem-solve.”

### **Set yourself up to succeed**

Successful resilience training should not only focus on individual change, but also on creating an environment where we can experience manageable amounts of stress and learn the skills we need, says Ungar.

“We still have to be motivated and make good decisions, but those decisions have to occur in a world that allows us to have choices and support,” he explains.

For example, instead of buying a gym membership, which requires individual motivation, buy two: It’s easier to be successful when someone’s holding you accountable. If your job is stressing you out, learning techniques for self-regulation, mindfulness training, self-care and expressing gratitude will help. But unless they’re combined with other changes to your life, they’ll ultimately fail, cautions Ungar.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: © RAWPIXEL.COM / STOCK.ADOBE.COM; KSENYA BERSON; ULTIMATE RESILIENCE





**Clockwise from top:** Yoga is one way to deal with—and move beyond—stress; resilience expert Taryn Marie Stejskal; Jo Burrell delivers a workplace resilience workshop.



*“Resilient people are good at recognizing when they’re experiencing anxiety, anger, irritability, impatience and frustration.”*

— JO BURRELL, CO-FOUNDER, ULTIMATE RESILIENCE ★



“You’ll be able to withstand stress a lot better if you’re taking steps to fix it,” he says.

Sign up for a yoga class, take a night class to reinvent yourself professionally or ask for a lateral change within the organization so you’re not reporting directly to the boss you’re having the conflict with.

“Generally, people fail when they rely only on individual change. You’re going to be more successful if you can find at least one other system that changes along with you,” says Ungar, who adds that the studies of resilience show that as one system strengthens, it has a domino effect on other parts of your life.

“For example, our research shows that making connections becomes a catalyst for other parts of your life to kick in: If you pay attention to who’s having a birthday in your workplace, people may notice when you’re having a tough day,” he explains.

**Become the hero in your own story**

While learning to walk again, Kevin Rempel fell back on his competitive motocross training mindset.

“In the culture of extreme sports, the joy was in the journey. And when you fall, you pick yourself back up,” he says.

“I want to help people develop powerful, unstoppable resilience, and to prevent people from giving up on things that matter to them. I never give up. The grit is what keeps me going.” ■

Wendy Helfenbaum is a Montreal-based writer and TV producer.

**Manage your mindset**

Tamara Judge, a positive psychology consultant at Keystone Coaching in England, has rheumatoid arthritis and specializes in helping people use resilience strategies to handle pain. Her techniques include:

- Mindfulness helps you focus on the present by tuning into your surroundings using your senses. “Learning to redirect your thoughts can train your brain to stop focusing on the pain and help shift your perspective, building resilience,” says Judge.
- Meditation can help you become more aware of your body’s sensations, including pain, without reacting negatively to them. “This awareness, along with deep breathing, can lead to reduced suffering and better pain management,” she notes.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy can change thought patterns and behaviors related to pain.

—WH

