

**New America
Resilience Audio Interview**

AMA MARSTON

Transforming challenges: From Patti Smith to the global arena.

Editor's Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity and readability.

Anne-Marie Slaughter: Ama Marston, it's so great to have you here.

Ama Marston: Thank you so much for having me. It's a real honor.

AMS: We've got lots of things to talk about on the subject of resilience, but I actually want to start in a different place because you wrote a book, *Type R*, with your mother. I remember when you sent me the book and one of the things I thought was, "I wonder what that's like, working so closely with your mother?"

Ama: Yeah. It is not what I expected I would be doing with my career, especially when I went to International Affairs school and was studying global economics and policy and what have you, but it has been a real honor. I think it is the foundation of what *Type R* really is, given that it came out of a bunch of shake-ups in my life where I had left the nonprofit and U.N. world and was building a new business amidst the financial crisis blowback, had a family accident, or my father had a family accident, and then I hurt myself. And so through talking to my mom and supporting one another—she was building a business as an entrepreneur in response to the financial crisis and shifting opportunity—our conversations led to us supporting each other as mother-daughter, but we also started to realize there's something here. Not only are we as a family undergoing so much pressure, personally, and professionally within these big global changes, but you know, each of our respective fields has something interesting to contribute to this. So my mom is a psychotherapist...

AMS: My goodness.

Ama: Right, that's another conversation. But you know, she had the psychotherapy background and had been doing corporate consulting on stress and work life issues and around the financial crisis. The businesses that actually needed it the most were hiring the least to bring in experts like her and so she pivoted and started creating an online platform, one of the first of its kind, to teach people these tools of resilience remotely. But that came with a lot of pressure, being an entrepreneur later in life. So anyway, it just happened naturally that we were having these conversations and there certainly have been some funny moments, particularly early on.

AMS: I would guess. I'm trying to imagine writing with my mother and we are very complementary, I think it could work. But of course, you know, you're also a mother and daughter. So yes, the personal and the professional all blend together.

Ama: One of my favorite moments, and I guess it's no longer a family secret, but when we were in the proposal writing stage, I had been writing a lot of policy papers and very analytical stuff and my mom is the author of, I believe, five previous psychology books, so we started writing the proposal and I think the first time we showed each other something we were both aghast at each other's work. I was like, "Mom! You can't say this! This is so touchy-feely. Nobody I know talks like that. They're not gonna—I mean this has to be professional!" And she was like "Oh my God, this is so dry and wonky and nobody is going to read it."

AMS: Exactly. Well, I have to say publishing has gone more in her direction, than ours. So let's talk about the book: its *Type R: Transformative Resilience for Thinking in a Turbulent World*, and it's come out of a while ago now, it was four or five years ago. And I want to talk about transformative resilience and I'll say when I read the book it was very important for how I thought about the definition of resilience, which is one reason that I really wanted to have this conversation. But I want to start with this notion of "Type R" because you say, you know Alphas and Betas and my brother's an investment banker and I'm always saying "you're really Alpha, you're completely Alpha" and his view is o, no, I'm the Alpha in the family and that he's actually a Beta disguised as as an investment banker. But you say there's Alpha and there's Beta and then there's Type R, so just describe what a Type R is.

Ama: So when we were writing this book, which was four or five years ago (the book actually launched maybe a year and a half ago), but when we were writing it, we were aware of these kinds of definitions of types of people. One being this hard-driven, very in-control, sometimes controlling type of person and then the other people that were supposedly more laid-back, maybe more introverted. And yet, we were seeing different kinds of patterns, particularly those who were thriving amidst so much disruption and stress. And when we talk about Type Rs we use type A and B as a point of reference and jumping off point, but Type Rs actually can be individual people. They can be leaders, Type Rs can be teams, whole organizations, or communities, in part, because we share different mindsets. You know that mindset is as individual as it is collective.

AMS: Right.

Ama: So Type Rs are these people or these businesses, these groups of people that turn challenges into opportunity, growth, and innovation. And essentially what they're doing is creating transformative resilience. So they're moving away from this notion of bouncing back to a baseline or to the status quo or what was known and comfortable before because often we can't get back to those points after something challenging as happened in such a fast-paced world. So it really is about using this shock, this discomfort, or these mounting pressures as a catalyst for growth. And that's why we talked about transformative resilience.

AMS: It's such an important concept, because I do think the intuitive definition of resilience is that you bounce back. It's that you go through a crisis and you get back to that equilibrium. But transformative resilience, you bounce somewhere else, right? So I think it's the events that are like a trampoline that can take you somewhere else, which I do think is critically important as we face everything from climate change to just the accelerating speed of our world overall. There probably is no going back or bouncing back exactly to where you were because where you were is changing. So give us some stories of transformative resilience.

Ama: Well, the easiest place to start is our own story.

AMS: Yes, I mean if you're writing from a place of truth.

Ama: Yes, I mean this book came out of personal and professional experience. I was laid up for six months, not able to walk at one point, not able to work, and as somebody who up until then had been in the thick of things, you know, I was advising the United Nations, global leaders, businesses on things like the predecessors to the sustainable development goals, you know, I was in the thick of it. I was high power, important, in control, independent—and all of a sudden I was lying on my back. And I just had to take each day as it came because some days I was able to do more, like go swimming, some days I was not able to do much. And so this notion of transformative resilience very much came out of the idea of, “Here I am. So what do I do with this? What comes next?” Especially because I didn't know what point I would arrive at with my health after that. And really, the notion of transformative resilience wouldn't have come into being had it not been for this difficult experience, had it not been for my mom and I having these conversations. So the term itself is an example of transformative resilience.

AMS: Thinking about what resilience meant for you. It's interesting too, because your body was telling you you had to change. I have to say, as somebody who's suffered from back pain, your body, your spine, the very core of you is saying “this is not sustainable,” in a way. So the transformation then—so you use the crisis, whatever triggers this time of reflection into transformation. And are there are other characteristics, common characteristics for the people that do that?

Ama: Yes. So Type Rs have a shared mindset. A mindset, for those who aren't that familiar with it, essentially is the lens through which we see everything and it's so pervasive that we often don't realize we have it. So you will be able to see me today, but I'm wearing glasses. And mindset is almost like the rim of the glasses that you don't see that you're actually seeing through.

AMS: That's a great image.

Ama: Especially because you can see me.

AMS: Yeah.

Ama: So the Type R mindset really is the core belief that you can rise to the occasion of challenges, and you can find a way to reframe and find the opportunity in it. That's not the same as negating any loss or difficulty. So it's not Pollyanna. So Type Rs in general share this mindset, and that mindset can be individual, but we also have collective mindsets as groups. And then, based on that, there are some common characteristics. And these are things that some people will already have a bit of, or some groups of people, and some of it that we learn and improve. And it's everything from adaptability, finding a healthy relationship with control.

AMS: Aha.

Ama: And I say that as opposed to being in control, especially for those Type As out there. Continually learning and iterating, calling on others for support, leveraging support, which could be financial support, intellectual, emotional. Then things like active engagement—because you can have all the analysis in the world, you can see what's not working, but unless you put that analysis into action and start making changes, nothing really happens.

AMS: I'm fascinated by your needing support and learning to reach out for support, because I do think in times of trouble or crisis we tend to pull into ourselves, and it's hard to ask others for support. And yet, I do think that part of adapting and changing is knowing that you're not on the journey alone. Certainly, organizationally realizing that your peers are in the same boat you are, waking up in the middle of the night worrying just like you are, but are also there so that together you're stronger—that seems to be very important and often hard for people.

Ama: And I think depending on where you are in life and the role you're in—one of the really great women that we interviewed for our book talked a lot about this and we kind of used her as the characteristic of learning to leverage support or the example of it—in that she had become executive director of an important not-for-profit, and when she took on the role, she didn't realize that there were certain things going on with their finances. The problems were somewhat masked by someone who is well-intentioned in finance, but that was masking the problem. And so by the time she took on the role, it became very critical. And this is an extremely diligent female leader and she tried and she tried different ways to get them back above the red line. And ultimately, one of the ways that she was able to do that was to say “you're paying me a lot of money to be here, but you're not really using my expertise.” But that was a very painful point to get to. And one of the ways that she kind of dealt with all of this was learning to leverage the support of people that could help her. She had a coach that became very dear to her, she had a brother that was very business-savvy, a supportive husband, and colleagues, and all of that was critical, especially because she was the leader in a circumstance where she didn't feel she could share certain things. She had to kind of keep mum about some of it for the sake of the team and motivation, also certain things couldn't be shared publicly. And I think that happens particularly in leadership roles, and it can be isolating. But as you say, when we're struggling, when we're hurt, when we've had a loss, we do pull into ourselves often to rest, even physically rest, and for

some of us who are used to being very independent, it can be huge to ask for help. When I was injured I couldn't do much for myself, including grocery shop. I was used to traveling around the world by myself, but then just getting across the street to go to the grocery store was hard. And I had one fantastic friend who I like to think of as a ray of sunshine. This woman would come over once or twice a week and bring groceries, and she actually kind of volunteered herself because I wasn't yet at the point where I was asking for help. And then after she started showing up I started to ask and continue, but it can be hard.

AMS: But part of the ways that we discover we have more strength than we realize is to recognize the strengths don't have to be our own, that they can be the strengths of our team and that team can be a personal cabinet or a kitchen cabinet, or it can be your professional team. But that has, at least for me, been transformative; realizing I don't have to have all these skills, I don't have to have all these abilities, I can assemble them and complement my own. So I want to go back to your reference to control, because I think that's very important. And then also I want to talk about failure. You said a healthy relationship to control, which is not the same as being in control. That again, in a time of great turbulence and fast change, strikes me as very important. The control freaks are in trouble indeed. I used to say when I was in the state department that the 21st century is a terrible time to be a control freak. But what do you mean by a healthy relationship to control?

Ama: What's interesting is that this is the one characteristic that has resonated most to so many people. And particularly women, who I think often feel that they have to be responsible for so much, even things that are outside of their area of influence. So on one hand, we have to be able to influence the aspects of our lives to feel engaged and like it's worth making an effort. I've also worked in a number of developing countries starting early in my career, and in that context, dire poverty often means that people have no choices and no ability to control or influence the basics, which we forget about sometimes in the United States, though there certainly, sadly are people in those circumstances. So on one hand, you need to have a floor level of being able to influence aspects of your life.

AMS: Basic agency. Yes.

Ama: Exactly, agency is a good word. On the other hand, we often make ourselves unwell and we spin our wheels by trying to overreach and take control of things that were not going to be able to control, particularly the big picture—global challenges, or national challenges. So something like climate change, we ultimately do have the ability to influence long-term with collective action. But it's not one individual person or one individual organization's ability to control that and especially in a single climate amplified event, like Hurricane Sandy. And so there's this balance that we find that allows us to relieve stress or to free up our energy, to pivot and see where we might be more effective if we have some of that basic agency, but we also think about things like what we have to let go of. And I came to some of this a couple of years, maybe a few years back while working with a coach thinking about my own life, and I don't know

why it came to be but this idea of concentric circles. What can I control? What can I influence? And what's entirely outside of my control?

AMS: Oh that's helpful, the circles.

Ama: Yes, and often one of the few things that we can entirely control are our own responses to things, our mindsets and ability to reframe. And again, this can be "us" as individuals or groups. We can often control how we choose to present ourselves, you know, the message. You can let people know that together, I think that we can accomplish this, or we can be these kinds of partners.

That may influence them, but you're not ultimately going to control their response and whatever else is going on in their life, or their work, or how they interact in the political landscape.

AMS: That's very helpful. Let's talk about this ability to reframe, because I do think that is critical. And I'm an inveterate optimist. And I often tell people, "look, I've been an international lawyer, I've been a government official, I run a non-profit. If I weren't an optimist I couldn't do any of these things, because they are all things in which you have a great many setbacks." International law doesn't work as many times as it does work. You have to believe in the long game. As a non-profit leader there are grants you are going to get and there are always ones you aren't, and fundraising is very much that way. But taught optimism and reframing aren't necessarily the same thing, so talk about what it means to be able to reframe in a resilient way.

Ama: So reframing in many respects is the foundation of transformative resilience; you're creating a transformation. And there are so many different ways to reframe. I think on one hand, as I mentioned before, part of being able to reframe is being gentle with ourselves or with others and acknowledging a loss or a disappointment. People, or groups of people, and organizations will be very resistant to change and reframing if they haven't had certain kinds of needs or losses or disappointments acknowledged. So you have to acknowledge and then find the strand of hope, find the opportunity, and sometimes almost flip it on its head. Years ago, I thought I would be an artist when I was a teenager, because my father is a nature photographer. I spent a lot of time in nature and there were moments that I thought, e "Okay, if I zoom in a little bit, what does the picture look like? Or if I if I zoom out and take my lens wider, is there something else that I can see that I couldn't see before?" And I did this when I was very narrowly focused on a particular framing or a particular outcome. In things like figure drawing they often tell you to learn to draw shapes as opposed to the object that you're looking at. And so you'll do things like turn something upside down so that you can see that it is made up of two triangles and a circle, as opposed to you know, the fruit that you're looking at and, in a way, I sometimes think that we need these type of skills. It's a very visual or tangible way that I'm using to try to describe reframing, but it basically is: how do we change our perspective? There's always going to be something that is an opportunity or is slightly different than we initially reacted to it. If we're able to flip it on its head, or zoom out, or think horizontally.

AMS: That's so interesting also because many entrepreneurs describe something similar about figuring out what the product was they had to sell. They start out with this vision of a particular service or a product and then they test it and they discover, well, actually that bombed but along the way they've created a software for communications that is really great, or they've created a service that they didn't realize people would want. So I love the idea of zooming in or zooming out, or thinking about drawing, because those really are reframing how our eyes see something, and the reframing we're talking about for resilience is how our brains see something, right? Suddenly seeing a picture differently. And again, at least in my own life, those two things are connected. Looking at something, a landscape, and finding the things you can control in it because that then gives you energy and confidence as opposed to feeling like you're just the victim of these larger forces.

Ama: Let me give you just a quick example that is still linked to photography. I'm hoping that I'm remembering this right, but I believe it was Fujifilm. My father is a photographer. It's an industry that has changed vastly in the years that he's been in photography. And so, actual film being used in cameras has pretty much been done away with and so certain companies like Fujifilm, it's like, well, that was their business, right? What do they do? And I think that in the process of trying to figure out what next, they realized that something in the chemicals that they use for fixing film, you know, the images and the light exposure on to the film, actually helps with aging or something. And so, as I understand it, they now make facial products.

AMS: That's fascinating.

Ama: I mean, if that isn't a kind of pivot and a finding of the next opportunity and reframing and transforming, then I don't know what it is.

AMS: Exactly. That is remarkable. It's a great example of where it seems like all is lost, finding a way through. But let's talk about failure, because one of the things that you talked about and we hear a great deal about in terms of adaptability is how you respond to failure and the value of failure. Indeed, in Silicon Valley they say "fail fast." Although I'm also reliably informed that it's easier to say than to do that. And in your in the book you actually say, failing does not feel good. You can reframe in any way you want. But you tell a story where Patti Smith was asked to perform at the Nobel Prize ceremony when Bob Dylan won the Nobel Prize. So Bob Dylan's there and Patti Smith is there and she's in front of this whole audience and she starts to sing, but she just becomes overcome with nerves, which for me is pretty amazing anyhow, to imagine Patti Smith overcome with nerves, and she couldn't do it, and she repeats a line. Then she turns to the audience and says, "I'm sorry. I apologize. I'm so nervous." So you can pick up the story from there and talk about how it connects to dealing with a failure. This is a failure. It sounds like an anxiety dream, right? You get up there and you can't sing and yet actually this turns into something positive.

Ama: Well, first of all, I've become a Patti Smith fan girl since this, and I'm actually getting to see her speak in New York about a year in her life that was particularly difficult. So I'll be

interested to hear her further thoughts about this. But I think what was remarkable for me and made me pay more attention to Patti Smith than I had previously was that here was this publicly embarrassing moment and she's a pro. I mean, she's at the top of her game, she's in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame! But she was able to use her vulnerability to really endear people to her. And I think that was part of the transformation in the failure. She also appears to be somebody that's self-reflective, who is able to say, "Okay, what can I take from this?" And as I understand it from an essay that she wrote (which demonstrates the reflection and publicly sharing the lessons, which takes bravery), she sat down at a table afterwards with some Nobel scientists and I think felt apologetic and you know, "I really wanted to perform at my best." Again, the vulnerability she had shown about her nerves made them say, "no, no, we wouldn't have wanted you to do it any differently because you've embodied the Human Condition. We could relate." And here are these Nobel Laureate of all these different kinds, relating to her. And I think that has meant a lot for me, to see somebody be able to publicly stand up and be vulnerable. It's a story that I told the first time I gave a public talk about my journey to writing this book, which included the story about my father having an accident and an amputation.

AMS: Wow.

Ama: And I burst into tears as I was telling this story to this auditorium, which was not what I had expected to do, and yet it was right under there. And somehow, having that Patti Smith story with me tucked under my wing made it feel like, "okay, I can do this too." You know, if somebody at that level can do it, I can too.

AMS: That's wonderful.

Ama: There's something I want to add about the failure conversation though. Because I think there can be a dark side to it. And I believe that Michelle Obama pointed to this and said that not everybody gets the chance to fail forward in the same way. You have to think about the existing inequities in that kind of landscape. People get judged differently for their failures. Do they get a second chance? Do they get applauded? What is seen as a failure or not? And we have to acknowledge that it may be very different for women than it is men, or for people of color. And so, I think there is something very valuable to talk about our with our ability to use failure. But the two points that I would add to that is that we can't ignore what is layered—that conversation is layered on top of social norms, gender norms, and racial tensions. And that a lot of the "fail fast" conversation and the examples you hear are the most powerful, most successful white men in the world are outliers. And the other thing is that we often want to tell this story of failure only when there is a success that follows.

AMS: Yes, of course. And there isn't always.

Ama: There isn't always. And we can't put ourselves in a position again individually, or as whole organizations, or even nations, where we shut down if there isn't a success story to tell as well.

AMS: Those are two very important points. And on the first one, of course, you're right about who gets a second chance. The sociologist Michelle Gelfand has written about tight cultures and loose cultures; tight cultures are where there's really very little room for error, for departure from the norm, and loose cultures are much more receptive to risk-taking and one of the things she shows is absolutely that lower-income people and certainly lower-income people of color are given very little margin for error. And even where you think about failure and the fact that your parents can bail you out, which is the case for so many affluent kids, if failure where you can nobody can bail you out can make the difference between basic success in life or not. So I do think that is right and it's interesting that so much of the fail fast dialogue has come out of Silicon Valley, which is hardly representative of the population as a whole. So it's a very important caveat.

One of the things I think about in terms of making our society more resilient is the idea of providing not a safety net—I mean a safety net is the idea, somebody will catch you when you fall, but I think of it as more of a foundation, maybe a bouncy one, to provide all Americans with that same security that affluent kids have. Meaning that it's okay to try because you will get a second chance. And indeed, expanding health insurance so that your kids can stay on your health insurance until they're 26 is a great example of that because otherwise, they'd have to have a job with health insurance and that means they're not taking the kinds of risks that they otherwise might be able to take. So that that's a very, very important point.

Ama: Just to add on to that, one of the ways in which I was able to start my own consulting business, maybe eight years ago in the UK, was because there was the National Health Service. So when I graduated with a Master's degree from Columbia University, I got out and for a time walked around the streets of New York without health insurance. Then living in the UK, I originally was employed before becoming independent and I could take that risk because the National Health Service was there and I could get care without having to earn a lot of money initially. So I say that again and again to people because of its importance in my journey; because I think there's importance at a policy level. But also there is such a strong narrative around entrepreneurship. And particularly now, there's a whole generation that's being told that's the way to work. And I don't remember the exact statistics, but it's something shocking like 45 percent of us will be self employed by you know, 2040 something. And yet I don't think that the conversations about entrepreneurship are realistic or honest about the playing field, or about power dynamics between independence and high-profile individuals that may take an interest in your area of work or companies that may take an interest in your area of work. There certainly are the people that will be able to break through and compete. But I think we really have to—if we're compelling a whole generation of young people towards entrepreneurship—we have to think about things like safety nets, and think about things like well-being and the toll that it can take to live the startup life and take certain kinds of risks, particularly if you're in a place that doesn't have safety nets. And that means having a more realistic and honest conversation about power dynamics, economic power dynamics, and celebrity versus non-celebrity.

AMS: Just to start with the idea that women get only 6% of all venture capital and those women, if you look at women of color, and probably men of color, the numbers are even smaller. So when you think about that, even among the men who do get the venture capital, there are many more stories of failure—to go back to your point that not all resilience stories end up with the falling down and then succeeding and the power dynamics are very much there. I also think about building foundations that are much more universal because I do think people will be more responsible for their own trajectory through life. But that that is very stressful, even for people who are entrepreneurial. I'm entrepreneurial and it's stressful. There are many people whose personalities are really much more suited to order and control, as you said. So this is only a path forward if we put lots of aids in place: nets and foundations. I do think that's very important.

Ama: If it comes hand in hand with, I think, a more honest and robust conversation and with social innovation. But also, after these past couple of years, I couldn't argue more strongly that we still need finance to be more transformative, even among the pool of women who are getting certain kinds of funding.. A lot of it still tends to reinforce gender norms; the women who are making purses and couture and what have you. As somebody who has global and social interests, and is kind of purpose-driven in dress, I want to see women get encouraged in those directions more, as well as men. But finances, often in an entrepreneurial context, are a catalyst for whether something takes off or not.

AMS: Exactly, and it's also critical to that sense of agency. So if we go back to the idea that you've had a real setback, you need to take stock or you need to reframe, you need to reach out to other people, you need to engage. One of the things that will let you do all of that is the belief that you'll get some of that energy, some of that fuel, which yes, money is still pretty essential in. I want to talk a little bit about organizational resilience because in many ways, one of the things again *Type R* makes clear is that the same characteristics— for individuals, for organizations, even for a country, and the United States of all countries— are needed to become far more resilient in the face of not only a dramatically changing climate, but also in a world of technology that we only barely understand. There's a business professor at Vanderbilt University named Tim Vogas, who has researched very high pressure and high-performing organizations like hospitals and fire stations, where performance really is a matter of life and death, and he finds that the key to resolving audience and growth is not a kind of technocratic response, it's not a whole set of rules and procedures, but rather an organization's culture. So talk a little bit about organizational culture and resilience.

Ama: I'm glad you brought up Tim because his work is fantastic, and in many ways it's counterintuitive because with these organizations that are high pressure yet high reliability, you think it's got to be the technical skills that keep them together, you know, those nuclear power plants, those fire stations. And what's so interesting about the research that he's done, for which I believe he's just recently won an award, is that he has found it's about shared mindset and the shared belief that the group or the organization will make it through. So it's a great example of collective mindset, moving from just your own individual mindset, but what they're doing in having this belief is essentially sharing a mindset that says we will find a way to make it through,

and then that belief leads to very different behaviors, particularly around things like communication. In hospitals there have been some examples of some very large, very costly failures—costly in terms of people's health and lives. And some of it they've discovered has come down to things like the pass off of information from one person in the chain to the other is not properly taking place. But in the organizations that Tim's looking at that are succeeding, the belief that together they will make it through is creating a different kind of communication and tighter bonds and connections, which then leads to a tighter hand off of information, making sure that things don't drop through the cracks. But it also creates a success story, ensured success or confidence that then allows people to let go of unnecessary control and hierarchy, so it allows information to flow to different parts of the organization. And this has come up in the military as well, with the chains of command. Do you keep the decision making from afar at the highest levels, or do you start to let people that are there on the ground who have very local-level experience and have their eyes on the changing situation make decisions that you channel back up to the highest levels? That's some of what takes place; this shift in information being shared as needed, decision-making shifting as needed when you have this core shared belief or shared Type R mindset. Not that that's what Tim calls it, but it is essentially the embodiment of the Type R mindset in an organization.

AMS: That's so interesting because General Stanley McChrystal in his book *Team of Teams* talks about having to build networks of Special Forces soldiers who could respond to the constantly changing tactics of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. He says that in the end, it's a combination of shared consciousness. So everybody's got to communicate. And he has a call with thousands of people every single day where people find out at least enough to know whom they have to follow up with. But then quite independent execution so that you don't have to check back, because you can't; it's got to be very fast. But that can only work when people feel like they're part of one organization, one organism really, and are communicating in all sorts of ways. That's interesting and I think reassuring it from the organizational level, and again very similar to the individual level. As we said, when you feel like you're not alone and that you can ask for help, you feel like you are part of something that has together, collectively a set of strengths that you yourself might not have. You feel better as an individual, but the organization also then communicates that.

We've got time for one more question and I have to ask you about the connection between resilience and and the larger public good. We've actually just been touching on the value of feeling like you're part of something else, but there's been research at the University of Virginia and the University of Washington business schools that look at companies that survive in the midst of a crisis and those that don't. They surveyed 140 businesses across a whole range of industries, and they found something that those businesses that engaged with their wider communities, in things like doing charity work that was one of the things that marked those companies that survived. So that's not the company responding in its business. That's the company responding in the service of the greater good. How is that part of resilience?

Ama: I'm so glad you brought up that research. It's one of my favorite pieces of what we've written about but also the foundations of resilience for individuals and businesses. And I just want to point out that there's a whole body of research for individuals that shows much better physical health for people that report having a strong sense of individual purpose. But then again, as you say, there's this research among other studies that shows organizations through the financial crisis that engaged more broadly—and in this genuine way where it wasn't seen as it's going to be a tit-for-tat—that they did make it through much more successfully, including several years after the financial crisis. Purpose is coming up more and more strongly and there was just an announcement by the Business Roundtable about moving away from this notion that business's core purpose is to return value to shareholders. And they've kind of done an about-face very recently, which we will have to see how it plays out because it always comes down to the details in taking action to implementation. So many of our systems are breaking down, whether its climate or the social fabric. I don't want to sound like a pessimist, because ultimately I am hopeful, but we need to be able to reframe these challenges. In doing so, we need to come up with innovative solutions that help recreate the social fabric so that we all feel a sense of buy-in. Because so much of what's happening in America, it seems, is that we're not living in the same shared reality. How can you have a conversation at the same table about finding solutions if you don't even feel like you both own the problem or live within the same spectrum of that problem? But there's a great example and it's a somewhat old one, but I think foundational about organizational purpose, which is the steel company Alcoa and Jim O'Neill. When he was brought in as the CEO, the opportunity presented itself because there had been a high profile death. And so he came into the company and the board and everybody expected him to kind of, you know, do the normal thing and talk about how they were going to keep plugging ahead with certain kinds of financial returns. But he came in with a whole different approach, which was: "We have to be values-driven and purpose-driven and that tat will lead to good business structure." And it was scandalous, as I understand it, and he started setting all of these safety standards as kind of the keystones of how things were measured and how that would structure business. After a year I believe there was a death on his watch and that was really difficult. It made him redouble his efforts and find further mechanisms for communicating his purpose to get buy-in. He made it so that it was everybody's purpose, but also it created different structures of calls all over the world checking in once a day. And he set these really stringent standards, like there will be no deaths this year. And it worked. Ten years later when he left, it was five times safer to work at Alcoa and I think their profits had grown from 3 billion to 27 billion in a 10-year period.

AMS: Because of purpose and meaning and a sense that you're not just in it for the money.

Ama: And he was very conscious and saying that economics is always put first in the way that we think about business, and he didn't think that was right. And he was doing that at a time when there wasn't as much discussion about it and it was kind of scandalous in the business community. So in a way, we can see steps being taken towards greater purpose in this new Business Roundtable announcement, but we'll then need to see lived purpose, which is always the challenge.

AMS: Well, that's a great note on which to end because, when you think about why we're having this conversation about resilience, it's because we are living in such a turbulent time and we feel the turbulence. I'm aware of this constant change, but also unpredictability and the possibility of bad things coming at us, but it's good to think that part of that will make us more resilient. You can't see what the future is, but you can control how you're going to respond to things you can't predict. And to think about what those characteristics are that will make you more adaptable or that will get you to a place you can't see, like the reaching out to others and engaging, but also connecting to something bigger than yourselves, whether that is your team or your community or nation or a larger purpose in the world. That for me is in and of itself at least some protection from the bumps that we face. So thank you. It's been a wonderful conversation.

Ama: Yeah, thank you, and I'm just going to say one last thing because we're just at the edge of big conversations with world leaders taking place on the sustainable development goals at the United Nations in a few days. It's such an example of transformative resilience at a global level that all of these governments came together and agreed to 17 goals that affect all of our lives, all of our economies, and all of our business. And it's hopeful and it's purposeful and it now gives us our task. It means that we have to be actively engaged in what our next steps are. And the youth are pushing us in the right direction. So there are reasons to be hopeful.

AMS: Well, thank you so much.