

PostTraumatic Growth

ANJA JONGKIND
GREET VONK



STRONGER THROUGH MISERY

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info@et-emergo.nl

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Preface

Misery... most people are not waiting for it to happen to them. But still, if it does happen to you, the consequences can be much less negative than you may think. As Anja Jongkind and Greet Vonk explain and substantiate in this book, you can come out stronger through PostTraumatic Growth (PTG). And that, of course, is pure profit!

Greet graduated from the Open University in 2013 with her research into PTG after burnout. Her research showed that people who fully recover from a burnout experience a form of positive growth and that they believe they can increase the use of their available tools for dealing with stress at work. It also teaches them to make other choices.

Anja and Greet have been using this knowledge and insight for a long time based on their own experiences, both personally and in their work as coaches. For more than 40 years, Anja has taught and coached on PTG-like principles and used these in her work as a therapist. Greet came into contact with PTG because she followed a trajectory with Anja more than 20 years ago.

Both did not know at the time that this later would be called PTG in science. That is why it was extra special that Greet was able to provide scientific support for this philosophy through her research for her master's thesis at the Open University. We have guided her with great pleasure.

In this book, Anja and Greet build on the insights they gained from their many years of practical experience and research of PTG. They also share many useful tips about, among other things, the handling of emotions, about nutrition, etc., but also about letting go of the idea that you should always cycle with training wheels after misery. They have translated it into a very accessible and readable book, the message of which you really cannot miss. A valuable result of their expertise and boundless dedication on how to turn negative experiences into something useful and beautiful, which will benefit you for the rest of your life. People get to know themselves better because of the misery they experienced. This can mean that you look at your environment differently, that you stand still to think what you actually feel is important. And perhaps that is the main benefit of negative experiences.

That is what makes this book so unique: the prevailing view that people will keep a vulnerability after their misery that signals the environment to be 'cautious', Anja and Greet highlight 'misery' as important life experiences that can make people stronger, steadier and more resilient than before! This also appears to be entirely in line with positive psychology, which focuses on promoting well-being and health rather than illness and complaints. From misery to strength. And that is what we should focus on. Thanks for this, ladies!

We wish everyone a lot of reading pleasure and the courage to grow to the maximum of everything you experience!

Prof. dr. Judith Semeijn and Prof. dr. Tinka van Vuuren

Introduction

The title of this book, *PostTraumatic Growth - Stronger through misery*, initially may seem like quite an odd title.

But why would you always need to stay vulnerable or need to keep an eye on your limits after misery?

That is not necessary at all! You can grow and therefore come out even stronger.

There is often a lot of attention for reducing complaints, but not for growth. And that's not smart. The opportunities for development are particularly great during challenging moments in someone's life.

How? By achieving Post Traumatic Growth (PTG).

The statement "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger" is well known nowadays. But why do many people get the stamp "to handle with care" so often after a burnout, psychological/emotional related complaints or other misery? There is even regular talk of stigma and discrimination. This hinders many people. This is shown in a study by Tranzo and Tilburg University (August 2019).

There are more than one million people in the Netherlands who take an antidepressant, and 16% of working Dutch people suffer from burnout complaints. And we're not even talking about all the psychological complaints people get as a result of, for example, seeing an accident happen, going through a divorce, losing their job, losing job prospects and all kinds of other misery.

It is, therefore, the time to radically deal with problems in a different way. And that is possible. Very much so.

Almost everyone knows the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The phenomenon of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) is still very unknown. That is very unfortunate.

After all, PTG offers positive, hopeful ideas for misery, which accelerates and strengthens the recovery. It can withdraw many people who are stagnant from psychological/emotional related complaints from the quicksand.

It is, therefore, our mission to make the concept of PTG more widely known than PTSD.

To achieve this, we give workshops, lectures and inspiration sessions about PTG, and we regularly publish about it in various magazines. We share our extensive experience and knowledge from our practices and from our scientific studies, research and publications.

And now there is also a book. To make PTG more widely known. Knowledge about these growth opportunities reduces or prevents despair and panic after misery, allowing you to recover and even grow faster and more complete.

This book introduces you to PTG's positive and hopeful ideas in an inspiring, recognizable and useful way.

Just having knowledge of PTG proves to be very important to achieve growth or to take steps towards recovery. Everyone deserves to grow in challenging times and turn something negative into something valuable, which will make them more powerful, aware and satisfied with their lives.

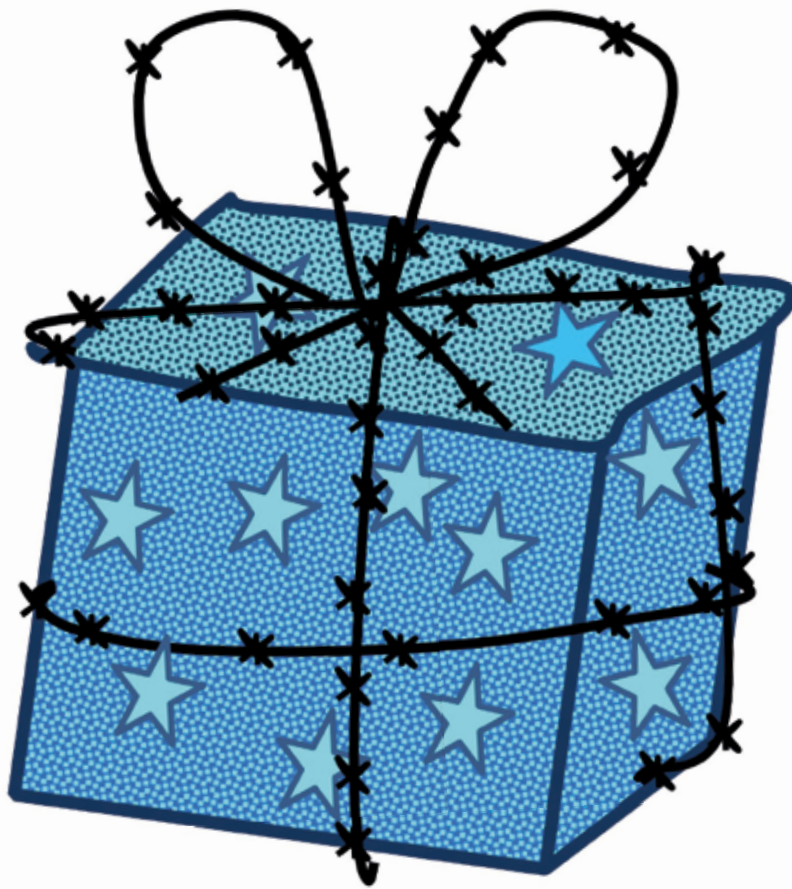
We have written this book for people who are experiencing misery themselves and for people who “support” or guide people who experience misery in their private or

work environment. In some chapters, the emphasis is more on people who experience misery themselves and in other chapters on “the surroundings”. It will show itself.

We wish you a lot of reading pleasure and hope that this book contributes to the realization of PTG, whether that is for someone else or for yourself.

Anja Jongkind and Greet Vonk

METAPHOR: *Have courage*



Challenging times are also gifts, no matter how difficult they may be. Unfortunately, they are wrapped with barbed wire. Nobody knows what is in your gift. The only thing that is known is that everyone who preceded you found the unwrapping of their gift more than worth it.

Allow yourself time to unwrap the new version of yourself.
Do it carefully.
Be happy with every piece of barbed wire you remove.

Have the courage not to become “the old you” again. And also have the courage to give others the space to do so.

1

What is
PostTraumatic Growth
(PTG)?



Growing through misery

Can you use a challenging period in your life to grow?

Yes, that is possible!

Most people do not naturally have such a great ‘willingness to change’. Only when it really starts to hurt, the willingness to change becomes a lot greater. As a result, we can also positively use a challenging period to achieve a growth spurt. In science, this phenomenon is called “PostTraumatic Growth” (PTG).



Figure 1. Possibilities after a setback, a difficult period or a trauma

Figure 1 shows what can happen to people who experience setbacks, a challenging period or other misery. The picture shows that we can succumb to it, enter a survival mode, or recover and even achieve growth.

Psychological complaints are traditionally treated with the emphasis mainly on symptoms, complaints and other general problems. In general, both in the professional world and by “the public” it is assumed that people with psychologically / emotionally related complaints are permanently vulnerable. Treatment is “successful” if the complaints are reduced as far as possible. Then someone is in the survival mode, not recovery or growth.

This method is wrong. When people are told that they need help, that they are vulnerable and are likely to remain this way, it quickly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If there is no talk of recovery and growth, you keep looking down, as it were. If that’s all you see, then that is the only direction you are heading.

It works better if we recognize that people can also grow in challenging times and that in such challenging processes, people are often still able to take responsibility in their own life and process.

To realize PTG, focus on an in-depth awareness of all your strengths, talents, possibilities and capacities. Focus on how you can become aware of this, how you can recognize them and thereby become able to strengthen them so that you can grow above your complaints, as it were.

In other words: you learn to recognize, identify and manage your known and unknown potential!

If you do that, you will get to know yourself and your possibilities. This is an intensive and profound process, which has a strong influence on how you live your life.

You can recognize such a change in people when they talk about it as if their life has been divided into “pieces”, such as: “Since my accident I have been a different person, I enjoy life much more”; “After my cancer recovery, I know what is truly important in life”; “My world collapsed when I lost my job, but afterwards it was the best thing that happened to me”; “Because of my burnout I am much happier and more aware in life, and I make choices that really suit me”; “I have been much happier since I overcame that misery”; “I am now much more aware of all good things and therefore enjoy life more.”

These are all kinds of examples that show that PTG leads to transformation. People experience that they function much better and that they have a much happier and more conscious life than before.

PTG does not arise from the traumatic experience itself, but it involves emotional growth and positive psychological changes as a result of struggling with misery, ultimately resulting in a higher quality of life.¹ It is especially because of that struggle that you can learn to recognize, identify and manage your known and unknown potential.

PTG is a process and a result

PostTraumatic Growth consists of two concepts: the PTG process and the PTG result.² The PTG process ultimately leads to the PTG result. Usually, the terms are used interchangeably, and that is also the case in this book.

The **PTG process** is usually a more extended period, from days to years, in which people develop new ways of thinking, feelings and behaviours, because the events they have experienced make them unable to go back to their old self. That just wouldn't work. Too much has happened for that. The growth process is often primarily a struggle. People want to feel good immediately after misery, but that is, unfortunately, an illusion. It is therefore essential to surrender to the process in which you have ended up. Fighting the pain or pushing it away works against you. Having the positive, hopeful ideas of PTG as a perspective makes the process a little easier so that it can go faster. But even then: your cleaning process will certainly not be nice or fun. It remains a challenging time. Remember that if it is "bad" anyway, you can better use the "misery" to do something valuable with. In an English book about PTG, Struggle WELL " , there is a good sentence about this: " Struggle is a terrible thing to waste." ³

Like the process, the **PTG result** is of course different for everyone. In the chapters "What does PTG deliver?" And "What else does PTG deliver?", It describes which growth opportunities there are, both personally and professionally.