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

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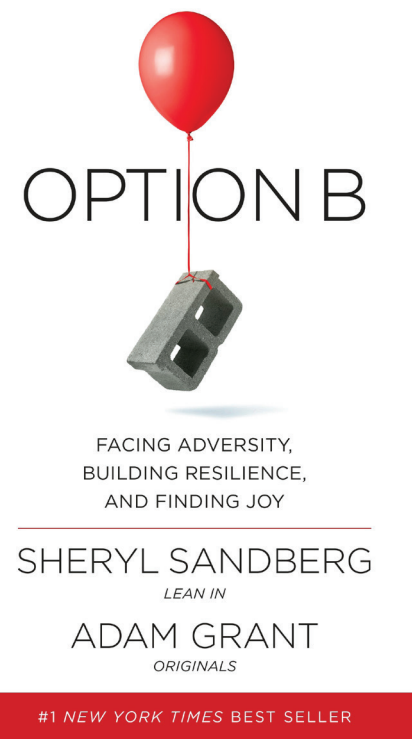
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Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy

By Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant
Book Review by Ammon Kou

“Option A isn’t available. So, let’s just kick the <expletive> out of Option B.”

Sometimes, we find ourselves living Option B. Our well-thought out plan falls through, and we are forced to undertake our backup. We face trials that tear our world apart. As the mother of a family of four and as Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg lived a picture-perfect life. However, when Sandberg’s husband abruptly died while on family vacation, her life took an instant turn toward the unexpected: Option B.

Option B details Sandberg’s path of pain, struggle, and eventual triumph over her grief. While we may also feel despair in the face of loss, Sandberg teaches us how to cope with living in Option B through the three Ps and the elephant.

Three Ps

In the midst of tragedy, we often find ourselves trapped within a vicious cycle of our own thoughts. We think we have no hope of liberation and are doomed to be forever defined by our tragedies. Sandberg defines this dark pattern as the three Ps: Personalization, Pervasiveness, and Permanence.

Personalization. Too often, we shoulder the blame for our circumstances. Regardless of who is to blame (“my fault” or “not my fault”), we personalize our losses and criticize ourselves for not doing enough. We look back and think “if only I had ...”

Pervasiveness. Those who grieve often experience survivor’s guilt. We allow the pain of our loss to seep into every aspect of our lives. We are no longer able to savor life’s sweet moments. Sandberg writes that, after her husband’s passing, she often felt guilty for simply laughing at a friend’s joke.

Permanence. After loss, we feel as though our sadness and grieving will last forever. Our future path is permanently twisted.

The three Ps are what break us when option A fails, but we need not let them control us forever. Sandberg reminds us that we need to recognize the good things still in our lives. We need to cling to hope and let that build our resilience. Most importantly, we need to develop self-compassion and define ourselves without our trials.

The Elephant: How to Cope

“Now that Dave was gone, our cute how-we-met story was no longer cute. Asking people how they met their deceased partner seems cruel, so no one does it. But for the widow or widower, not asking means they miss out on the nostalgia of recalling those early romantic days.”

Sandberg writes that mentioning the “elephant” is okay. We, who have experienced loss, often want to talk about our struggles. Deep and sympathetic conversation can help us battle our grief and give us support in the darkest times of our life. Sandberg challenges us to reach out and be open in discussion with others. Instead of entirely focusing on “how we feel,” we should focus on “how we feel *today*.” Doing so can re-invite our loved ones back into our lives.

Conclusion

Loss is rarely expected. We say *plan for the worst, but hope for the best*, but when the worst hits, we realize we were never truly prepared for it. *Option B* is a heart-touching narrative of what Sandberg learned because of her husband’s sudden death. Her writing accurately portrays the lengths she needed to go through to gain her life back and make the most of her Option B. Embodied throughout her book is the lesson that this resilience is not something with which we are inherently born; it is a muscle that we need to grow. 🏹