



ANTIFRAGILE: Things that Gain from Disorder by Nassim Taleb (2014)

I have read hundreds of books and Taleb Nassim is as smart as they get. Antifragile is an inspiring metaphor for how we can show up in life. I just finished reading this beast for the second time. Here are my notes from reading it, with some of my thoughts as well.

Antifragile – you want to be the fire and wish for the wind.

Antifragility loves randomness, uncertainty, and errors.

Fragility of the teacup. Once anything passes its natural limits it becomes fragile.

The odds of rare events are not computable.

Harder to determine solutions in complex systems. Keep to localized control where possible.

Black Swans. They never happened before. Non-linear.

The simpler the better.

Antifragile – fail fast, be foolish, love small mistakes (from tinkering), modify exposure to events, hormesis, soul in the game, real-life experience, and library learning.

Post-traumatic *growth*.

Who really innovates? The tinkerer.

Layers of redundancy help with antifragility. Redundancy is opportunistic. Plan B.

The more energy you put into trying to control your ideas and what you think about, the more your ideas end up controlling you. Free your mind.

Many people (and companies) wreck their reputations by trying to defend them.

Information feeds off attempts to harm it.

Welcome the critic!

We need self-imposed stressors and time for recovery. (Lifting, sprinting, fasting, etc. and recovery time.)

Casual opacity in complex systems. So layered, it's hard to see it.

Cause → consequence is hard to see in complex systems.

If you are fully alive, you will like and welcome a measure of randomness and disorder.

Is your life some kind of project? Or a bold adventure?

Do employee claims make us stronger by exposing our weaknesses?

The Procrustean bed. (An arbitrary standard to which exact conformity is forced.)

Avoidance of small mistakes can make the larger ones more severe (burn control).

What question are you most concerned about your boss asking you?

Don't be a Turkey – 1,000 days of being fed and nurtured... and then Thanksgiving!

How secure is your company or job to a Black Swan event?

Risk is in the future, not in the past.

Limiting variance heightens the exposure to Black Swan events.

Free-range humans and free-range kids.

Iatrogenic – naïve interventions and negative harm (negative hero). A big problem in the medical community.

“The psychologist Gerd Gigerenzer has a simple heuristic. Never ask the doctor what you should do. Ask him what he would do if he were in your place. You would be surprised at the difference”.

Where are we relying on data where there is the possibility of observation or direct communication (Looking out the window to see if it is raining outside.)

Avoid the health-eroding dependence on external recognition. Byron Katie – “ Lord save me from the need to be appreciated and loved by others. Amen.”

Wisdom in decision-making = knowledge.

(Heuristics/Simple Rules)

“And the key phrase reverberating in Seneca’s oeuvre is nihil perdit, “I lost nothing,” after an adverse event. Stoicism”

The stoic turns fear into prudence, pain into information, mistakes into initiation, and desires into an undertaking.

The Barbell approach- you want asymmetry. Play it safe with 90% and go for it with the other 10%. True for your money and time?

Prepare for the worst, the best can take care of itself (Yiddish proverb).

Nobody really knows where they are going.

Options are an agent of anti-fragility.

Freedom is the ultimate option.

Have ideas of your own, be imaginative, have courage, and make it happen.

Innovation- most opportunities are in plain sight. Rolling suitcases. Lights on the robot’s story.

Thinking about 2nd, 3rd, 4th consequence. Play it to the end. Climbed the tree but didn’t think about coming down.

[Surveys are B.S.] Undercover boss of Rita.

The innovation - implementation gap.

Innovation is NOT rocket science.

Bet against the assumption. The hype.

Antifragility is a verb, NOT a story.

Is the HR “practitioner” more valuable than the “strategist”?

“Knowing” gets in the way of learning. (Tom Chin)

Is strategic planning superstitious babble?

Are you speaking the truth... or saying what you hope will win you favor?

Fragilistas look to be victims (story about documenting first 6 weeks of employment/focusing on one out of 12 reasons for being fired.)

Don't invest in plans. Invest in people. Short the hype.

“Much of what other people know isn't worth knowing.”

Haste makes waste. Take time to do deep work.

There is NO instant pudding. (Deming)

White Swans (knowable) Black Swans (unknowable)

Current risks? Think through the potential for “fat tail” events.

- COVID/new disease
- Cyber exposures
- War/Rioting/Revolution
- Ethical/Safety/Financial violations
- Natural – fire, earthquake, hurricanes
- Brand damage (how?)

Squeeze – being forced to do something right away regardless of costs. (Fuel, commodity, costs, etc.) Bottlenecks are the mothers of all squeezes.

Technology lacks elegance and can be a distraction.

Data is better at debunking than confirming.

The most unseasoned ideas are fragile.

Skin in the game – owner-operated businesses.

Debt = bondage.

Watch for unexpected FAT TAIL events (like the pandemic. Who thought it would last this long?).