

When Option A is Unavailable



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

Authors: Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant

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At the time Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg published her book *Lean In*, she was happily married to her second husband, tech executive Dave Goldberg. Then, Sandberg suddenly became a widow. In her new book, *Option B*, Sandberg describes the horror of finding her husband dead on the floor of a gym while they were on vacation in Mexico. “So began the rest of my life,” she writes. “It was – and still is – a life I never would have chosen, a life I was completely unprepared for.”

Two weeks after her husband died, Sandberg received a letter from

a widow, an acquaintance who said that she would like to offer comfort but, in truth, the pain never subsides. “That letter,” Sandberg writes, “destroyed my hope that the pain would fade someday. I felt the void closing in on me, the years stretching before me, endless and empty.”

When the letter arrived, Sandberg turned to someone she had met a few years earlier: Adam Grant, a psychologist and professor at Wharton (and a best-selling author of such books as *Give and Take*). Grant immediately flew from Philadelphia to Sandberg’s home in California to convince her there was a bottom to this seemingly endless void. From this conversation sprang the new defining project of Sandberg’s life: not only to somehow learn how to be resilient but also to help others be resilient in the face of their own tragedies.

The result is not only this book, which, although using the first-person voice is co-authored by Grant, but also OptionB.org, a non-profit organisation that offers a variety of services and resources for those living with a tragedy.

The phrase Option B comes from one of the many moments of deep sadness in which she declares to a friend, “I want Dave!” Her friend immediately replies, “Option A is not available. So let’s just kick the shit out of Option B.”

The phrase captures Sandberg’s

Sandberg’s book traces her difficult journey from the early grief of widowhood, to finding resilience, even joy

philosophy that this is not a chosen path and never will be a chosen path, but it is the path you are on. As she writes, “Life is never perfect. We all live some form of Option B.”

In Option B, Sandberg recounts step by step her difficult journey to resilience. She remembers, for example, the first time she felt happy after her husband’s death. It was at a bar mitzvah for the daughter of one of her best friends, whom she had known since high school. At the party, she suddenly found herself dancing and singing along to Earth, Wind & Fire’s “September” with another long-time friend. And then she burst into tears.

“Dancing to an upbeat song from childhood had taken me to a place where I wasn’t filled with loneliness and longing,” she writes. “I wasn’t just feeling okay. I actually felt happy. And that happiness was followed immediately by a flood of guilt. How could I be happy when Dave was gone?”

This story is recounted in a chapter entitled “Taking Back Joy.” Accepting moments of happiness without guilt is one of the most difficult steps to take after a tragedy, but it is also an important part of one’s resilience, Sandberg writes.

As she explains in her introduction, “I am only partway through my own journey. The fog of acute grief has lifted, but the sadness and longing for Dave remain ... Like so many who’ve experienced tragedy, I hope I can choose meaning and even joy – and help others do the same.”

Like C.S. Lewis’ *A Grief Observed*, published more than 50 years ago, Sandberg’s *Option B* will be helping other survivors choose meaning and even joy for decades to come. ■

