

— A SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Antifragile Business *Diagnostic.*

A fifteen-minute look at where stress damages your business, and where learning from stress could be making your business stronger.

BEYOND RESILIENCE

Most business advice stops at resilience. That's a missed opportunity.

Resilience is the ability to return to baseline after stress. It's a real and valuable property. But there's another category, defined by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his book *Antifragile*, for things that don't just survive stress but get stronger from it. He called this ability antifragile. Your immune system works this way. So does a well-trained athlete. So do certain businesses, though usually by accident rather than design.

The distinction matters because the responses look identical from the outside. Two businesses lose their largest client. Both survive. One returns to where it was, scarred but intact. The other ends the year more profitable, with a sharper ideal client profile, a tighter sales process, and a renewed sense of what its actual value is. *Same shock. Different trajectory.*

The questions that follow are built around that difference. They are pointed by design — fuzzy questions produce fuzzy thinking. The diagnostic covers five domains where exposure tends to live. You can move through them in about fifteen minutes, or spend more time if you want to dig deeper. There is no score at the end. The point is to think intentionally about your business, not to be measured.

HOW THE RATING WORKS

Each question gives you *three options*.

For each question, pick the option that describes your business *today* — not the version you're working toward, and not the version you'd describe to a client. Trust your first instinct. If you catch yourself hedging between two options, that hesitation is usually a more useful signal than whichever one you eventually pick. At the end of each domain you'll find a brief observation — not an interpretation of your answers, but a direction to point your attention next.

 FRAGILE

Fragile

A meaningful shock here would do real damage. Recovery is uncertain or expensive.

 ROBUST

Robust

A shock here would hurt, but the business would absorb it and return to normal operations.

 ANTIFRAGILE

Antifragile

A shock here would actually make the business stronger. You have systems, habits, or structures that turn stress into improvement.

FOLLOW ALONG WITH HEART STRONG

A fictional business, Heart Strong Coffee, shows up at the end of each domain. It's an area coffee shop with a corporate catering arm and a break-room supply business serving downtown office buildings. Use Heart Strong to follow along, then turn the same lens on your own business.

DOMAIN ONE

01 Revenue & Client Concentration

Concentration of revenue is often the *quietest source of exposure* in a business. It rarely announces itself, and it shows up in nearly every post-mortem of a business that didn't make it.

1.1 If your single largest client or revenue source disappeared tomorrow, what would happen in the next *ninety days*?

- FRAGILE** Layoffs, missed obligations, or existential threat.
- ROBUST** Painful, but the business survives and adjusts.
- ANTIFRAGILE** The slack would force overdue changes that strengthen the business.

1.2 What percentage of revenue comes from your top three clients or accounts?

Write the number here: _____ %

- FRAGILE** More than 50%.
- ROBUST** Between 25% and 50%.
- ANTIFRAGILE** Under 25%, with a deliberate diversification strategy.

1.3 When was the last time you lost a meaningful client or revenue source, and *what changed* in the business as a result?

- FRAGILE** Client loss hit us hard; it took months go get back to where we were or we are still in a weaker position than before the loss.
- ROBUST** We absorbed the hit, adjusted, and returned to where we were.
- ANTIFRAGILE** We treated the loss as a signal and came out of it measurably stronger.

1.4 How predictable is your revenue ninety days out?

- FRAGILE** I am not confident about next month, let alone next quarter.
- ROBUST** I have reasonable visibility through contracts, recurring patterns, or a strong sales pipeline.
- ANTIFRAGILE** I have visibility *and* I have stress-tested what happens if my assumptions are wrong.

HEART STRONG COFFEE

Their hospital cafeteria account is their largest single client — roughly a third of catering revenue. When they learned the hospital system was consolidating vendors, Heart Strong faced a choice: they could treat the news as a threat and scramble when the contract came up, or they could treat it as the forcing function they'd been missing and start building the events business, and the office park accounts they'd been postponing because "the hospital account was stable."

WHERE TO POINT YOUR ATTENTION

Concentration is not always bad. Some of the most profitable businesses in the world have concentrated revenue. What matters is whether the concentration is *deliberate* and whether you have built mechanisms that turn client losses into business improvements rather than just bruises.

NOTES FOR THIS DOMAIN

DOMAIN TWO

02 Key Person & Vendor Dependency

Most leaders can name the one or two people whose departure would create real disruption. Far fewer can name the vendors whose disappearance or price hikes would do the same. Both are forms of dependency, and dependency is where exposure quietly accumulates.

2.1 If you were unable to work for sixty days, what would happen?

- FRAGILE** The business slows or stalls; critical knowledge isn't accessible, and key decisions don't get made.
- ROBUST** The team maintains operations, growth plateaus and some coordination friction occurs.
- ANTIFRAGILE** Processes and structures are in place to handle extended absences. The sixty days validates that they actually work.

2.2 Is there a single employee whose sudden departure would meaningfully damage the business?

- FRAGILE** Yes, and we have no documented backup for what they do.
- ROBUST** Yes, but we have documentation and could recover within a quarter.
- ANTIFRAGILE** No single person is irreplaceable; cross-training and documentation are habits, not projects.

2.3 Name your three most critical vendors or suppliers — software platforms, raw materials, fulfillment partners, professional services. Anything you cannot operate without.

YOUR THREE

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

For each: what happens if they go out of business, raise prices 300% at renewal, or are acquired by a competitor?

- FRAGILE** I have not seriously considered this and have no alternative ready.
- ROBUST** I have a viable backup plan, even if executing it would be painful.
- ANTIFRAGILE** I actively maintain relationships with alternatives and have stress-tested the switch.

2.4 When was the last time you tested a vendor or service alternative — even a small pilot — to know whether the switch is actually feasible?

- FRAGILE** I have never tested an alternative.
- ROBUST** I have evaluated alternatives on paper.
- ANTIFRAGILE** I have run real pilots, even small ones, to verify the switch works in practice.

HEART STRONG COFFEE

Their espresso machine service technician is one person, two hours away. Their primary roaster is local, single-source, and accounts for 80% of their bean inventory. Their POS provider has raised prices three years in a row. Each is a quiet dependency that hasn't triggered a serious conversation about alternatives.

WHERE TO POINT YOUR ATTENTION

Key person risk gets attention because it is dramatic. Vendor risk is often larger and almost always less examined. The discipline is not to eliminate dependency — that's impossible — but to know exactly where you are dependent, and to have done the work to know what comes next.

03

DOMAIN THREE

Operations & Systems

When operations can't bend with changing conditions, they create the kind of brittleness that turns ordinary friction into operational crisis. Brittle operations rely on heroics. Robust operations rely on procedures. Antifragile operations rely on *feedback and action*.

3.1 When something goes wrong — a missed deadline, a quality issue, a customer complaint — what typically happens after the immediate fix?

- FRAGILE** We fix the immediate problem and move on.
- ROBUST** We document the issue and update procedures.
- ANTIFRAGILE** We treat the failure as data and look for the upstream pattern, not just the immediate cause.

3.2 How much of your operations relies on knowledge that exists only in someone's head?

- FRAGILE** Significant portions; documentation is sparse.
- ROBUST** Most critical processes are documented.
- ANTIFRAGILE** Documentation is current, tested, updated regularly, and improved when it fails.

3.3 When was the last time you deliberately *removed* a tool, process, or step from your operations? Not replaced — removed.

- FRAGILE** I cannot remember the last time we removed something.
- ROBUST** Occasionally, when something is clearly broken.
- ANTIFRAGILE** Regularly; we treat operational complexity as a cost and review it deliberately.

3.4 If a new employee joined next Monday, how long before they could perform a core operational task without significant supervision?

- FRAGILE** Weeks to months; most learning is by osmosis.
- ROBUST** Days to weeks; we have onboarding materials and clear procedures.
- ANTIFRAGILE** Hours to days; our systems are designed to make new people productive fast.

HEART STRONG COFFEE

When their head barista quit during the holiday rush, the catering side suffered for two months. Not because the new hire was incapable, but because the procedures, recipes, and event setup checklists existed only in the departed barista's notebook. They had robust people with brittle systems.

WHERE TO POINT YOUR ATTENTION

The temptation in this domain is to add — more documentation, more procedures, more tools, because addition feels like progress. The antifragile instinct is evaluate consistently removing tools and processes that are no longer necessary. The strongest operations are usually the ones that avoid unnecessary complexity, where every step earns its place.

NOTES FOR THIS DOMAIN

DOMAIN FOUR

04 Cash & Financial Position

A thinly capitalized business with strong operations is one bad quarter from collapse. A well-buffered business with weak operations has time to fix things. This domain is about the financial strength that enables every other domain become more antifragile.

4.1 How many months of operating expenses could your business cover with current cash and accessible credit, with zero new revenue?

FRAGILE Less than two months.

ROBUST Two to six months.

ANTIFRAGILE More than six months, with that level treated as a deliberate target.

4.2 How exposed is your business to a sudden 20% drop in revenue?

FRAGILE A 20% drop would force layoffs or distress decisions within sixty days.

ROBUST A 20% drop would hurt margins but not threaten operations.

ANTIFRAGILE A 20% drop would activate a planned set of responses we have already thought through.

4.3 Do you know your true cost of customer acquisition, your contribution margin per service line, and your break-even point?

- FRAGILE** I know revenue and rough profit; the rest is fuzzy.
- ROBUST** I know these numbers and review them periodically.
- ANTIFRAGILE** I know these numbers, review them regularly, and use them to make decisions before crises force me to.

4.4 When was the last time you raised prices or eliminated an unprofitable offering?

- FRAGILE** I cannot remember; I am afraid of losing customers.
- ROBUST** Occasionally, in response to cost pressure.
- ANTIFRAGILE** Regularly, as part of disciplined offer management.

HEART STRONG COFFEE

Their break-room supply business has razor-thin margins, but they keep it because it's "always been part of what we do." Nobody has run the numbers in three years to ask whether the time and attention spent on that line is earning its place. This is not unusual. It is also not antifragile.

WHERE TO POINT YOUR ATTENTION

Cash is not just about survival; it is about optionality. A business with cash can say no to bad clients, walk away from bad deals, and take advantage of opportunities competitors cannot. Most owners think about cash as a buffer. The antifragile reframe is to think about it as an asset that produces options.

NOTES FOR THIS DOMAIN

05

DOMAIN FIVE

Talent & Team

This domain is looks at whether your business makes people better, not just more productive. Strong operations rely on procedures. Strong businesses rely on people who are growing. Systems get stronger when you remove brittleness. People get stronger when you give them something to grow into.

5.1 When someone on your team makes a mistake, what is the dominant response?

FRAGILE Blame, frustration, or quiet resentment.

ROBUST A correction conversation and a return to normal.

ANTIFRAGILE A genuine examination of what the mistake reveals about the system, the role, or the support around the person.

5.2 Are your people clear on what excellent performance in their role looks like — not in vague terms, but in specifics they could describe back to you?

FRAGILE Probably not; we have not had that conversation explicitly.

ROBUST Yes, for most roles; expectations are documented.

ANTIFRAGILE Yes, and we revisit those definitions regularly as the business and the people grow.

5.3 How does someone get better at their job here? Not how do they get promoted — how do they get *better*.

FRAGILE Mostly on their own; we hire people we hope are already good.

ROBUST Through experience, with occasional training.

ANTIFRAGILE Through deliberate development — feedback, stretch assignments, exposure, and time set aside for it.

5.4 If a strong employee quietly started looking for another job today, would you know? Would you know *why*?

FRAGILE No, and probably not until they gave notice.

ROBUST Possibly, if they showed signals; the why would be a guess.

ANTIFRAGILE Yes, because the relationship is close enough and the conversations honest enough that drift would surface early.

HEART STRONG COFFEE

They lost two strong baristas in eighteen months, both to the chain across the street. The owner assumed it was about pay. It was actually about scheduling unpredictability and a feeling that nobody noticed when they did exceptional work. The information was available — they just hadn't built the relationships to receive it.

WHERE TO POINT YOUR ATTENTION

Most operational philosophies treat people the way they treat systems — minimize variance, eliminate dependency, contain exposure. The businesses that grow over decades are usually the ones that treat employee development as core operating discipline, not as an HR project.

NOTES FOR THIS DOMAIN

AFTER THE DIAGNOSTIC

Now look back at your answers. Not at the count — at the *shape*.

The most useful exercise from here is not to fix everything at once. Pick one domain. Pick the question in that domain that surprised you most. Sit with it for a week. Watch your business through that lens. See what you notice.

Where did you mark *fragile*?

That is the domain where the next shock will hurt the most.

Where did you *hesitate*?

That is the domain where you have not yet done the thinking.

Where did you mark *antifragile*?

This is the domain that is hardest to achieve intentionally.

The one *question* you'll sit with this week —

And what you want to notice through that lens.

— A CLOSING THOUGHT

The deepest idea inside antifragility is *asymmetry*.

Small downside, large upside. Most business decisions get this backwards. We optimize for the upside and ignore the asymmetry, taking on hidden exposures for marginal gain.

The businesses that last are usually the ones that obsess about the downside. Not in a fearful way — in a structural way. They build buffers. They keep options open. They refuse single points of failure. They treat every shock as information.

They do not just survive uncertainty. They use it as a catalyst for growth.

The goal of this diagnostic is to provide you with a different way of looking at the business operations you have already built and a clearer picture of which moves will make them stronger.

— IF SOMETHING SURFACED

If working through this raised questions you want to think through with someone, *I'd be glad to grab coffee.*

Let's talk about what surfaced and what to do next.

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MORE DIAGNOSTICS

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