Building Your Personal Resilience
During Times of Change

Publication date:
June 9, 2017
Updated September 5, 2018

Resilience is a way of combating stressors in your life

Resilience is the capacity to adapt to change, adversity and stressors in a way that not only allows them to bounce back, but also grow and improve from experience.

Research shows that moderate levels of stress are healthy and improve productivity while too much or too little stress is damaging to performance, sometimes severely.
While stress is nothing new, in today’s workplace a high level of personal stress has become the norm. When people are feeling overwhelmed, they are unable to cope with adversity and are often paralyzed by inaction. This decreases productivity and increases other personal and organizational costs like healthcare and expenses related to absenteeism.

Stress and adversity are not going to disappear, so a person’s ability to become more resilient is more important than ever. Research shows that highly resilient people respond to challenges with flexibility, bounce back from challenges, and even find opportunities within workplace stress. They perform more effectively in their jobs, are healthier, more engaged with their work, and have higher commitment to their organizations. The good news for employees and organizations is that resilience can be learned and developed.

Characteristics of Resiliency

There are nine characteristics of resiliency which we can learn to develop and grow. They are categorized below into three broader areas:

1) **FILTER** - How you filter information and interpret the world. This is how you select information and integrate it into your mind and is comprised of personal responsibility, realistic optimism, and personal beliefs.

   - Personal responsibility is the belief that successes or failures at work are determined by one’s own talents and motivations as opposed to external forces such as luck and good timing.
   - Realistic optimism is the tendency to see the world in a positive way but remain grounded in reality.
   - Personal beliefs is the sense that life has deep meaning and purpose.

2) **ACT**- How you handle challenges. This represents how you behave and respond to adversity and difficulty, and comprised of self-assurance, self-composure, problem solving and goal orientation.

   - Self assurance is the belief in oneself to successfully perform at work
   - Self composure is the ability to manage stress and remain calm under pressure
   - Problem solving is the ability to plan resolve problem effectively
● Goal orientation is the tendency to set appropriate goals, monitor progress on those goals and adjust behavior accordingly

3) **INTERACT**: How you communicate and connect with others. This refers to your ability to communicate courageously with others and cultivate supportive relationships. It is just as beneficial to have one person in whom you can confide as it is to have multiple people.

- Courageous communication is the tendency to communicate with others in a candid and courageous way in the face of difficulty
- Social support is the perception that one is part of a supportive social network. This includes having close confidants and people with whom one can discuss problems.

### Six Techniques for Enhancing Your Personal Resiliency

1. **Realistic Optimism** - Reframe Your Thinking- Realistic optimism is the tendency to see the world in a positive way but also remain grounded in reality.

   Try It: When faced with a challenging situation, re-frame the stressor in terms of these four criteria: 1) interpret adversity as opportunity, 2) personal weaknesses as beneficial qualities, 3) impossibilities as distant or even near possibilities, or 4) hostile or ‘cold’ behavior as lack of understanding.

2. **Mindfulness** - Recognizing the importance of focusing attention and awareness on the present moment.

   When you are mindful you focus on the present experience, you observe your thoughts and feelings from a distance, without judging them as good or bad.

   Try It: You can practice mindfulness using a form a meditation by finding a quiet, private place, sit comfortably, relax your eyes and gaze 3-6 feet in front of you. Focus your awareness on your breath, staying attentive to the sensations of inhaling and exhaling. See thoughts and sounds that come to mind as a distraction and let them go and return your attention to your breathing.
Other forms of mindfulness:

- Exercise – even 15 minute walks lead to greater energy.
- Disconnect from technology – turn off the email notification, put the phone away. Schedule specific times for checking email, texts and messages instead of responding to them as they occur.
- Schedule daily interactions- if you work alone or in partial isolation, schedule a time every day when you will visit someone. Be intentional about this.

3. Act “As If” – We know that our attitudes influence our behaviors, but it’s also true that our behaviors influence our attitudes. When we behave with self-assurance and composure, the brain configures itself to feel the same way—we begin to release hormones that change our body chemistry and increase resiliency. This strategy is about utilizing power poses. Power poses are certain expansive body postures that can transform the stress response and induce confidence.

Try It: A high power pose is one where you place your arms overhead or place your hands on your hips while standing or sitting tall- these are expansive rather than contractive and when held for just two minutes can have significant effects on your physiology and attitudes. Use this technique before giving a speech or speaking at a meeting.

4. Gratitude – There are numerous physiological and psychological benefits to gratitude including lower aggression, elevated mood, and self-confidence.

To build resilience we need to train our brains to focus on positive events through gratitude. Scientific studies reveal that gratitude is associated with greater happiness, optimism, empathy, and lower aggression.

Try It: Develop a gratitude list – devote a small portion of time each week to listing the things for which you are grateful; after a period of time, you will more likely feel happy and optimistic. Consider writing a gratitude letter to someone who has influenced your life in a positive way or making it a habit to thank at least one colleague for something every day.

5. Giving - Contrary to popular belief, giving can be energizing, as long as people give in ways that utilize their strengths and allow them to see the results of their efforts. When people give their time and effort to others, this can be one of the most valuable things they do for themselves as well. Giving adds meaning to our lives, distracts us from our own problems, and helps us feel valued by others.
Try It: Volunteer your time to a local food shelf. Offer assistance to a peer who is having difficulty learning a new technology or completing a new task.

6. **Goal Setting** – Goals promote resiliency by focusing our attention and encouraging persistence. Goal setting focuses our attention and helps us persist through challenges. Research consistently shows that ambitious and specific goals are powerful drivers of behavior.

Try It: Goals are best designed when they are specific, measurable, attainable, and relevant to personal values and company objectives, and bound within a certain timeframe.

**Choices**

We all have choices. We can choose to be unhappy through times of stress and change or we can use techniques to develop our personal resiliency and adaptability to change, be happier and healthier and **enjoy the journey!**

Footnote: Content for this article attributed to the Adaptive Mindset for Resiliency Concepts Guide with permission as a licensed facilitator for the TRACOM Corporation.