

Building Resilience

The idea of developing resilience has been embraced by many businesses only to be put on the back burner, with so many other good ideas, as the requirement for a longer-term commitment and conscious effort became evident. Those organisations that are mature enough to commit energy and resource to the long haul do realise value beyond what any short-term initiative could enjoy.

The ability to actually hang in for the long-haul, exert energy and attention over time, even when apparent benefits are not immediately noticed, is a quality of resilience, whether speaking of individuals, teams or organisations. Resilience enables us to bend without breaking, and to adapt and find our way to back to the surface when immersed in a flood of trial, trauma, adversity or other challenges. Like a muscle, resilience is



Bend rather than break, a quality of resilience

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Abstract

Strengthening resilience has a positive impact on self-esteem and personal power. Some practical approaches for building resilience are identified.

Keywords

Cognitive reappraisal, mindfulness meditation, re-framing, stress inoculation, practical approaches, resilience, self-efficacy, self-esteem, thrive (love-based) responses

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developed with practice, by engaging with “reasonable” amounts of stress. Developing resilience facilitates the growth of self-esteem, self-efficacy and other intra-personal capacities. As we develop our own resilience we are then better placed to lead teams and organisations, and support the development of resilience in others.

I have just finished reading “Long Walk to Freedom”, the autobiography of Nelson Mandela, and as a result have found myself reflecting on the subject of resilience. Unwavering in his commitment to the freedom of his people, a concept placed higher in his value system than personal freedom, Nelson passed through 27 years of imprisonment to come out conqueror. I specifically don’t say “suffered through”. Suffering is a choice. While he certainly experienced significant trauma, his capacity to re-frame his moment-by-moment experience within the context of his higher purpose gave his life meaning and shifted his experience from what could have been severe suffering to clean struggle. While not a perfect being, and he does admit to many flaws, Nelson consciously looked for the response from within himself that would create the most significant, beneficial outcome. As he

struggled under significant oppression, he sought to move from fear to love, consciously chose powerful responses over fear-based reactions, and maintained a consistent internal dialogue regarding purpose and meaning regardless of external pressures to change his core beliefs. His struggle brought meaning, and ultimately victory, though the latter is never assured.

In “Man’s Search for Meaning”, writing from his personal experiences and his professional background as a psychologist, Viktor E. Frankl asserts that it is those who found meaning in the adversity that they experienced who were best able to survive the traumas of the World War II concentration camps.

Some well recognised techniques for developing resilience include:

- ***cognitive reappraisal***: re-framing negative experiences using a more positive perspective
- ***mindfulness meditation***: develop the capacity to observe stimuli and the physical, emotional

and mental responses in an impartial way that enables objective detachment and an increases one’s capacity to stay present

- ***aerobic exercise***: well recognised for reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, and improving mental capacities of attention, memory, decision making and planning.
- ***stress inoculation***: taking on increasingly difficult challenges in a deliberate manner to develop the resilience muscle
- ***backing of trusted people (without advice)***: increases self-confidence, provides a safety net and supports the development of problem solving, reappraisal and actively engaging with challenges

How resilient are you? How do you handle the challenges that come your way? Do you find your inner mettle in times of challenge, or do you look for external circumstances and people to blame? What strategies have you got in place to develop your capacity further?

For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 12 (Appreciating the Fog) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). [Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose](#). Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

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