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Why resilience is more than a HR buzzword

How well does your team bounce back from setbacks? Successful leaders take steps to ensure their teams keep striving through challenging times.


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In the world of physics, resilience relates to the ability of material to absorb energy and release that energy as it returns to its original shape. For example, the capacity a tennis ball has to return to its original form after being hit. The recovery that occurs in this phenomenon can equally be applied to the capacity some people have to ‘spring’ back into shape following a period of stress.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary [defines resilience](#) in people as “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change”. Author PG Wodehouse took note of this when he wrote, “There is in certain men ... a quality of resilience, a sturdy refusal to acknowledge defeat, which aids them as effectively in affairs of the heart as in encounters of a sterner and more practical kind.”

Having the ability to cope under extreme pressure, work well through times of challenge or change and bounce back following disappointing setbacks unquestionably matters in business. Contemplate, for a moment, the strength of your own resilience.

How well do you maintain focus, optimism and the energy levels needed to keep striving for a challenging goal? What impact does your mindset and behaviour have on your team when you’re under a lot of pressure? The simple reality is if you are struggling to cope or keep going, chances are your team are feeling it too.

Eroded patience, tolerance and emotional control, together with heightened sensitivity, aggression and defensiveness, are common signs people are lacking resilience. When attitudes and behaviours become destructive or unproductive, a team’s capacity to collaborate and reach their collective potential is dramatically undermined.

Leaders are wise to invest in developing their own resilience as well as that of the people on their team. Among the most important first steps you can take is to nurture strong relationships across the group. Trust and respect are at the heart of people’s ability to ‘link arms’ and battle through tough times together.

When people believe their leader and colleagues are capable and trustworthy, they're entirely more likely to feel confident and courageous in the pursuit of challenging objectives.

Take steps to build confidence. With a clear view of our strengths, both capability and character related, people are more likely to maintain belief, optimism and ultimately a 'can-do' attitude when under a lot of pressure. Start by understanding the limiting beliefs that hold you and other key members of your team back from being at their best.

Manage stress by expecting every team member to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. Lead by example and demonstrate how the people on your team can maintain balance irrespective of the workload demands of their role. While it matters that people dig deep and keep striving, so too does taking the time needed to rest and re-energise.

Simply slogging through is unlikely to get you to where you need to be. Recognise that energy is the vital fuel that enables people to think, feel and behave successfully. If you or your people are constantly running on empty, it's just a matter time before signs of burnout start to appear.

Equip your people with the problem-solving skills they need to work through complexity and identify practical solutions. While training options may add value, also work closely with your team to understand how you currently tackle problems and what changes you can make to improve the process you typically work through or the quality of decisions you often make.