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Leadership Essentials

Resilience

Achieving leaders are resilient



“Resilience is not just your ability to bounce back, but also your capacity to adapt in the face of challenging circumstances, whilst maintaining a stable mental wellbeing. Resilience isn’t a personality trait – it’s something that we can all take steps to achieve.” MIND (2017)

Developing Resilience

Emotional resilience is to some degree an enduring individual trait in that some people are born resilient whilst others are not. Resilience will also be affected by factors such as age, gender and life experiences.

However, resilience is not ‘fixed’, and can be developed with effort and practice by, for example:

Making positive lifestyle changes

Looking after your physical and mental health

Building your support network

Maintaining a positive outlook as you work towards your personal and work goals

Grit

Grit is the perseverance and passion that motivates an individual to stay focused on achieving long term goals over a sustained period of time. Resilience requires optimism to continue after adverse events, but grit is the motivational drive to keep going with a difficult task over a sustained period of time. In this sense resilience and grit are connected, but are not the same. Resilient individuals, particularly those with ‘grit’ have also been found to have developed a positive mindset, where challenge is perceived as an opportunity to learn rather than an obstacle that must be overcome.

Growth Mindset

Individuals with a growth mindset believe that, with encouragement and the right environment, intelligence can be developed over time. Effort leads to success, and a positive attitude can improve performance, particularly in the way they deal with setbacks.

This contrasts with people who have a fixed mindset, who believe that intelligence is innate and cannot be changed and that someone either has intelligence or they do not.

This understanding of fixed and growth mindsets has transformed our understanding of learning. Dwek (2017) showed that:

- Individuals who believe their intelligence can be developed outperform those who believe their intelligence is fixed
- When individuals discover that it is possible to grow their brain and develop their intellectual ability, they achieve better results
- When you are stuck, trying new strategies, seeking input from others, and thriving on challenges and setbacks are key to learning and improvement (not just your effort alone)
- By changing your mindset, it is possible to boost your achievement

Resilient Teams

A group of resilient workers may not necessarily create a resilient team because individual and team resilience are not the same. Resilience is recognisable in teams where there are high levels of team cohesion and creativity. A resilient team provides support to each other and there is trust between the members of the team. Resilient teams collectively respond well to adverse events, although the relationship between an adverse event and team resilience is complex. For example, an increase in job demands across the team may induce stress and hamper positive emotions, which can decrease team resilience. If the increase in the team’s workload is short in duration however, this can lead to a sense of accomplishment, and produce a feeling of well being and resilience. It is therefore possible to develop a resilient team through your leadership interventions. This includes:

- Using language that encourages perseverance and praises effort
- Strengthening and growing positive mindsets amongst team and groups, focusing on the passions people have in the team to achieve their goals and recognising their perseverance
- Being flexible and creative, demonstrating how challenges that emerge are opportunities for learning
- Being purposeful with yourself and others, setting small goals to achieve larger goals to keep motivation high
- Reflecting on what you and others are achieving and recognising progress and achievements. Let these inform what you plan to happen next

Crisis Management

Resilience amongst individuals and teams can really be tested where there is a crisis. A crisis is a situation where there is a sudden, significant or unplanned event that disrupts normal activities. Individuals with different levels of resilience may need to draw on the strength of the team to cope with adversity, change or challenging situations.

You can demonstrate your resilience at times of crisis by preparing yourself and others for rapid change by drawing on a range of strategies that help you and your team to respond urgently to change. This might include using the strengths of those team members with grit to support you to work with the rest of the team to see through any changes that are needed. Any key messages you communicate from the crisis, and actions that need to be taken, need to be conveyed to individuals and team in terms that are motivating and reflect a positive mindset. You may wish to provide extra support to individuals that you are aware could struggle with the crisis and you can tailor change messages that clearly state how the changes will meet their needs, as well as business goals. Make your analysis of the situation positive for team learning and identify further learning opportunities, to build individual and team resilience.

Compensatory factors such as ‘grit’ make crisis management with individuals with this trait easier to manage, as such individuals have the experience and tenacity to adapt well. Where you have less experienced individuals, they may struggle so a focus on adapting and learning, will increase their resilience for any future crisis. For less resilient inexperienced individuals there may be a greater need for protection. These needs can be identified through appraisal and performance management processes, generating training and development needs to enable the individual to respond positively to change, whether it is a crisis or not.

Advice for building resilience in self and others:

• Recognise that resilience, grit and a growth mindset can be developed
• Role model resilience, grit and a growth mindset through the work you do everyday, but also when there is a need to adapt to new circumstances quickly, and encourage others to do the same
• Keep the messages to your team positive, and reward determination and perseverance as well as the achievement of personal and business goals
• Consider the work everyone is engaged in as opportunities for learning and development, and encourage staff to take on new challenges
• Access supportive networks to get the support you need, and encourage your team to support each other, particularly if members of the team appear to be struggling
• Ensure that you and your team members are not succumbing to stress, which can undermine well-being. Allow yourself and team members time for recovery and opportunities to reflect when needed
• Stay open to feedback and encourage collective solutions to problems. This will support team cohesiveness, and resilience

'If I only had one strength that I could choose, I would choose resilience. Resilience is the shock absorber for tough times, and there surely will be tough times occasionally. The only people who don't experience bumpy waters are people who are not doing anything.'

Jill Griffin (2019)

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