

Member's Quarterly

Spring 2023 Edition

Feature

Resilience is a Leadership Superpower -

How to build yours



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When it comes to leadership skills, resilience is the superpower every leader needs to develop. Resilience is the skill that helps you work effectively with a wide range of life and leadership challenges. Specifically, the challenges you face in times of uncertainty, stress, volatility, and change - times like now.

Though we are essentially in a post-pandemic recovery period, challenges and curveballs have become the norm in our personal and professional lives, especially for leaders. This new normal creates the kind of volatility and stress in which resilience - the ability to bounce back from setbacks - allows you to function effectively and even to thrive.

What is Resilience?

Amit Sood, MD, the Executive Director of the Global Center for Resiliency and Well-Being defines resilience as 'your ability to withstand adversity and bounce back and grow despite life's downturns.'

Resilience is not a 'trait' that you do, or do not, have. Rather, it is a combination of thoughts, behaviours, actions and more that form a powerful set of skills. This set of skills - what I like to call your superpowers - can be learned and developed, just like the process of building your physical muscles. Resilience can also be strengthened with focus and practice.

As you boost your resilience quotient, you strengthen your ability to work with challenges in constructive ways, recover your leadership equilibrium and continue to lead well.

For leaders everywhere, resilience is a skill you can count on to boost your effectiveness in every aspect of your personal and professional life.

Can Resilience be learned?

YES! Effective leaders build from every experience and invest in developing a deep well of resilience in the process.

Some leaders, for example, have learned to harvest insights and learned from setbacks and failures. Others have developed a practice of appreciation, shining a light on the silver linings they see when they reframe adversity. Just like putting money in the bank, they can then draw strength from their resilience 'account' when they need it most.

Your THOUGHTS are the foundation of your resilience, so I encourage you to start your skill-building there. Here are two specific ways to do it:

#1 Focus on the Present

One of the most powerful ways to be more resilient is to focus your thinking on the present - especially if you're inclined to ruminate incessantly on the past. Challenging though it can be to tame your wandering thoughts and stay in the moment when setbacks happen, doing so helps you avoid the more destructive patterns of doomsday thinking that can shut you down and compromise your ability to respond effectively.

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When you focus on the present, you can fully appreciate the challenge you are facing with clarity and concentration. For example, you can discern what is real (and not), as well as appreciate how it may or may not affect you.

Staying present will also equip you to distinguish what is within your control, helping you focus your energy most productively. The result? You will be able to lead with greater clarity and concentration as you consider how to lead through the issue at hand.

Leadership Resilience Exercise: Pay attention to your thoughts and challenge yourself to stay present. Look and think clearly about what is real now, in the present moment. Write it down to center yourself and move forward.

#2 Find the Positive in Your Challenging Moments

Reframing your thoughts to bring a positive perspective to each challenging situation is an equally powerful way to build your resilience. When challenging moments happen, pay close attention to your thought patterns. Ask yourself the following questions.

- Are your thoughts typically positive or negative?
- How do you tend to see yourself in them?
- Do you see yourself overwhelmed and unable to move forward?
- Are you more inclined to see yourself challenged but undaunted by the situation?

It can be easy to get caught up in doomsday thinking and negative emotions that derail your leadership effectiveness. Instead, challenge yourself to pause and name the negative thinking pattern. Then regroup and reframe your thoughts.

For example: What insights can you appreciate from each experience? How might those insights serve you in future?

When you challenge yourself to focus on (and in) the present moment and adopt a more positive, constructive mindset, you will be able to avoid the kind of knee-jerk, potentially emotional reactions that will not serve you as a leader. Instead, you will be well positioned to consider and choose the most constructive and appropriate response.

Leadership Resilience Exercise: Look closely at your typical thought patterns especially if your default is negative and invite yourself to consider a more positive, constructive frame of mind. Challenge yourself to do this each day for a week and notice what happens when you reframe your thoughts.

Why is Resilience such an important leadership skill?

Setbacks, even outright failures, are inevitable for every leader. The more resilient you are, the easier it becomes to rebound – and the faster your recovery time.

When you focus your thoughts on the present and practice reframing your negative thoughts, you will be able to respond thoughtfully rather than reactively when challenges or setbacks occur. In the process, you will be building superpower skills that boost your resilience and effectiveness in all aspects of your leadership.

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