

Developing Personal Resilience

Handout to accompany the 90-minute virtual session with Sue Butterfield, In Equilibrium

Characteristics of resilient people

From the Famous People exercise at the workshop, identify from all the characteristics of resilience that were talked about, the five that you consider to be the most important. Then pick one characteristic we talked about that you think you need to develop further to become more resilient in future.

Five most important characteristics:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

The characteristic I need to develop further is:

What is Resilience?

“The ability to succeed, live, and develop in a positive way . . . despite the stress or adversity that would normally involve the real possibility of a negative outcome. It is the ability to maintain personal wellbeing in the face of challenge.”

Explaining the Resilience Skills

Realistic Optimism - Resilient people have a realistic, optimistic view of the world. This optimism is not fantastical, it is based in reality. They persist in seeking goals despite obstacles and setbacks. They tend to operate from hope of success rather than fear of failure. Setbacks are viewed as due to manageable circumstance rather than personal flaw.

Problem Solving - Resilient people have the ability to look at problems and challenges from a comprehensive perspective. Problems and challenges are viewed from many different perspectives, with many factors given consideration.

Emotional Awareness – Resilient people have the ability to identify their feelings and where necessary, have the ability to control their feelings. They are able to label their feelings, rather than labelling people or situations. For example, “I feel impatient,” as opposed to “This is ridiculous.” Resilient people can distinguish between thoughts and feelings and importantly, can take responsibility for their feelings. For example, a thought would be “I feel like..” and “I feel as if..” A feeling would be “I feel.” “I feel jealous,” as opposed to “You are making me jealous.” Finally, they can recognise how their feelings affect their performance and understand the links between their feelings and what they think and say.

Impulse Control - Resilient people tolerate ambiguity well so they do not rush to make judgements or snap decisions. They step back and think about things before acting. They have the ability to stop and choose whether to act on a desire to take action. For example, when they become angry, instead of shouting or getting into an argument, they stop and decide that those actions may not do any good in the situation – in fact, they could make matters worse. Controlling our impulses helps us to finish what we set out to do and to plan for the future. It also helps us to delay our gratification – to control our impulse to have something right now just because we want it.

Empathy - Resilient people are highly empathetic. They not only identify and understand their own emotions, they can identify and understand the emotions of others. They are attentive to emotional cues and listen well. They show sensitivity and understand another person’s perspective. They acknowledge and reward peoples’ strengths and accomplishments and offer useful feedback whilst identifying peoples’ needs for further growth. This allows the highly resilient individual to both build social relationships and to give out social support.

Self-Efficacy - Resilient people have confidence in their ability to successfully solve problems. They recognise their strengths and weaknesses and use their strengths to help them cope with adversity. In essence, self-efficacy is the extent that you believe you can do a particular thing. The stronger your belief, the stronger your self-efficacy.

For example, viewing challenging problems as tasks to be mastered, developing deeper interest in the activities in which you participate and forming a stronger sense of commitment to your interests and activities. On the other hand, the weaker your belief, the weaker your self-efficacy. For example, avoiding challenging tasks, believing that difficult tasks and situations are beyond your capabilities and focusing on personal failings and negative outcomes.

Reaching Out - Resilient people are prepared to take appropriate risks. They are willing to try new things and view occasional failures as essential stages in the process towards ultimate success. They have the ability to take on new opportunities and challenges in order to maximise their potential, and to deepen relationships with those important in not just business but also family life. Importantly they are able to ask for help when required without feelings of anger, resentment, inadequacy or intimidation.

Self-reflection

Of the key resilience factors outlined, which two would you say you are strongest at?

Which one do you need to work on improving the most?

Think of one small step you can make toward strengthening your resilience for this

Boundaries

"If you cannot say no and really mean it, you cannot say yes and really mean it" -
Joshua Isaacs

What is a boundary?

Personal boundaries are guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates to identify, for themselves, what are reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave around them and how they will respond when someone steps outside those limits.

The following are two examples of situations where you may want to enforce your boundaries:

At work your line manager asks you to work overtime to progress your project. You have home commitments and want to be able to say 'No' to the request, but feel anxious about the impact on the project and also your manager's reaction.

A friend calls you at work and wants to go out that evening for drinks to celebrate their birthday. You want to go home and rest after what has been a pressurised day. You start off by saying you're tired and want to go home, but your friend keeps pushing until you say yes.

Boundaries and resilience

Every time you say "yes" when you want to say "no," you're jeopardising your ability to spring back. Why? Because you're compromising your boundaries and this will eventually lead to resentments. You are allowing things to happen in your life that you are really not comfortable with. Those things are reducing your resilience, sapping your energy and compromising your commitment to what's really important to you.

Boundaries are the "force field" you create around yourself by the limits you set. Limits around time, limits around who you let into your life, limits around what activities that you let take up your attention and your time. They are the imaginary lines that enable you to tell people how close they can come to you.

Good boundaries mean that you spend your time and energy wisely. You don't waste anything on what's not good for you - people, activities, food etc. You are in charge. You're choosing what you let inside your life. As a result, you feel in control, and become more resilient.

The work perspective

Think of your boundaries as a tool you bring into the workplace to protect yourself and feel safe. This will increase your confidence to be more assertive.

Exercise 1: Building boundaries

People can have many boundaries similar to the examples on the previous page, in respect of many aspects of their lives. Please think about 1 workplace boundary and 1 non-workplace boundary you would like to build for yourself.

Write/type, or think about the boundary you want to build at work with your colleague/s and at home with a family member. If you are doing this exercise with a partner, their reactions and comments to the boundaries you want to build will help you to clarify or refine them.

Boundaries v barriers

A robust boundary should work like a force field with a filter that allows in the information the person with the boundary needs to hear while repelling the toxic/abusive information that is also directed at them. An example is interacting with someone who is being rude or abusive but is also communicating information that may be important. A boundary will allow you to listen to what they have to say without being intimidated or flustered by the rude or abusive behaviour that is accompanying it.

There is a difference between a boundary and a barrier. A boundary allows something in or out, like drawing a line in the sand, or like your outer layers of skin. A boundary is semi-permeable allowing supportive influences and healthy activities into your life and keeping out toxic influences and people from impacting your behaviour. A barrier allows no movement and very often does not allow another person choice or negotiation. For example, if you say to your manager, '*I refuse to work anytime after 5pm,*' that is a barrier because circumstances may mean you will have to work late at some time to finish a project etc. There is no flexibility in this barrier and demonstrates a lack of empathy which is crucial to resilience.

Top tips for setting boundaries

- 1. Think about your use of language**, for example, to say 'no' you could say – “I'd prefer not to because" or “I'd rather notas.....”
- 2. State your position positively.** “I can do it, if I could get some help on the processing side,” or “I can do that for you, although we'd need to discuss the timescales you're suggesting.”
- 3. Know how you expect to be treated, and be clear about it to others.** Many of us have been trained not to make demands or state our own wants when dealing with others. But consider this: How much easier would your day be if everyone you dealt with was completely upfront with how they preferred to be treated and where their boundaries are?
- 4. Let other people know how you prefer to be treated, what you expect from them and what your personal boundaries are.** You don't have to be rude about it; a simple, “I'm sorry, I reserve weekends for (activity/people),” or, “If you don't mind, I would prefer not to go out after work for a drink as I want to get back in time to spend some time (with...or doing.....)” This is all that is required to get the point across fairly and politely.
- 5. Be respectful, thoughtful and responsible when setting boundaries.** It's irresponsible and unprofessional to stay quiet about potential professional boundary issues at work and then end up with too much workload that results in not doing your job to the best of your abilities. You are responsible for setting boundaries around your time and organisation. It is also not fair to others in any relationship to let a lack of boundaries create tension, resentment and other problems.
- 6. Respect other people's boundaries, even if you don't agree with them.** If your boundaries happen to be incompatible, you must either find a way of working around those issues, or work out a compromise that will work for you both. This is essential for resilience. Don't go straight to creating a barrier, this is resistance not resilience.
- 7. Be proactive when dealing with other people's boundaries.** If you're unsure where another's boundaries lie, take the initiative and ask. In a business situation, you can start by asking how the other person prefers to be addressed or how they prefer to receive communications.

In personal settings, you can start by talking about your likes, dislikes and other personal idiosyncrasies. In either case, most people will appreciate the opportunity to make their needs clear and reciprocate in kind.

Challenging negative thoughts

The exercise below will help you map whether or not you are accurately assessing a situation or whether one or more cognitive distortions are affecting your thinking.

Think about the last situation you were in where things did not go very well. Write/type the FACTS ONLY, who, what, when etc - very brief notes.

Write/type what your thoughts were at the time, then how you felt, and how you behaved as a result of your emotions. Then write/type the consequences.

Thoughts
Feelings
Behaviours
Consequences

Reflect on your thoughts in relation to this situation. Can you relate to any of the following thinking traps?

Realistic Optimism and Thinking Traps

Resilience is about being able to think of a solution to a problem from many different perspectives which requires some thinking outside of the box and positive thinking. This becomes very difficult if you have what is called 'thinking traps.'

Thinking Traps

1. **Jumping to Conclusions Trap:** Believing one is right about a situation or what another person is thinking despite little or no evidence to support it.
2. **Always Trap:** Believing that negative events are unchangeable and that you have little or no control over them.
3. **Tunnel Vision Trap:** Focusing on the less significant details in a situation while screening out the more important aspects.
4. **Magnifying the Bad Trap (catastrophising):** Magnifying the negative aspects of a situation.
5. **Me, Me, Me Trap:** Believing that you are the cause of every problem you encounter.
6. **Them, Them, Them Trap:** Believing that other people or circumstances are the cause of all problems.
7. **Disqualifying the positive:** You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or another. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences.
8. **Mind Reading:** Assuming that you know what another person is thinking, or expecting another person to know what you are thinking.
9. **Personalisation:** You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event which in fact you were not primarily responsible for.

Social Interaction Network Profile Exercise

"The quality of your life is a direct correlation with the quality of the people you spend time with." Dan Banbury

The people I turn to:	Name(s) Or individual's initials if preferred	How helpful are they? (Low 1 – 5 High)
For close friendships To share problems To have fun with For expert advice To energise me As Helpers As Mentors For acceptance and approval To help me discover and try new things When I need good advice for a problem with: My team My budgets An important customer Technology		

Review your present network and make an honest assessment of how well it is working for you.

Who would you like to improve your relationship with? Think of at least one action step you are willing to take towards this improvement.

Final reflection

Choose three ideas/suggestions/small steps you will use to strengthen your resilience:

At work:

In your personal life:

Resources and further reading

Please visit our website to access resources relating to resilience and wellbeing at work: <https://www.in-equilibrium.co.uk/resilience-resources/>
<https://www.in-equilibrium.co.uk/wellbeing-at-work-resource-overview-page/>

This blog article is about small steps to build personal resilience:
<https://www.in-equilibrium.co.uk/microsteps-to-resilience/>

In Equilibrium Quarterly Newsletter

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