

Why build resilience?

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Published in June 2021 on LinkedIn, this article reflects on the significance of resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite progress, the need for resilience remains vital in facing ongoing global challenges. As individuals, leaders, teams, and community members, building resilience is crucial in navigating continued uncertainty and change.



The pandemic pivot

Over a year ago, our nation shut down practically overnight because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies pivoted to remote working, while some, such as essential workers, continued working on site under potentially challenging conditions. For many, this has resulted in challenges with poor work-life balance, isolation, mental health and burnout.

Resilience — our evolutionary heritage

Humans are remarkably resilient. Over countless generations, our forebears survived through brutish conditions. Yet, most did not face the steady drip of toxic stress in the way we do today, where we often find ourselves feeling overwhelmed, fatigued, and anxious.

Even with the availability of vaccines and the distant promise of societal transformation, we cannot wait for better circumstances to somehow erase the ever-present need for perseverance and grit. The road ahead is uncertain, and the recovery task list may be overwhelming. How are we to complete this marathon when we're so worn out after the first few miles? And what about the next marathon?

The call

While resilience can't magically relieve stress, it can help us in profound ways. As we grow in our capacity to thrive and adapt through adversity, we become better equipped to take care of ourselves and others, now and in the future. It is this grand challenge that calls to us: to grow our collective resilience so that we might all find our footing in our efforts to create a safe, fair and sustainable world.

Resilience blooms from multiple sources: our genes, our early childhood experiences, our daily lessons in the school of hard knocks, our day-to-day choices and habits, our close relationships and more. Among all those sources, there are those over which we have some control (habits and attitudes) and those over which we have little to no control (genes and upbringing).

The ongoing promise of resilience lies in what we can control and influence. Whatever our default level of resilience, we all can get better at bouncing back and thriving through life's uncertainties and adversities. Most of us do this naturally as we grow and adapt.

We grow and adapt

It's a given that most of us could benefit from better sleep, food and exercise. Each helps the body and mind immensely. But there's more. Our lifelong process of neural adaptation (neuroplasticity) largely determines how each of us is wired in our response to adversity. We become what we do, what we believe, how we perceive and how we respond.

At the center of our approach to resilience development is our focus on the constellation of mindset, habits, practice, attention and awareness. By understanding how resilience works, we gain agency in our ability to slow down and better choose how we respond. By employing simple science-based mind-body practices for staying on an even keel, we grow in our capacity to skillfully sail through life's choppy waters.

Think of this simple example: you get on the freeway and realize there is gridlock for the next several miles. You feel the pressure in your chest rising. How do you respond? Do you pound the wheel in frustration? Or do you take a few slow, deep breaths and turn on your favorite podcast?

Resilience shows up in these many small choices we make throughout our day. Each time that we accept these annoyances with grace and ease, we build more resilient neural connections, strengthen our resilient habits and make it even more likely that we will make that resilient choice again when confronted with the next unfavorable circumstance.

Building resilient teams

COVID-19 has amplified the need for resilience in all organizations. Most employees are not fully equipped to deal with disruption and uncertainty on this scale. Our Resilience Development Program is a way for companies to help teams build positive coping skills

and for leaders to support resilience as we all search for a way through our myriad ongoing conundrums.

Key skills we help participants develop include:

- Holding a resilience mindset in the face of adversity
- Being aware of and regulating challenging emotions
- Maintaining resilient attitudinal buoyancy and flexibility
- Leveraging resilience to act courageously
- Establishing daily resilience habits
- Fostering resilience in the teams we lead

The tide that lifts all boats

Resilience is a tide that lifts all boats. Helping employees and leaders build resilience adds to their emotional buoyancy and helps them better navigate life's rocky shores. As we each build resilient habits, skills and mindsets, we build resiliency into our organizations, priming and preparing them for the many challenges we face now and for the many more that may lie ahead.

For more information on resilience and how to develop it in your leaders and across your organization, please contact me at bill@billhefferman.com