

Network to Work Meeting

December 2018

RESOURCE DOCUMENT – *CAREER RESILIENCE*

What is Career Resilience & How can it Be Developed?

Most of us have a general understanding of the word ‘resilience’ as the ability to deal well and adjust to changing circumstances, challenging situations, and all types of difficulties. It is our ability to weather a storm and ‘bounce back’, even when circumstances are discouraging or disruptive.

In the workplace, a variety of stressors can pose challenges that throw us off our game. It could be the pressure of an increased workload, a setback in completing a task, or a significant and unsettling change. A resilient individual can adapt and deal with these situations in a positive way, while continuing to perform at an effective level and while also, ideally, learning new skills and new ways of working.

This ability is highly prized by employers, and where possible, it is something to be highlighted in a job interview. Oftentimes an applicant will be asked to share a challenge they encountered on a job and how they handled it. With such a question, an employer is looking to assess how resilient the individual is - how well they cope with problems, how much they persist at trying to solve problems, and how they engage the people around them to solve problems. Should an interviewer ask you to describe a failure, s/he is looking to see how well you cope with failure – what personal coping mechanisms you use - and whether your talk of your emotions in dealing with the failure reflects a growth mindset.

Career resilience, however, is not just about ***reactively managing and recovering from difficulties***, i.e. responding to challenge and change. Developing career resilience also includes ***proactively initiating change and taking charge***, i.e. taking personal action to develop our careers and skill sets, seize upon learning opportunities, and set goals that allow us to craft a work life consistent with our needs and values.

During our careers we may move from one role to another, one organization to another, and even from one specialty to another. An individual who is “career resilient” is able to embrace lifelong learning, be agile and flexible, have or regrow a sense of personal control, and focus clearly on future

goals. For the reality is that employers no longer “look after” their employees; rather, employees today are responsible for their own career and survival.

DEVELOPING CAREER RESILIENCE

Strategies for developing career resilience relate to how you might seize upon opportunities – professional and personal, formal and informal - for learning and for personal development. Your workplace might be unwilling or unable to offer you formal training, but informal opportunities can be just as valuable. These could be shadowing someone for a morning at their workplace, discussing someone’s job or career and how they got there, or taking on projects as a volunteer, even in an unrelated field.

There are other **techniques for personal development** that are not directly workplace oriented that can also help to grow resilience. Here are some valuable ones to consider.

1. **Learning to Let Go:**

Highly resilient individuals not only recognize when something has gone wrong but also ***learn from it and then let it go***. They're able to move on from it and keep trying new things without a fear of failing. They accept that it's normal to be imperfect when trying something new and are fully willing to learn from – and forgive themselves for - their inevitable mistakes. Many people struggle with moving on and beat themselves up for a long time, but highly resilient people have that ability to bounce back.

If you wish to increase your ability to “learn and let go”, one of the most important things you can do is give yourself the opportunity to reflect, to learn, and to be very aware of your own self-talk. As you enter into new situations and new scenarios, pay attention to the things and stories that you're telling yourself about your abilities, your experience, and your confidence. Are you telling yourself, *“I'm feeling good about this, I'm going to give it my best shot, and I believe I can do this? There might be things that go wrong, but I'll learn from them.”* Or, alternatively, are you going into those new experiences telling yourself, *“I don't deserve to be here, I'm going to be found out, and I'm going to fail.”* If you are telling yourself those things, they are likely to become self-fulfilling beliefs that will continue to limit your capacity for resilience.

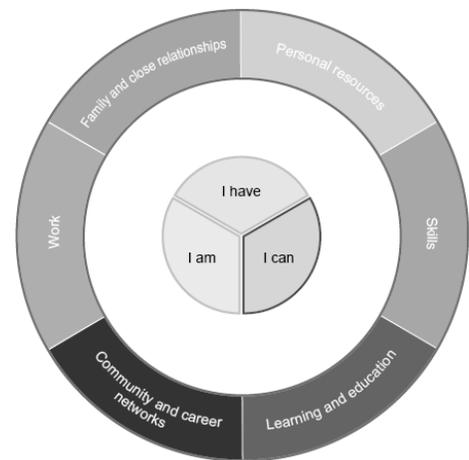
If you notice your self-talk is derailing you, try some of the following tips for keeping your self-esteem high.

Here are some tips for keeping your self-esteem high. Which of these could you do, or do more of, to help yourself grow or maintain positive beliefs about yourself?

- Do activities that you enjoy.
- Spend time with positive, supportive people.
- Keep a notebook of positive comments people make to you.
- Take photos of the work you are proud of, or the meal, DIY job or project that turned out well.
- Be helpful and considerate to others.
- Try not to compare yourself to other people.
- Try to do regular exercise, eat healthily and get enough sleep.
- Be assertive – don't let people treat you with a lack of respect.
- Use self-help books and websites to develop helpful skills such as assertiveness or mindfulness.
- Learn to challenge your negative beliefs.
- Acknowledge your positive qualities and things you are good at.
- Get into the habit of thinking and saying positive things about yourself.

2. The Resilience Doughnut – A Model of Career Resilience

This figure depicts “The Resilience Doughnut (*adapted from Worsley, 2015*), which combines several elements associated with career resilience. The more an individual possesses these elements, the greater their capacity for resilience.



- A. The center of the model sets out *three internal, personal elements* that are important for developing career resilience.
- 1) **“I have”**. In challenging times, to what extent do you have – and are you able to draw upon - social relationships, physical health, financial resources, or your emotional well-being?
 - 2) **“I am”**. In challenging times, to what extent do you have – and are you able to draw upon - a strong sense of identity and self-esteem?
 - 3) **“I can”**. To what extent are you able to recognize and self-assess your skills and apply them to achieve your goals or carry out actions?

B. The outer ring of the model looks at the *external resources and environment* each of us may be able to connect with, or draw upon during difficult times, in order to support and develop our career resilience. These resources are:

- 1) Family and close relationships
- 2) Personal resources
- 3) Skills
- 4) Learning and Education
- 5) Community and career networks
- 6) Work

Techniques for Implementing the Resilience Doughnut model:

To develop career resilience, choose one or more elements from the model's inner or outer ring to focus on.

Inner Ring – Personal Elements:

No matter the resources in the outer ring that you have available to you, putting your focus on elements from the inner ring – like choosing a positive attitude, developing your self-esteem or catching and stopping negative self-talk – will make a significant difference.

Element #1 – “I have”:

Physical health: Making even small changes towards a healthier lifestyle can provide solid benefits that support resilience. Another reason for considering your exercise levels is because resilience is about trying new things and new approaches, and or going for a walk in the rain, for example, can be a low-risk way to kick-start the process.

Emotional Well Being: Mental health refers to the way in which we think, problem-solve and process information. Emotional health relates to the way in which we appropriately express our emotions. The two are closely linked. Having good mental and emotional health can influence the way we see ourselves and the world around us, how we solve problems, and how well we express our emotions.

One way to measure your personal well-being is to consider how happy you are. The following table shows how different aspects of life impacts ones happiness and sense of well-being. Are there activities you wish to increase or decrease?

Measuring well-being. Different activities can either positively or negatively impact your well-being, as seen in the table below. Consider your own situation; where might you put your energy to make the biggest difference in your sense of happiness and well-being?

Table 1 - Impact of activities on well-being

Activity	Impact on well-being	Activity	Impact on well-being
Connecting with people	+10%	Keep learning	+6%
Joining community groups	+8%	Physical injury	-12%
Physical exercise	+8%	Social isolation	-14%
Hobbies and new interests	+6%	Debt	-16%

Element # 2 - “I am”:

Self-esteem: Self-esteem is an indicator of the beliefs you have about yourself – what you think about the type of person you are, your abilities, the positive and negative things about you and what you expect for your future. This links to the ‘I can’ element mentioned above.

If you have healthy self-esteem, your beliefs about yourself will generally be positive. You may experience difficult times in your life, but you will generally be able to deal with these without them having too much of a long-term negative impact on you.

If you have lower self-esteem, you may tend to focus on your weaknesses or mistakes and find it hard to recognize the positive parts of your personality. You might talk to yourself in a critical tone that you wouldn’t use with others, or might blame yourself for any difficulties or failures that you have. You can’t seem to “learn from and let go” as discussed above.

Set out on page 2 of this Resource Document are tips to help you foster your self-esteem.

Element #3 – “I can”:

Self-Effectiveness: Self-effectiveness relates to your judgment of your ability to be effective in carrying out tasks or activities, or in achieving your goals. The degree to which you believe “you can” impacts:

- the way you choose tasks, goals and actions, that is, how high you aim and whether you risk taking on tasks that are a bit of a stretch;
- how much time and effort you make to achieve or complete a task, that is, how motivated you are;
- how you think about challenges, obstacles and lack of achievement. For example, if you have a high sense of self-effectiveness or self-worth, you may view an unsuccessful job interview as due to too little preparation beforehand, whereas if you have a lower self-belief, you are more likely to conclude that you are not good enough for this job, or any other job like that.

Outer Ring – External Resources and Experiences that Support and Develop Career Resilience:

Focus on External Resources: What aspects of your environment impact you positively? During times of crisis, if you are able to connect with and draw support from strong resources and experiences in your external environment, you will be less likely to withdraw. Consider which of the following resources feel like sources of strength, positive energy and support, and keep your energy and attention there.

Family and close relationships:

These can be our sources of emotional support. However, sometimes our closest family and friends can feel threatened by our plans for change or find it hard to see us in a new light. Seeking out relationships where you feel energized or accepted for who you are can help you to feel supported and be resilient.

Work:

Your working environment, sense of responsibility for the work you do, and sense that your work is valued can be a positive sources of support during challenging times and foster resilience. Consider what is going well even when other aspects of work can be challenging.

Personal resources: Your financial, physical and mental well-being.

Skills: Knowing your skills and strengths is an important aspect of career resilience.

Learning and education: The more you enjoy learning, engage with others while learning, and have the confidence to reach out to learn what is needed, the more resilient you can become.

Community and career networks: Connections with people in your communities – personal and professional – can offer the support that will help you be resilient.

SUMMARY

You may feel in a place where control over your working life and its direction feels distant. You may have other people fully dependent on you, and little space to exercise personal choices. Nonetheless, it can make a difference if over time you carve out the space to initiate change and take charge, understanding that career resilience is about being both proactive as well as reactive.

People have differing beliefs about the extent to which their actions can control events in their lives. Some individuals believe events in their life derive mainly from their own choices and actions. Others believe that their life events are controlled by external factors they cannot influence – ‘fate’, in other words

However, change is possible when people use their strengths and networks, continue to take risks and to learn, and take action in changing times. Resilient individuals thrive in situations of change and even seek out challenges, or are willing to take on projects where it isn’t clear that success is possible. They have a strong sense of personal control and a clear focus on goals for the future.

In closing, here is a final activity that can help you to enhance and renew your resilience.

Activity – Enhancing and Renewing your Resilience. The actions listed in the tables below support resilience. For each one, consider the frequency with which you “do” that item. For those you mark as “rarely”, what might you do to increase that activity in your life? Making small changes to your behaviors and habits can bring immense rewards.

Physical	Rarely	Most of the time	Always
I eat a healthy diet			
I exercise for 30 minutes at least 3 times per week			
I get 7–8 hours’ sleep at night			
I take steps to maintain a healthy weight			
I have at least two alcohol-free days each week			
Action item			

Well-being	Rarely	Most of the time	Always
When I experience setbacks at work I am able to recover my positive outlook quickly			
I feel relaxed and in control despite the pressures at work			

I am aware of my emotions and the emotions of others			
I am optimistic and forward thinking, rather than negative and blaming			
I can step back and keep things in perspective even under pressure			
I focus well and shut out distractions at work			
I set priorities and manage my time well			
I am secure and confident			
Action item			

Financial resources	Rarely	Most of the time	Always
I actively keep track of my income and outgoings			
I spend less than I earn and make regular savings			
I have an 'emergency' fund of at least three months' expenses set aside			
I contribute to a pension fund			
Action item			

Renewal	Rarely	Most of the time	Always
I create clear boundaries between work and home			
I am able to leave work behind at the end of the day			
I take a break every 90 minutes to 2 hours at work			
I create time in my life for activities that I find enjoyable and satisfying			
Action point			

Sources:

Career Resilience

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The Resilience Questionnaire: Why Does Resilience Matter?

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