

# The effect of resilience on workplace environments

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“So what is resilience really about?” asked my leader-in-training. Knowing that multilingual environments can frequently lead to misinterpretations, I simply had no choice — a demonstration was needed right there and then.

I took a balloon and pressed my finger into the exterior wall to make an indentation. For the balloon, I was the cause of an agitation that wasn't the norm, forcing an unexpected change. Yet, as soon as I released the pressure, the balloon bounced back to its original, uncompressed form.

“What you have just witnessed, my friend, is resilience,” I declared. Whether that demonstration equated to “resilience for dummies” or “advanced reflection on cause and effect under pressure”, it resulted in an in-depth discussion about resilience and its effect on workplace environments.

Things will always challenge a leader; after all, a leader creates the future. No recipe exists explaining how to build the way forward. No secret formula has been written for the unknown, as a leader creates it as progress occurs. A leader lives in the world of vulnerability, something that is evident to all when challenge comes out of nowhere and stamps its presence in every thread of the corporate fabric. A government law with huge financial consequences; a competitor's new strategy; a customer's negative review — all have the propensity to be the finger in the balloon. But yet with resilience, the pressure from those events will never permeate and burst the balloon. Resilience is to a leader as resourcefulness is to Richard Branson.

So what conditions must exist for leaders to apply the concept of resilience?

Inner confidence and comfort with themselves and the future, for one.

This allows any pressure to be circumstantial, matched or even negated. A positive attitude towards pressure allows it to be welcomed as an invitation to find new ways or change — it becomes just another source of reflection for learning. The American author Bruce Barton says it so well: “Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who dared to believe that something inside them was superior to circumstances”. That inner confidence and the ensuing resilience can influence others to follow, and with an army tagging along no amount of pressure will ever be able to take hold.

Resilience is also about staring down the barrel of challenge, and as such a balanced approach and a good state of health will minimise risk of an explosive response. In this scenario there is nothing to defend or argue about, as the source of agitation has become a source of learning, balanced perspective and maybe even hope. Many leaders find it easy to be resilient in times of change as they have control over their life; they have a healthy work-life balance in place and plenty of personal time. Nothing can faze the leader who is both grounded and balanced.

Resilience, when combined with optimism, ensures no pressure can destabilise. Resilient leaders seem to live in the world accepting that we ourselves can't possibly predict what's right or wrong, so it is best to move ahead knowing that the pressure could result in myriad solutions — meaning we become the creators of the future.

Take, for example, an inefficiency in a business that is having a draining effect. Resilience allows this inefficiency to be viewed as a sign that something else is trying to happen in the business system and there would be no better time than now to explore that.

An open-minded environment is one that will see things not for what they are but for what they can be. On the other hand, a closed-minded environment will become stuck in what is, as it is argument-based, divided into camps of right and wrong. Environments open to possibility can separate the issue from the emotion, gaining clarity first and foremost to what the issue is. This does not mean that no mechanism exists for the emotional side, yet it does not cloud future possibility. If a leader has been made redundant, resilience shines through when that leader is observed almost immediately going into another direction — creating something that was not possible in the past environment, perhaps choosing to channel his entrepreneurial spirit into his own business.

With resilience there's just no way for a leader to be derailed; the inner push is simply too powerful to allow any source of external agitation to have a permanent effect. Perhaps it is no wonder that balloons are a natural source of curiosity for so many.

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