

Resilience is an increasingly sought-after and desired attribute. Do you wonder how you can have more of that? And why bother anyway? See below for a brief glimpse into the world of resilience and optimism.

(If you would like to learn more on optimism, resilience and energy, including how to measure your levels of optimism, contact me regarding workshops, coaching and information.)

Resilience and Optimism

Research reveals that optimism and resilience:

- give you a competitive advantage, an edge, improved productivity, better ability to meet challenges
- help you bounce back after a setback, and get on a roll when you succeed
- lead to better health, a longer life
- result in increased happiness
- buffer you against depression
- lead to increased immunity against helplessness

Optimism and resilience go hand-in-hand: optimists have positive emotions about the future and see the future as rosier than do pessimists. Optimistic people have temporary, specific explanations for bad events, but permanent, universal explanations for good events. For pessimists, it's the reverse. (Note 1)

NB - Beware of blind optimism; this is not what it's about. You can still be prudent, critical, have logical thinking skills, *and* be optimistic: together these are powerful.

How to Increase Optimism and Resilience

The good news is that the research shows you can enhance and develop resilience and optimism. For example:

* Increasing positive emotions leads to the creation of durable personal resources, which last beyond the actual moments the positive emotions occur. The 'broaden and build' theory suggests that positive emotions fuel psychological resilience. (Note 2)

* Karen Reivich, one of the world's leading experts in positive psychology, notes that people have an 'explanatory style' for explaining adversity. This is like a lens, or filter, through which you see the world. Where this leads to pessimistic thoughts, the aim is to turn off this 'auto pilot', to instead understand and circumvent thinking styles, so that you can see the true causes of adversity. Turning off the autopilot leads to increased resilience. (Note 3)

* Skills to change thinking include: identify and dispute limiting beliefs; avoid thinking traps; detect underlying beliefs; challenge beliefs; put thoughts into perspective; learn to be calm and to focus; challenge pessimistic beliefs in the moment; replace dysfunctional beliefs. (Note 3)

* A range of widely and thoroughly tested activities have been tested in the field of positive psychology, and have been shown to increase optimism and resilience.

* Build up positive emotions to loosen the hold of negative emotions.

Quotes

“Positive affect - emotion, mood, attitude - is the single most important ingredient in flourishing i.e. growth, resilience, and generativity” (Barbara Fredrickson, November 2004, Note 2)

“The resilient people had a remarkably rapid recovery from stress...these are optimistic action-oriented people. If something goes wrong in their lives, they immediately start to think about how to make it better. The brain chemicals that generate enthusiasm for a challenge...are at work when our energy is high, our effort maximal, and our mood positive” (Daniel Goleman, in “Working With Emotional Intelligence”)

“Patients who described themselves as highly optimistic had lower risks of all-cause death, and lower rates of cardiovascular death than those with high levels of pessimism, according to an article in the November issue of The Archives of General Psychiatry, one of the JAMA/Archives journals.” (www.newstarget.com; 10 April 2005)

“Strategic resilience ... is about having the capacity for change before the case for change becomes desperately obvious.” (Gary Hamel, The Quest for Resilience, Harvard Business Review, Sept 2003)

Definition of resiliency: “The ability of carpet to spring back to its original texture and thickness after being walked on or compressed by the weight of furniture” (antron.dupont.com/content/resources/carpet_glossary/ant06_03_18.shtml)

Notes

- (1) Martin Seligman Ph. D. in “Authentic Happiness”
- (2) Notes from positive psychology/authentic happiness class attended in Nov 2004 led by Barbara Fredrickson, Associate Professor of Psychology, University of Michigan.
- (3) Notes from positive psychology/authentic happiness class attended in January 2005 led by Karen Reivich Ph.D.

About this article

My aim is to provide you with information to help you and your staff with your personal and professional development. The theme for 2005 is ‘Thriving People, Thriving Workplaces’. Each month, topics covered are based on areas of interest raised by clients and colleagues. Material is drawn from journals, books, articles and shared experiences.

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