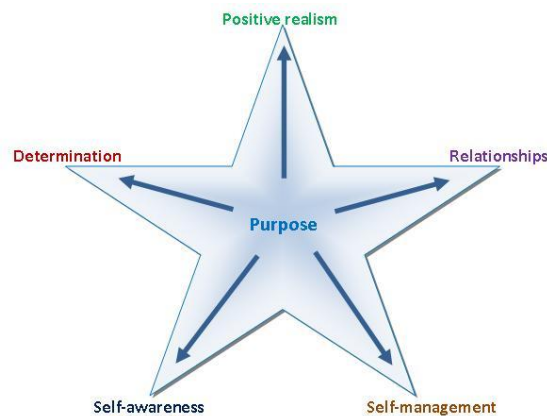


The Components of Personal Resilience

There is a growing amount of research and publicity about the power of personal resilience when managing pressure and avoiding stress. Despite this, many organisations still want to focus on stress management or wellbeing programmes. Although these are better than nothing maybe they, and their personnel, would benefit more from putting the attention onto developing people's personal resilience. (There is a strong argument for also addressing organisational influence at the same time.)

Resilience has many definitions from the "ability to bounce back" to "*The ability to withstand adverse events and stressful situations without falling apart, by actively and positively coping with stress*" (Stein and Book) Whatever your preference for definitions, you can probably identify certain times and situations where you feel more capable and resilient. Maybe you can use these to learn from and expand the range of situations where you can respond more resiliently?

We have identified 6 components which we believe are fundamental to personal resilience. Each of these can be developed and thought of as a work in progress which you keep improving. Not only will strengthening them help to increase your personal resilience they will help you in many other aspects of your life.



Sense of purpose

Probably the core component of the six. It is the foundation for the all of the others. Not everyone is clear about their purpose and it is frequently something that you can define as you move through life. The stronger your sense of purpose the better equipped you are to handle challenges and setbacks and to recover from them. If you are not clear, it can lead to feelings of frustration or aimlessness. Being able to identify this can help you to feel you are having a more meaningful life. Do you understand the purpose in all the activities you engage in or do you experience a frustrating sense of why you are there?

For many people their sense of purpose is around one of the following, or a combination: people – interests or hobbies – religion or spirituality – personal achievement or ambition

Positive realism

This component is something of a balancing act, between being able to think positively about situations and events whilst being realistic about what can be achieved. (It is not about some naive false optimism!) It involves being able to generate positive thoughts and feelings about situations. If you slip towards the other side, ask what do you gain by taking that more negative view of things? Practise seeing the glass half full, look at the positive and you will

start to feel different. At the same time, a healthy dose of realism is good. It reduces the chance of having unreasonable expectations and subsequent disappointment. Keep things in perspective and it will help you to achieve these aims. Whether thinking about what might happen, or reflecting on things from the past, think positively and with the realistic perspective. Focusing on what is in front of you now can support this approach.

Relationships

People matter to us. Supporting and caring relationships are essential. Your interpersonal communication and skills can be an important element of your ability to be resilient and how well you can handle difficult situations or times. Having people around who you can reach out to when you need support or help is a real asset. (Provided you are open to doing so and do not think it is a weakness to seek support.) It is also powerful to be able to offer help and support to others when they need it. Developing your interpersonal skills to be able to adapt to a wide variety of people and interactions can help reduce the possible pressures created in difficult relationships.

Determination yet open-minded and flexible

How good are you at seeing things through? When faced with challenges do you deal with them by having a “can do” approach, being proactive and taking action? This component considers how well you finish tasks and things which you have started. Are you able to keep going in the face of adversity rather than giving up? Your ability to persevere when confronted with difficulty will help your resilience. An important part of this is your ability to be adaptable and open-minded. Rather than being closed minded in your determination, resilience is helped if you can be flexible in your approach to things. It prevents any tendency to keep repeating the same behaviours to similar situations and expecting different results! A willingness to explore options and alternatives will always provide you with a greater range of choices to deal with situations.

Self-Awareness

This refers to your knowledge of your inner self and how you think, feel and react. What are the patterns you have in the way we think about, or respond to, different situations and challenges? Can you identify the positive, more helpful ones – and those which might be less positive? Resilient people are able to identify the causes of their success and any failures and learn from them. They will accept responsibility for their actions and reactions. They recognise what challenges or situations are beyond their control and that the part which is in their control is how they think and react. Assess your own habits about your thoughts, do you live in the present and future, or keep going back to the past?

Self-management – self-reliance

This component is somewhat more pragmatic as it considers how well you know, and use your strengths and skills and recognise your limitations. Both at work and home, do you manage your time and only take on what you can handle realistically? Over-commitment is a major source of pressure for many. Aim to get your work-life balance at the right level for you and those around you. Take responsibility for yourself and your actions. As you build your own reliance you can become stronger at doing this. Looking after yourself is also important. Your health, lifestyle and even amount of relaxation and sleep will help towards your resilience.

For organisations, you can really benefit from helping your people to introduce some initiatives to help them increase their personal resilience. We know that stress costs your business, both directly and indirectly. Why wait until it becomes a problem? Support your people by working on prevention and start offering some personal resilience training or help.

Individuals can use various ways to assess themselves. Discussion with friends or colleagues, self-assessment, coaching or taking some sort of profile or questionnaire. (You could try our Personal Resilience Index!) Identify where you feel you could improve and where you feel you are strong. Think about your preferences or choices for how you could develop in the areas you want and take some action. Ultimately, it will help you with your quality of life and potentially help in all areas.