

Your Role as a Leader in Building Team Resilience

1st February 2020

Resilience is the ability to deal flexibly and creatively with change and the obstacles and setbacks that life throws our way. Good managers take action to build resilience in the people who make up their teams.

In this article, you'll read about the important steps you can take to foster this valuable resource.

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Employees are more likely to be resilient and practice resilience in a work culture that nurtures it. For example, an important part of personal resilience is taking action to solve difficulties. People are more likely to do that if they feel they have a measure of ownership and control over their work on the team—if they can suggest and act on solutions.

Two other key components of resilience are seeking support as needed and learning from challenges. Employees are more likely to seek support from others if their manager encourages personal connections among team members, and they are more likely to learn from challenges when their manager emphasizes growth and learning as normal expectation in the team's work.

In big and small ways every day, there are steps you can take to foster individual and team resilience.

Five resilience builders

1. Encourage employees to be involved in problem solving. By encouraging all team members to get involved in problem solving, you're not only building better solutions, you're demonstrating that each person's ideas and input is valued. You are also helping team members learn to act resiliently, by taking action themselves and working together to solve problems.

- Involve team members in finding solutions to work challenges.
- Encourage employees to problem-solve some of the team's issues without you.
- Encourage and acknowledge suggestions from all employees.

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- When your group faces a problem and finds solutions, step back together to take note of what you've all learned and how you got to the solution. That will help everyone react more positively and proactively when the next challenge arises.
2. Acknowledge and show that you value your employees' responsibilities outside of work.
- Make yourself aware of your company's work-life programs and encourage employees to take advantage of these. Be sure all employees know about the many resources available through the program that provided this publication and know how to contact the program.
 - Demonstrate that you value your employees' personal responsibilities by including their important personal commitments in the team's planning calendar — graduations, religious holidays, other important occasions. Whenever possible, adjust the work calendar so these dates don't conflict with team meetings or project plans.
 - Foster flexible work practices that give employees more choice in how, when, and where they work. Flexibility helps people manage work and personal priorities and gives them a greater sense of control over their lives. That, in turn, reduces stress, builds resilience, and enhances both individual and team effectiveness.
3. Strengthen social support and connections within the team. Mounting research shows that people with more social connections live longer, suffer less depression, stay healthier, and remain more resilient than those with few social connections. A Gallup Organization survey found that one of the strongest predictors of an engaged employee is having a good friend at work. It's important that in addition to caring about doing a good job, team members also demonstrate caring for each other on a personal level.
- Make time for camaraderie, friendships, and fun on your team. Social occasions and celebrations can be effective, but little things also go a long way. You might set aside one day a week to have lunch together. Or an hour a month for bagels, coffee, and conversation.
 - Build humor and fun into the hard work.
 - Plan team-building activities.

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These might include an outing, a workshop, a retreat, or another opportunity for people to get to know one another, appreciate one another's strengths and work styles, and build team spirit.

- Build connections among team members who may never be together in one place. For example, it's a good idea to build in time at the beginning of conference calls for check-ins and casual conversation so that team members get to know a little about one another and have an opportunity to build connections. If some members of your team work remotely, have video chats or video conferences so that everyone can talk face-to-face from time to time.

4. Provide opportunities for all employees to learn and grow. As a manager, you play a key role in providing access to learning opportunities.

- No doubt your company offers training programs and opportunities for professional development. It's your job to provide flexibility so that employees can take advantage of these programs and to encourage them to take the time to learn.
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- Performance management is another avenue for providing employees with opportunities for growth and development. It's here that you as a manager can have tremendous impact. When you have periodic discussions with employees about their goals and plans, take the time to explore together the next steps for growth, and make suggestions for how employees can achieve their goals. They will see that their desire for growth, training, and development is being acknowledged and supported.

5. Promote health and energy. In addition to modeling resilient attitudes and behaviors yourself, there are many ways that you as a manager can promote team health and energy.

The simplest and most straightforward thing you can do is to make team members aware of everything the company offers in the way of stress management, time-management courses, health facilities, nutrition counseling, mindfulness, and health and

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wellness programs. Talk about how important you think these resources are and encourage people to make use of them.

- Schedule meetings and allow flexibility so that people can make use of these programs.
- When you have team functions, provide food options that encourage healthy eating habits.
- Be intentional about encouraging people to take care of themselves as they also pursue business results.
- Let employees unplug after work. Our “always-on, multitasking work environments are killing productivity, dampening creativity, and making us unhappy,” write management consultants Derek Dean and Caroline Webb in McKinsey Quarterly. All of us need time to rest and reenergize in order to stay resilient. Let your team members know the times when you expect them not to be trying to connect. For example, you might discourage or ban work email and texts on weekends or after a certain hour in the evening, except for real emergencies. Be sure to not reward people for being “always on,” and look for opportunities to thank people for excellent work done during normal business hours.

If you invest effort in building your team’s resilience, there will be payoffs in the short term, but the biggest payoffs are in the expansion of capability and energy for the long term. Remember, small actions can make a big difference over time. You don’t have to do everything all at once. But resolve today to do at least one thing that will build greater resilience in your team.

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