

Your Role as a Leader in Building Team Resilience

1st February 2020

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 are in a team setting in which they feel they have a measure of ownership and control.

Similarly, a key component of resilience is seeking support as needed, and learning from difficulty. That's much more likely to occur if a manager encourages personal connections and emphasizes growth and learning among team members.

Five resilience builders

Encourage individual and team problem-solving. By encouraging employees to get involved in problem-solving, you're not only solving the problem, you're demonstrating that their ideas and input are valued and teaching the team to act resiliently, by taking action to solve problems.

- Involve team members in finding solutions to work challenges.
- Encourage employees to problem-solve without you.
- Encourage and acknowledge suggestions from all employees.
- When your group faces a problem and finds solutions, step back together to take note of what you've learned. That will help everyone react positively and proactively when the next challenge arises.

Acknowledge and show that you value people's personal responsibilities.

- Make yourself aware of your organization'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 people's work-life responsibilities by including team members' important personal commitments into the team's planning calendar — graduations, religious holidays, other important occasions — so that wherever possible, these dates don't conflict with team meetings or project plans.

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- Foster flexible work practices that provide employees with more choice and control over how, when, and where they work. Flexibility enables people to better manage work and personal priorities, which reduces stress, builds resilience, and enhances effectiveness.

Strengthen social support and connections within the team. There is mounting research that shows that people with greater social connections live longer, suffer less depression, stay healthier, and remain more resilient than those with few social connections. A Gallup Organization study 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.

Rather than thinking of these social connections as distractions from the "real" work, think of the time invested in building connections within the team as "social capital" that can yield many dividends.

- 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 humour and fun into the hard work.
- Plan team-building activities. 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 between team members who may never see one another. 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.

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 organization offers training programs and opportunities for professional development. It's your job to provide flexibility and to offer encouragement so that employees take advantage of these programs.

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- Performance management is another avenue for providing employees with opportunities for growth and development. And it's here that you as a manager have tremendous impact. Host periodic discussions with your team members about their individual goals and plans. Take the time to explore with employees 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.

Promote health and energy. Other than modeling resilient attitudes and behaviours 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 make team members aware of everything their employer offers in the way of stress management, time-management courses, health facilities, nutrition counselling, and health and wellness programs. Talk about how important you think these things 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 reinforce healthy eating habits.
- Be intentional about encouraging people to take care of themselves as they also pursue business results.

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. 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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