

## Team Resilience – How do you adapt and thrive together when the going gets tough?



In my recent work with teams I've noticed contrasting moods of energy and commitment along with a sense of overwhelm. The challenge for Leadership teams is to balance the needs of clients, their teams and key stakeholders while delivering stretching targets in (often) changing markets. That's what makes the role interesting and demanding. And it creates pressure. Our reaction can be to push harder to succeed by doing more and increasing pace of delivery just when we need to slow down to create space to think and renew energy.

And it's a recipe for negative stress or even burnout if teams don't pay attention to their ability to perform through intensity. I don't mean 'toughing it out'. It's about supporting individual and collective energy so that teams continue to think well together and can respond thoughtfully rather than being triggered into knee jerk reactions.

We know that people respond differently to events and change. It's not the event itself that is stressful

– it's our response. It's what we believe, think, feel and do that impacts the results we get:

"Highly resilient people are flexible, adapt to new circumstances quickly, and thrive in constant change. Most importantly, they expect to bounce back and feel confident they will. They have a knack for creating good luck out of circumstances that many others see as bad luck." (Siebert, 2005).

### *So, what sets us up to adapt and thrive?*

S.R. Maddi's seminal piece of research over 12 years with Illinois Bell Telephone company as it went through dramatic, stressful change due to deregulation distilled three attitudes and strategies that lead to resilience in action.

## *Our Mindset matters*

He called these attitudes the 3 Cs:

**Challenge** – believing that life is naturally stressful and challenging so stress becomes a motivating force. Change is inherent in life and gives you an opportunity to learn and change.

**Commitment** – having an active, engaged stance towards life. Having a sense of purpose leads people to persevere, influence and stay involved with what is going on around them (see our previous blogs on purpose).

**Personal Control** – a mindset of accepting challenges and working to overcome and master them. Finding possibilities and opportunities even when change is outside their control. I regularly see this commitment and drive to find creative ways around challenges. One leader I worked with saw this as what made it “fun”. And ironically when there’s too much of this, it can become exhausting.

We all struggle at times. Developing resilience is about supporting ourselves and each other in what David Whyte aptly calls those “Dark nights of the soul”.

## *Three ways to thrive when the going gets tough*

Maddi identified 3 “hardy strategies”:

**Problem-solving coping** – identifying stressful circumstances, working out what can be done to turn them to a growth advantage.

**Socially supportive interactions** – supportive relationships and interactions where it’s OK to sound off or ask for help.

**Beneficial Self Care** – finding ways that work for you to look after yourself and recharge

My sense is that looking after yourself is the foundation. If you do that and find ways to support each other and get the support you need you are in a better place to be able to spot and work through stressful circumstances.

## *Six ways of using support to build Resilience*

You can do these individually and/or incorporate them into team meetings. When you do this as a team it creates permission to be open and bring our humanity and frailties into the room. You’ll find additional resources at the end of this blog and look out for our other posts where we’ll share two further great, practical tools for team resilience.

**What things energise and resource me/ you?** Find the things that feed your energy and set you up to be at your best. James Bailey (HBR) interviewed Executives about how they renew themselves and found 4 themes Health (exercise, diet, sleep); Removal (something that whisks you away);



Intellectual (study, puzzles, hobbies like model building) and Introspection (mindfulness, time for reflection, participation in support groups).

**How am I/are you right now?** Take time to notice. Using a scale of 1-10 (low to high) can help you to get a clearer sense of where you are right now and where you want to be. Once you notice, you can decide what kind of renewal you need. You can do this informally or give each team member time to share (succinctly!) at the beginning of a meeting. This kind of “check-in” helps people to be really present and improves focus.

**Seek out and offer social support.** This can be as simple as taking time out with a colleague for coffee or lunch and asking, “How are you really?” (and don’t accept the answer “fine”). At times it will mean shared thinking to get perspective or simply letting off steam. The crucial ingredient is to be clear what stays confidential between you.

**Using a check-in process to start meetings normalizes showing concern.** Example questions are: What’s on your mind? How are you and what do you want to say to be focused on this meeting? Get to know each other’s hot buttons. Set aside time as a team to discuss what triggers you or frustrates each of you. Doing this means it’s easier to spot when a colleague needs help or support.

**Make it OK to ask for help.** Successful, capable people can struggle with this – and without it it’s hard to feel like you have each other’s backs – a common refrain in my work with teams. Take time as a team to discuss what support looks like to each person, what kind of support you each value.

I worked with a team with great drive, commitment, and a track record of success. The challenge was that they didn’t feel successful. They realised that their unwritten deal was that “asking for help wasn’t OK and we needed to tough it out”. Eventually, the question they articulated and explored was “how do we create a culture where it’s OK to admit that we’re struggling and ask for help?” The question itself felt freeing and started a shift in the way team members supported each other and the permission they created in their own teams to ask for help.

**When the going gets tough – huddle.** Tough situations and challenges need high quality thinking. Carve out time to do the thinking. Often a short discussion to air the challenge and gather thinking and perspectives can stimulate fresh perspectives and aid reflection time. And vice versa. Ask yourself what’s really needed for this situation.

So if you notice that your resilience is low, you’re feeling stressed and you’re still tempted to put your head down and keep going, my thought for the day is **STOP, pause for a moment to notice how you can support yourself (what you need to give yourself or ask for) so that you can reboot and crack on with your next challenge with renewed energy.**

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For more fresh thinking, resources and practical tools visit <https://eye2eyedev.com/resources/>

### **References:**

Maddi, S.R. (2013). *Hardiness: Turning Stressful Circumstances into Growth*. New York, NY: Springer.  
Why leaders don’t brag about managing stress, James R Bailey HBR



Managing with the Brain in Mind – David Rock

Reduce Your Stress in Two Minutes a Day – Greg McKeown HBR

The Power of Resilience – Sam Goldstein, Ph.D. at TEDxRockCreekPark You Tube

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