



AMA RESEARCH

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Employee Engagement, Motivation, and Productivity in the New Workplace

Fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose among remote and hybrid workers.

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Resilience Is More Than Being Able to Bounce Back

There are certain moments you know the world has changed, and is never going to be the same again. This morning I woke up with the thought of writing this editorial, editing layout, and then after work, making pickled tomatillos as Christmas gifts. Then came devastating news that has unalterably changed the world of people I consider as my family.

In between phone calls, texts, and unexpected alterations of travel plans for this weekend, I am still writing this editorial and doing the work I need do. Maybe it's practicality, maybe it's pure Taurean stubbornness (if you believe in that astrology sort of thing). Maybe it's resilience—making plans, scrapping plans, making new plans, but always keeping the end goals in mind, keeping in mind that you're never going back to how things used to be.

This issue is continuing the theme of resilience that has predominated throughout the year. One thing the pandemic has changed is the composition of most workplaces, from all in-person to a combination of remote and in-office teams. Research from AMA examines how to build employee engagement and productivity in these new workplaces. Survey participants stated that although they are working more and producing more, they are feeling less engaged with their co-workers.

Other highlights: Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez addresses how building project management skills is crucial in the post-pandemic reality, and what what qualities are needed to thrive. Charleen Wheeless talks about the phenomenon of the Great Resignation and her personal understanding of what happens when life changes and you can't go back. And Mark Goulston, MD, and Diana Hendel, PharmD, draw on their psychiatry and medical backgrounds to detail why a "trauma plan" is necessary in these times and how to build one.

As 2021 wanes and 2022 comes closer, the world will continue to shift. And AMA will continue to provide the skills and tools you need to go with the changes and not yearn for the past.

Christiane Truelove
Guest Editor, *AMA Quarterly*

AMA QUARTERLY

JOURNAL OF THE
AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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AMA Quarterly® (ISSN 2377-1321) is published quarterly by American Management Association International, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019-7420, FALL 2021, Volume 7, Number 3. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to American Management Association, 600 AMA Way, Saranac Lake, NY 12983-5534.

American Management Association is a nonprofit educational association chartered by the Board of Regents of the State of New York. *AMA Quarterly* is an independent forum for authoritative views on business and management issues.

Submissions. We encourage submissions from prospective authors. For guidelines, write to The Guest Editor, *AMA Quarterly*, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019-7420 or email editor@amanet.org. Unsolicited manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Letters are encouraged. Mail: Letters, *AMA Quarterly*, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019-7420; email: editor@amanet.org. *AMA Quarterly* reserves the right to excerpt and edit letters. Names and addresses must accompany all submissions.

Subscriptions. Executive and Individual Members of American Management Association receive *AMA Quarterly* as part of their annual dues, a nonrefundable \$50 of which is allocated for the subscription to *AMA Quarterly*. Single copies are available at \$25 plus shipping and handling. Requests should be sent to sgoldman@amanet.org

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New Year, New Challenges for Leaders

As we enter 2022, many leaders are finding themselves facing a new reality. Call it the organizational version of “long COVID”: The acute impact may or may not ever be over, but the lingering effects remain.

After headlines early in the pandemic proclaiming that for many, remote work was yielding increased productivity and engagement, data (including our own reported in this issue) now suggest that a significant fraction of companies are at risk of entering a new phase. Characterized by burnout and decreased engagement, it’s a problematic period. Many employees are saying that while they are getting more done, they are also stressed by staff shortages and heavy workloads. The professional networks that used to provide support and camaraderie are suffering—and along with them, so is cross-department collaboration. Employees are recognizing the need to upgrade their skills, while for many tensions over returning to the office remain unresolved.

The good news is that this is a moment when great managers can make all the difference.

Taking another page from our COVID metaphor, it’s up to managers to diagnose and treat each of their employees. The Job Demands–Resource Model, an academic model for explaining stress and engagement, provides a guide.

It suggests there is a balance for each employee: on one side, the demands of the job and all that goes with it; on the other, the resources they have access to. Recognizing when the demands of a job have grown, great managers realize they have two choices if they want to engage and motivate their people: Address those demands or find ways to tip the balance on the resource side.

While there are some job demands that a manager can’t impact, it can be empowering to know that almost anything that creates additional resources for an employee can have a positive effect. Recognition, appreciation, training, tangible rewards, empathy, autonomy, and empowerment are just some examples.

To get started, managers can ask themselves:

- Are there job demands that I can reduce? It doesn’t have to be big to make a difference—every reduction in job demands is positive. More time for an employee to think can lead to incremental innovation in the areas you control.
- How can I increase connection to our organization’s purpose and others within the organization? Effective communication around the purpose and importance of the work people do can often be lost when tactical issues seem more pressing. Bringing people together to reconnect with each other outside of transactional exchanges of information during the workday is another priority.
- What can I offer in terms of tangible or intangible rewards or support? With a tight labor market, compensation has to be considered, but every manager has the capacity to offer an unlimited supply of genuine appreciation for people and what they do.

If you’d like to think more about these topics with others and develop your skills in any of these areas, please reach out. We have resources to help. It’s a primary reason why we at AMA exist.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Manny Avramidis". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Manny Avramidis
President and CEO
American Management Association

Employee Engagement, Motivation, and Productivity in the New Workplace

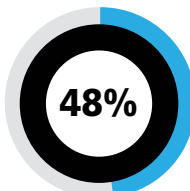
Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Shared Purpose Among Remote and Hybrid Workers

Widely embraced by both small businesses and major corporations—Capital One, Dropbox, Ford Motor Company, Intuit, Reddit, Siemens, and Twitter among them—remote work is here to stay. Among the benefits of working from home, employees consistently cite no more commuting (and the related time and money saved), a more flexible work schedule, and the freedom to live anywhere they want (as long as it has Wi-Fi). Companies that adopt either a fully remote or hybrid work model typically reduce their real estate and facility maintenance costs, sometimes substantially, as well as gain access to a larger and more diverse talent pool. Still, despite its advantages for many workers and organizations, the remote or hybrid workplace is a work in progress, with questions about its long-term effectiveness and impact on employee motivation and productivity.

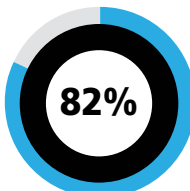
In October 2021, AMA surveyed members and seminar participants nationwide about their level of engagement with work and how that engagement affects both their individual output and their organization overall. Based on the responses of more than 680 participants, people are now working more and producing more but feel less engaged with the work they are doing, with their closest collaborators or teammates, and with other workers

KEY FINDING

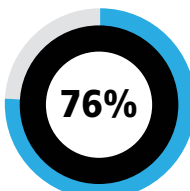
Workers today feel less connected to their co-workers, overwhelmingly due to their company's shift to a fully or partially remote workplace.



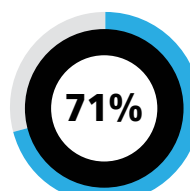
48% of participants said they feel less connected to the people they work with regularly.



82% said they feel less connected to co-workers they work with occasionally.



76% said that feeling less connected to people they work with often or daily has the greatest impact on their sense of belonging.

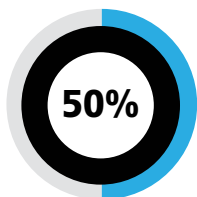


71% said that feeling less connected to people they work with less often most affects their sense of belonging as well.

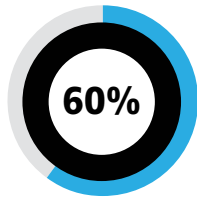


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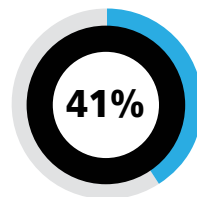
Maintaining employee engagement is a critical challenge for the new hybrid workplace.



50% said the overall productivity of their organization has increased since the pandemic.



60% agreed that overall employee engagement in their organization needs improvement.



Only 41% said their company is focusing on initiatives to drive engagement.

across the organization than they did before the pandemic.

Nearly two-thirds of survey participants said their workload has increased from what it was prior to Covid-19, and slightly over half said their productivity has increased as well. Yet, less than a third said their motivation to

deliver results for their organization has increased. However, among the 27% who reported an increase in motivation, a significant majority—77%—also noted an increase in productivity. Clearly, increasing motivation is crucial to sustaining high productivity among a remote and hybrid workforce. And

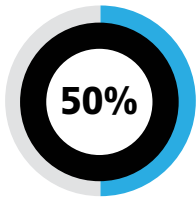
as the responses strongly suggest, the key to increasing both motivation and productivity is keeping employees engaged in their work while reinforcing a shared purpose.

KEY FINDING: Workers today feel less connected to their co-workers, overwhelmingly due to their company's shift to a fully or partially remote workplace. Nearly half of the survey's participants said they feel less connected to the people they work with regularly, if not on a daily basis, than they did before the pandemic, and 82% said they feel less connected to co-workers they work with occasionally. Nearly three-quarters of respondents attributed this loss of connection to working in a hybrid or remote work environment.

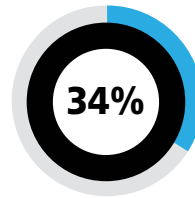
How does the loss of connection with co-workers affect remote workers and their work? Not surprisingly, employees' "sense of belonging" suffers, significantly. Among participants, 76% said that feeling less connected to people they work with often or daily has the greatest impact on their sense of belonging, and 71% said that feeling less connected to people they work with less often most affects their sense of belonging as well. This finding not only affirms the importance of maintaining strong ties among remote and hybrid workers who collaborate on a day-to-day basis—it also supports the importance

KEY FINDING

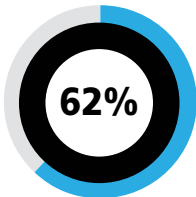
The level of employee engagement has a strong correlation with a company's ability to attract and retain top talent.



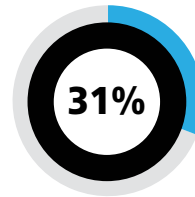
50% of participants said their organization is having difficulty with both attracting new talent and keeping good people.



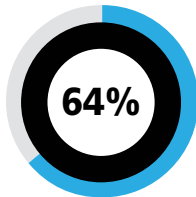
Among respondents who said engagement is better than it was pre-pandemic, just 34% of organizations struggle with recruiting.



62% of those same organizations have problems recruiting quality workers.



31% have an issue with retention.



64% struggle to retain them.

of strengthening the weak ties between employees who seldom work together. When they no longer work in the same building on the same schedule, employees in different departments or divisions rarely cross paths and get the chance to connect. As a result, workers lose the opportunity to create bridges to workers with ideas, perspectives, and access to information beyond their immediate team.

After sense of belonging, participants cited "motivation" as the area most impacted by loss of connection with both close team members (60%) and occasional collaborators (52%). Close to half of the respondents also stated that feeling less connected to co-workers has an impact on their productivity.

KEY FINDING: Maintaining employee engagement is a critical challenge for the new hybrid workplace. Among participants, 50% said the overall productivity of their organization has increased since the pandemic. While less than half noted a decrease in workforce motivation, 60% agreed that overall employee engagement in their organization

needs improvement. Yet only 41% said their company is focusing on initiatives to drive engagement. When asked if their organization is currently holding social activities to keep employees connected, the answer for 55% of participants was no.

KEY FINDING: The level of employee engagement has a strong correlation with a company's ability to attract and retain top talent. More than 50% of participants said their organization is having difficulty with both attracting new talent and keeping good people. Among respondents who said their organization needs to improve employee engagement, 62% of those same organizations have problems recruiting quality workers and 64% struggle to retain them. However, among respondents who said that employee engagement is better than it was before the pandemic, just 34% of those organizations struggle with recruiting and 31% have an issue with retention.

Along with calling attention to the need to foster connection and engagement among remote and hybrid workers, responses shed light on how

the nature of work has changed from pre-pandemic days. In addition to handling a heavier workload while often feeling isolated from their co-workers, today's employees are often compelled to be more efficient and more creative in getting work done. Fifty-four percent of participants said their need for project management skills has increased, and 66% said their need for creativity and innovation skills has increased as well.

As this survey confirms, the transition to remote or hybrid work comes with considerable challenges for both employees and employers. Most notably, when people do not work together in the same actual place and time, and deal with increased responsibilities and pressures, engagement and motivation are bound to suffer. From the essentials of project management for the non-project manager to workshops on coaching and leading virtual teams, AMA offers resources and tools to help both individual contributors and managers rise to those challenges and thrive in the new workplace. [AQ](#)



PROJECT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Help Build Adaptability

BY ANTONIO NIETO-RODRIGUEZ

**In this decade, the world will see more change
and projects than ever.**

The trillions of funds that have been promised for the pandemic recovery mean that there are millions of projects that will require millions of project managers.

A McKinsey survey from May 2020 on the most critical skills organizations need to develop post-COVID-19 highlighted that, for the first time ever, project management was one of the top three.

Yet, despite this outlook, the appalling project failure rates, around 60% to 70%, require us to refresh and redesign the project and change management methods that we use. In fact, the methods we use today were designed for a world where operations were the primary focus and projects were a small fraction of an organization's activities.

In the "Project Economy," as I define it, project-based work becomes the primary unit of work, while operations need less and fewer resources to be carried out. The good news is that project-based work develops your adaptability and resilience. And that is why demand is increasing extraordinarily fast for people who can effectively lead projects.

A quick search on LinkedIn makes it clear just how many job descriptions require sound project management skills and experience. I can totally relate to this, as in two of my previous companies, one of the major skill gaps identified was people capable of leading projects across the organization. While many of us pick up some of these skills by intuition and practice, the reality is that developing sound

“The ability to break down the scope into manageable workloads, identify interdependencies, prioritize the work, and translate the activities into a precise project plan constitutes critical technical skills.”

modern project management skills requires eagerness to learn, dedication, and focus.

Quite simply, great project leaders make their projects more successful. The most effective project manager is like a football coach or an orchestra conductor. As a true team player, this manager can gather a diverse group of people, each with unique expertise, and create a high-performing team out of the different individual talents. Each participant must have a clear role, feel that they are contributing to the purpose of the project, and be appreciated by the others.

A successful project leader is resilient against adversities and knows how and when to adapt. They will also seek diversity in the team composition and encourage and take advantage of diversity of thought.

I believe anyone can develop into a successful project leader. However, the responsibility requires focus, commitment, determination, personal awareness, eagerness to be a continuous learner, and perseverance during times of failure. As Pamela Gill-Alabaster, head of sustainability at Mattel, rightly said, “Continuous learning leads to continuous improvement. Commit yourself to advancing your knowledge, skills, and expertise. The business environment is quickly changing, and your understanding of the leading practices, thinking, and emerging tools will help you manage for better results. Be a lifelong student.”

QUALITIES TO THRIVE IN THE PROJECT ECONOMY

The main qualities needed to excel as a leader in the project-driven world can be grouped into five categories:

- Project management technical skills
- Product development and domain expertise
- Strategy and business acumen
- Leadership and change management skills
- Agility and adaptability

Let’s now explore each of these competencies in turn.

Project management technical skills. Effective project leaders use tools and techniques to determine the rationale and business case of a project. They should be able to work with key contributors and partners in defining scope accurately. The ability to break down the scope into manageable workloads, identify interdependencies, prioritize the work, and translate the activities into a comprehensive, well-defined, and

precise project plan constitutes critical technical skills.

These skills require a good understanding of details (analytical skills) and the overall picture (strategic skills), as well as the interdependencies and trade-offs between scope, time, and budget.

When delays or changes to the plan are foreseen, a good project leader analyzes the consequences and offers viable alternatives to the sponsor and steering committee.

Product development and domain expertise. Modern project leaders need to have product development skills and domain expertise to lead high-impact projects. They should be proficient in whatever offerings the project will generate: the technology (such as AI or Big Data), the features, the product, the service, or other capabilities.

These competencies give you credibility with the team and the stakeholders. They enable you to communicate in the language of the experts and the product teams, and they give you a good grasp of the project benefits and how and when they will be achieved. Your level of expertise should be overarching rather than detailed. It is not your job to decide on or do most of the work, but you need sufficient understanding to be able to challenge the teams.

Strategy and business acumen. A project leader should develop a good understanding of the organization, its strategy, its key competitors, and the environment in which the project will be implemented.

For example, if the project’s purpose is to increase access to education, an effective project leader will need to appreciate a range of educational systems—which systems are the most successful, why they succeed, and which alternatives best fit the specific needs of the project.

The ability to connect the project benefits and purpose to concrete business challenges and priorities is essential for project buy-in and success. Stakeholders, including senior management, will be more supportive if the project leader can make this connection. The most important capability in this category is a strong focus on the benefits and other impacts, even in the early stages. Value creation is a critical and sought-after element in the project-driven world.

Leadership and change management skills. The increased speed of change, greater complexity, overlapping priorities, culture of seeking consensus, multigenerational workforce—all these forces make the implementation of projects much

harder than in the past. Although pure managerial skills were largely sufficient for previous generations, today's project managers must develop strong leadership and sound change management capabilities.

They have to provide direction; communicate progress and changes; evaluate, develop, and engage staff; and motivate people even though the managers have no formal authority. They must also develop the skills to confront and challenge others effectively and respectfully. Diverse opinions and different ways of solving problems will lead to potential conflict throughout the life of the project, and misunderstandings will occur—these are a normal part of conducting projects.

The effective project leader should also be able to engage the project sponsor and obtain the support of senior leadership and the organization for the project. The ability to understand oneself and effectively sustain working relationships with others—in other words, emotional intelligence—is critical. Project leaders have to understand different cultures and how to get the best work from a variety of people; manage and persuade multiple stakeholders, including some who are against the project; build bridges across the organization (which will often be siloed and short on resources); create a high-performing team; and dedicate enough time to develop and coach team members.

Project leaders must make effective decisions and be proactive, disciplined, and results-driven. Finally, they must be resilient—able to bounce back from any difficulties and changes that life throws their way. Resilience is an invaluable leadership skill in projects.

Agility and adaptability. In today's world of constant flux, effective project managers need to feel comfortable working in uncertain situations, making plans and decisions with only limited information. When the initiative's requirements are not known in advance, there is much uncertainty about what the outcomes will look like or whether the requirements are likely to change throughout the lifecycle of the project. In these situations, the project manager should be prepared to apply some Agile methods (or adaptive techniques).

As organizations increasingly sought to become faster and more flexible, they recognized that the Agile principles used in software development could be applied much more broadly to organizations as a whole. Leaders focus on creating this Agile environment by encouraging everyone to contribute, facilitating joint problem solving, and encouraging all project team members to take accountability for individual and team outcomes.

Agile leadership is the craft of creating the right conditions for self-organization. Finding the balance between anarchy and an overly strict structure is crucial in today's markets. Developing and maintaining this environment is often hard work, requiring you to focus on the needs of others and promote an ownership

mindset, feedback, and long-term goals. In this environment, micromanagement takes a back seat to agile teams that collaborate, learn from each other continuously, get quick feedback from users, and focus on quality.

THE XTH FACTOR

Besides the five key competencies of project leadership, a good attitude is also essential. I label attitude the "xth competency" and not the sixth, because it has a multiplier effect on all the other competencies and the overall success of the project. Attitude is contagious. As the project manager or project sponsor, your attitude will strongly influence other people around you.

Attitudes are established ways of responding to people and situations—ways that we have learned from our beliefs, values, and assumptions. Attitudes manifest themselves through our behavior and help us persevere through the most challenging moments of the project. Attitude is sometimes more important than facts, the past, and education. A knowledgeable and experienced project manager without a positive attitude will often fail to deliver the project. When choosing a leader for a highly demanding project, organizations are better off with someone who is less experienced or lacks some competencies but who has a strong, positive attitude.

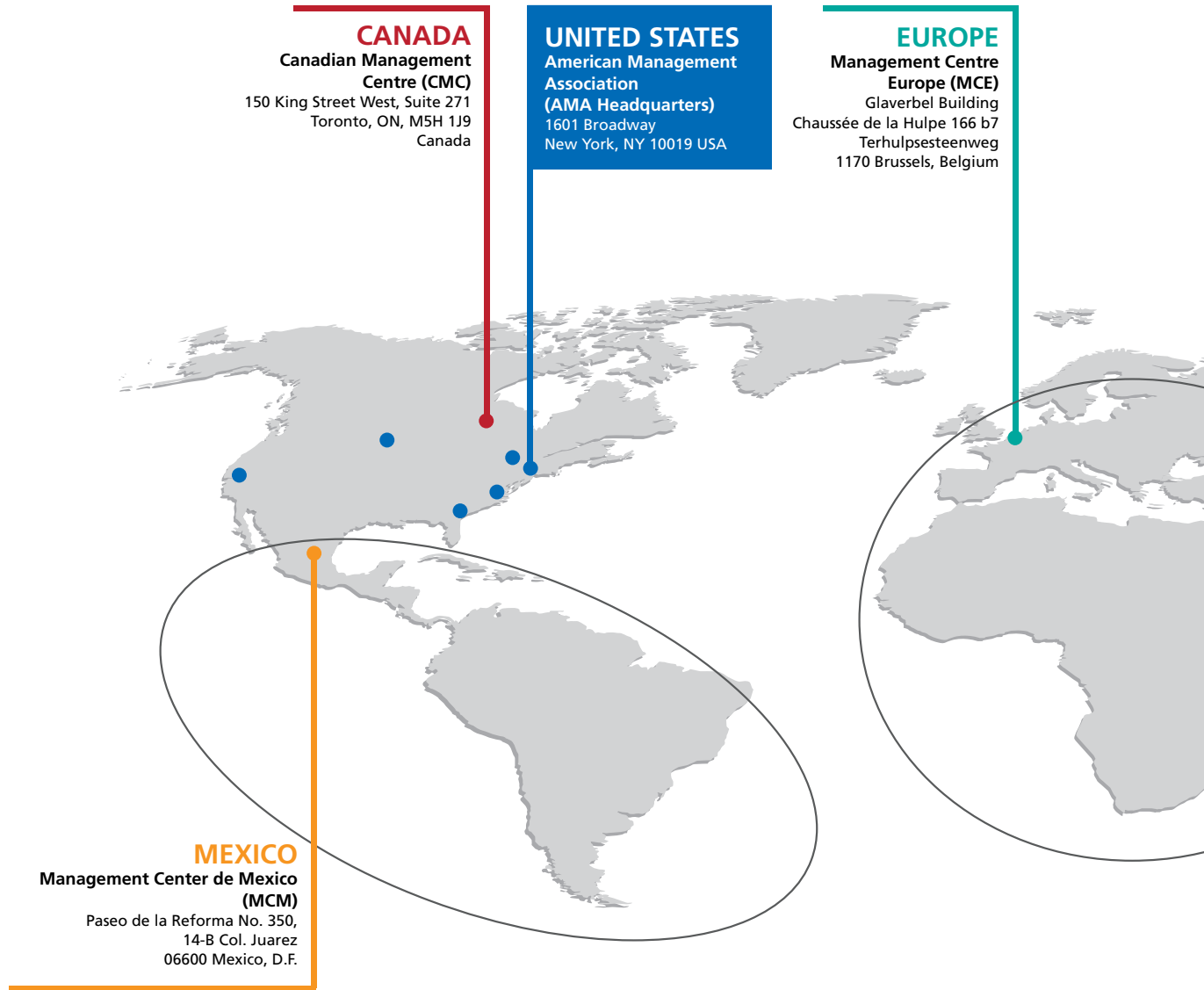
Maintaining a positive frame of mind requires effort. Even when times are difficult, as they often are with projects, look for the bright side of every situation. Spending time with optimistic people will help you stay positive. Expressing gratitude is another powerful way to keep a positive attitude. Show appreciation to your team members and their contributions. They will probably contribute even more to your current project and want to work with you on future projects.

I am convinced that anyone can develop these project management competencies and become more adaptive and resilient, but it requires commitment, determination, personal awareness, and the desire to learn. Good project leadership not only improves projects but also positively shapes organizational culture as well.

Are you ready for it? [AQ](#)

Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez is a leading expert in project management and strategy implementation, creator of concepts such as the "Project Economy" and the "Hierarchy of Purpose." His work has been recognized by Thinkers50 with the prestigious award "Ideas into Practice." He is the author of the recently published Harvard Business Review Project Management Handbook, as well as Lead Successful Projects, The Project Revolution, and The Focused Organization. He has been teaching the value of project management to senior leaders for more than two decades at Duke CE, Instituto de Empresa, Solvay Business School, and Vlerick. Nieto-Rodriguez has held executive positions at PricewaterhouseCoopers, BNP Paribas, and GlaxoSmithKline. Former chairman of the Project Management Institute, he is the founder of Projects & Co and co-founder of the Strategy Implementation Institute. He is a member of Marshall Goldsmith 100 coaches.

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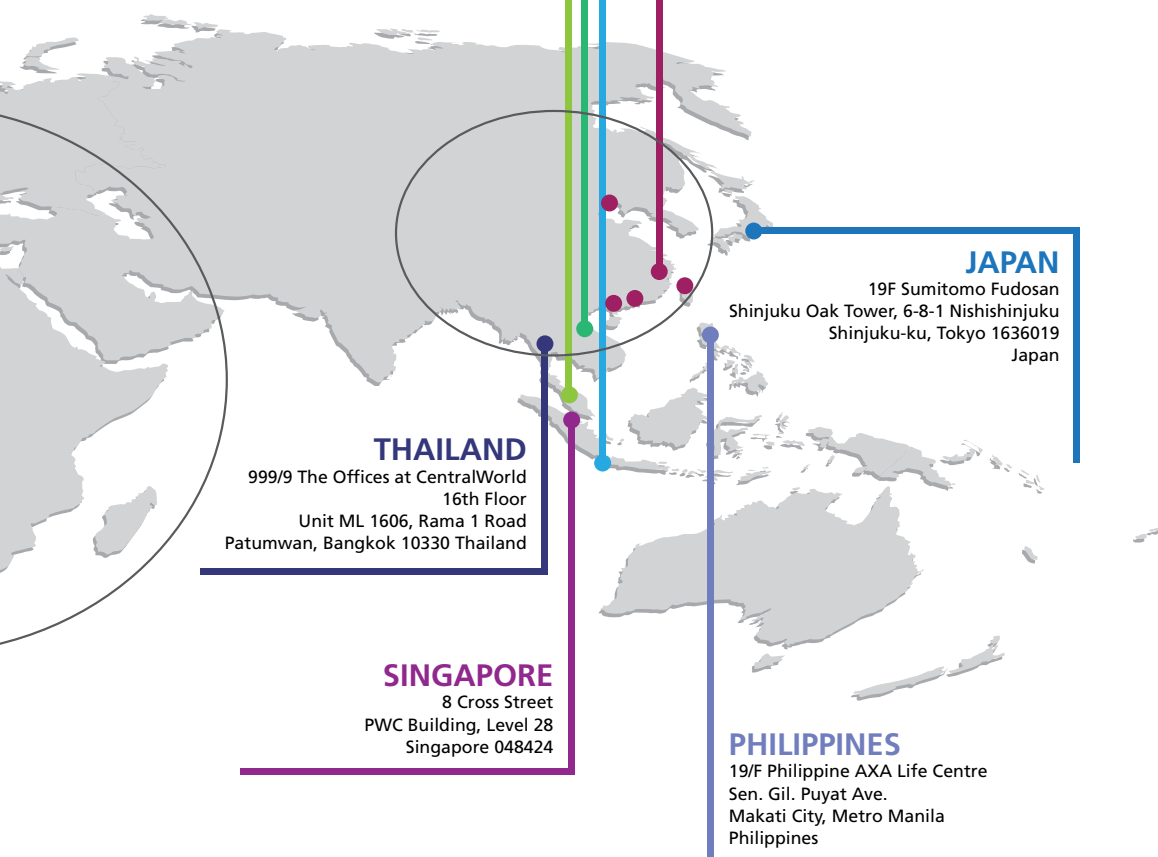
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A person in a blue lab coat is working in a laboratory. The scene is dominated by blue and yellow light. In the foreground, a microscope is visible. In the background, a network diagram with yellow nodes and lines is overlaid on a blurred image of the person. The overall atmosphere is one of scientific research and technology.

I Was Part of the **GREAT RESIGNATION** Before It Was a Thing

BY CHARLEEN WHEELLESS

There are a lot of conversations and even more articles about the trend being called “the Great Resignation.”

A quick Google search on the topic resulted in 446,000,000 articles and books in .66 seconds. It is on everyone’s mind, especially leaders of organizations who are still grappling with attracting new workers, hanging onto the ones they have, and understanding what this new hybrid work culture is all about. Some have suggested it’s the great reset, and I tend to think they are right.

But, for many of us, and especially minority women, understanding some of the factors fueling the Great Resignation—and why these factors involve resilience—started well before the pandemic. It seems like others are just catching up to what resilience is really all about, and how it looks and feels. Most Black women mastered resiliency at the earliest ages because racist and discriminatory behavior starts well before a person enters the workforce. When you are constantly made to feel invisible or that you don’t measure up to the ideal required for you to succeed, you must be resilient. You quickly learn how to compartmentalize negative behaviors you face, how to show up and how not to, and how to trade in your authentic self for the normalized version of a successful executive.

Nearly four years ago, I was at the top of my game in my field. As the saying goes, I was “kicking butt and taking names.” I was more stressed out than I think I’ve ever been, but I didn’t care. I’m resilient, remember? I reveled in the stress because it signaled responsibility. Jetting across the world meant I had something important to say and do, and that paycheck meant that I could have (almost) anything I wanted. What I didn’t know at the time was that I was about to learn an entirely new lesson about resilience, what it means to thrive, and what it means to lead under these circumstances. I would finally have the answer to that often asked but rarely answered question, “Was it worth it?”

While I was busting up stereotypes and breaking through walls, my body was waging war. A war that I later learned was cancer. I would have about nine surgeries in three years, one of my breasts would explode (yes, it really happened), and I would nearly die at least three times that I remember.

The most jarring was that after spending 30-plus years building a life that I loved, cancer took it away and replaced it with something and someone I didn’t even know. Physically, I was still me, just with a few body parts missing. Mentally, I was all over the place. Everywhere and nowhere at the same time. When I could finally close the door on the first part of

my treatment protocol, which initially took two years, I looked up and didn’t recognize myself after the dust cleared. My outward appearance had not changed much, but internally, an entirely different scenario was playing out. I didn’t understand my life anymore.

AN IDENTITY CRISIS

When I was diagnosed with cancer, one of my first thoughts was, “I know how to be an executive; I don’t know how to have cancer.” But when it seemed like it was nearly over, the script had flipped, and I thought, “I only know how to have cancer.” And when I attempted to reenter the workplace, I was hit with a jarring realization: I didn’t fit neatly back into that life either.

Perhaps I just realized that I never fit in. I was so busy proving who I wasn’t, I didn’t always stop to remind myself who I was because I knew the answer would always be the same: the only Black woman in the room or at the table. As a Black woman who has worked in corporations and industries that were white and male, I achieved success. But now, I had to ask myself the hard questions: What did I give up for that success? What am I going to do in the future? What type of leader am I going to be now?

The first part was easy compared to the rest of it. I knew it was time to go. I chose me. I tapped out. Under no other circumstance could I ever have imagined I would be the woman to walk away from a lucrative career I had spent my entire life preparing for and building. It wasn’t about a pending global pandemic—we knew nothing of what was ahead for the world. It was about the racial pandemic I had been fighting my entire life, and I just had enough. It was time to start my Great Resignation.

When I started my career in the late 1980s, I gladly woke up every morning, happily prepared for work wearing my smart business suit and sensible heels. And, just before leaving my apartment, I’d put on the essential garment I needed that day and nearly every day since—an invisible but very real suit of armor. It provided me with the protection I needed to ward off the many subtle—and not so subtle—aggressions that I knew were ahead of me that day.

And for the most part, it worked. It enabled me to say “thank you” instead of getting angry when someone complimented me on being articulate. By the way, ask any minority who has been told these words, and they will tell you that it is not a compliment. Did you expect me to be inarticulate? It enabled

“What’s happening today, during this ‘Great Resignation,’ I believe is the realization by thousands of people—many who are women—that they are enough. And no longer should it be required to fit in to be successful.”

me to swallow my tongue when ignored, even if I was the smartest person in the room that day. It helped me keep my passion in check lest I become the angry Black woman in the office. I could go on, but I think you get my point.

Fast-forward several years, and I traded in that suit of armor for a super-hero cape. I was a working mother, and as most women know, if you’re a working mother, you need to be a super-hero to get things done—at work, at home, and everywhere else in your life. Yes, I still needed my suit of armor. It’s important to know that just because you have a seat at the table does not mean that everyone is comfortable with you being there. The tropes and acts of aggression don’t go away; they just become different. To the degree possible, I was prepared, and it worked until it didn’t.

I was not prepared for my post-cancer career. I found that I needed that suit of armor more than ever, but I also needed that super-hero cape to turn back into who I used to be at work—the go-along-to-get-along and overachiever type.

In walking back into a life that I wasn’t sure I fit into anymore, I found that it’s tough to fly, to soar, when a suit of armor is weighing you down. It just doesn’t work. Within weeks, if not days, it was apparent that I was no longer up to the life I had spent so long building—so long molding myself into every company’s ideal, or as close as I could get to it, of the nonthreatening Black woman. The one who could help solve every company’s diversity problem just by existing, by taking the time to explain to white executives why it was so hard to work days and weeks after the George Floyd murder. For Black people and women, there’s been a knee on our neck for most of our lives. In the movie *RBG*, about Ruth Bader Ginsburg, she is quoted saying, “I ask for no favor for my sex. All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks.” Though the movie makes it sound original, it is a paraphrase of a letter by the

19th-century abolitionist and women’s suffragist Sarah Moore Grimké.

For me, it was time to pivot. To put away the cape, shed the suit of armor, and recognize that it took me three decades of listening to people in positions above me tell me all the reasons why I was not good enough, and a scary-as-hell cancer diagnosis, to realize that I was enough all along.

WHY WE’RE LEAVING

What’s happening today, during this Great Resignation, I believe is the realization by thousands of people—many who are women—that they are enough. And no longer should it be required to fit in to be successful. We don’t want to play that game anymore. We are taking our marbles and going home because we don’t like the rules. Black people, especially Black women, are citing they had more psychological safety working from home during the pandemic than in the office. They didn’t have to pretend or ward off subtle attacks and diminishments from co-workers when working remotely. They could focus on doing what they wanted to do most—good work that brought value to their organizations without judgment. After months away from the office, they realized that their work environment was not good for their emotional and physical health. And, they don’t want to go back.

Researchers point to a myriad of behaviors leaders need to perfect to help their employees feel safe and comfortable at work. They must tune into their employees’ mental health and well-being; give everyone the chance to be their best self; ensure their people feel valued, respected, and heard; and the list goes on. These leadership behaviors are not new. Minorities, people from underrepresented and underserved communities, and women of all races have asked for these considerations for hundreds of years. So why the panic now? Why all the attention on these topics now when many employers didn’t care enough before?

There’s no magic answer to the question of how to stem the Great Resignation. The solutions will take time. It’s hard to change ingrained behaviors in an individual, let alone an entire organizational construct. So I will provide two pieces of advice for leaders to consider. First and foremost, lead with empathy, humanity, and compassion. And remember the words of the late Dr. Maya Angelou, “When you know better, you do better.” So, do better. [AQ](#)

Charleen Wheeless describes herself as “an accelerant for other people’s success.” In her work as a keynote speaker, author, and leadership and personal development coach, she delights audiences and helps individuals and organizations chart a roadmap to success. She specializes in strategic communications; diversity, equity, and justice in the workplace; and people development. Wheeless is the author of You Are Enough! Reclaiming Your Career and Your Life with Purpose, Passion, and Unapologetic Authenticity (Amplify Publishing, May 2021).



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Resilience Depends on Having a **'TRAUMA PLAN'** in Place

BY MARK GOULSTON, MD, AND DIANA HENDEL, PHARM D

We're all facing unprecedented and ongoing upheaval.

Between supply chain woes, “the Great Resignation,” social and political turmoil, and the ongoing legacy of COVID-19, organizations in every industry have been forced to drastically alter the way they do business. These new disruptions are coming on top of older ones that have been around for decades: rapid advances in AI, tech-driven shake-ups, shifting consumer behaviors, and more.

We can expect more of the same in the foreseeable future. This is just how we live now, moving from one massive change to the next. Frequency, intensity, and duration have all been ramped up. We've entered a new era of uncertainty, volatility, and disruption.

We say all of this to lay the groundwork for two overarching and intertwined points:

Point 1: The accelerated level of chaos is driving home the need for organizational resilience. This is a quality that's always been linked to long-term success, and it's doubly important now. Without resilience, companies won't be able to pivot in response to changing market conditions, let alone when the next COVID-like crisis strikes. The ability to pull

together, switch gears, and quickly adapt when needed must be baked into the culture.

Point 2: The same conditions that make organizational resilience so necessary also tend to destroy it. Why? Because living through a major crisis, in conjunction with an unending stream of disruptions, tends to have an incredibly destructive effect on people. In many cases, employees have moved past stress and straight to trauma—and undealt-with trauma weakens an organization's culture in dramatic ways.

Specifically, it can cause polarization. Businesses often struggle with questions that appear as choices between one side and another. For example, is the business better served by focusing on high quality or low cost? Should it be focused on short-term gain or success in the long run? Is maximizing financial margin more important than fulfillment of mission? People tend to have different ideas on these issues even in the best of times, but trauma can stoke and inflame them.

WHY TRAUMA INDUCES SPLITS

When a traumatic event occurs, opposing views can be taken



to the extreme, and rifts can divide the organization. People believe the right course of action is either “A” or “B.” Their opinion is rigid and unmovable, and they see themselves as right and the other side as wrong. When one side is chosen and the other ignored, its drawbacks and weak points quickly emerge. More often than not, leaders will then reverse course and go to the other extreme—which of course has downsides as well.

It’s not uncommon for tugs-of-war to ensue and the pendulum to swing back and forth. With every swing of the pendulum, division deepens. Needless to say, this is antithetical to creating organizational resilience!

Of course, addressing trauma isn’t only about resilience. It’s the right thing to do on virtually every front. The subject of mental health in the workplace has come “out of the closet” in a big way in the past couple of years. Companies are realizing that healthy, happy employees are more engaged, innovative, higher performing, and loyal. Those that prioritize employee well-being are more likely to attract and retain good talent.

All of that said, it’s critical to have a plan to help your organization prepare for trauma so that when (not if!) it occurs, you’re ready to respond. While the plan will look different for each company, here are a few core ideas to keep in mind:

Deploy your Rapid Response Process right away. Everyone, leaders and employees alike, needs to know what to do when a trauma occurs. This requires knowing their roles and responsibilities. A Rapid Response Process (also known as a Code Blue) is a plan that enables fast, sound decision making and that ensures a standardized, safety-focused approach for moving forward through disruption. When creating yours, consider following these steps:

- **Assemble your team.** Delays in taking action can be costly, so create a Rapid Response Team and define each person’s role before a trauma occurs. Your team should include senior leadership as well as leaders of key functions such as finance, security, HR, operations/logistics, communications/PR, and facilities.
- **Appoint a “central commander” and allow that person to delegate.** Navigating a crisis by committee can be too unwieldy and time-consuming. Choose a leader for your Rapid Response Team who will be in charge of assigning personnel, obtaining additional resources, coordinating with external partners, and so on. Make sure this individual is present, accessible, and able to lead with calmness, resolve, and empathy.
- **Get your team to the command center, stat.** A command center (or operations center) is a physical or virtual location from which the Rapid Response Team can run its operations.



“Leaders should be very visible in times of crisis and afterward. This helps prevent false or negative narratives that would divide your team from filling the void.”

Ideally, it should be sequestered (away from the chaos) and large enough to house the whole team. We also recommend that you select a code word (such as “Code Blue” or “Code Rapid Response”) to signal that you have pulled the cord and that your team needs to get into position.

- **Compile key information, facts, and data.** What do you know? What do you still need to find out? What’s relevant? What isn’t? Make sure you have the information necessary to meet your organization’s most urgent needs and to deploy resources effectively and efficiently.

- **Communicate a “we’re all in this together” message.** When disruption strikes, the shared experience draws people together. You can capitalize on this phenomenon—and nip divisive behaviors like blaming and shaming in the bud—by proactively spreading a message of unity.

Watch for signs of trauma (and don’t call it stress). We need to know the difference between stress and trauma. They are two different animals and must be treated in different ways. While stress can be intense and unbalancing, it does not make us feel that we’ve completely lost control—and it eventually passes. Trauma, though, is overwhelming. It robs us of our sense of safety, fundamentally changes how we view the world, and sends us into survival mode.

Just as a drowning person doesn’t always scream and flail, traumatized employees don’t always exhibit outward signs like crying, shaking, or sweating. They do experience a “fight, flight, freeze” survival response, which manifests in a variety of ways. Some employees might become disagreeable or contrary or have angry outbursts. Others will rigidly adhere to “the way we’ve always done things” and resist adapting to the new situation. Still others will adopt an “I’m fine; everything’s fine” attitude even though they are plainly struggling.

Be sure to keep an eye on leaders after a trauma too. Some might hunker down in their offices instead of leading by example. Others might begin to make uncharacteristically hasty decisions.

Make clear and frequent communication a top priority.

After a traumatic incident, people have a great need to know what is happening and why. Leaders should be very visible in times of crisis and afterward. This helps prevent false or negative narratives that would divide your team from filling the void. The acronym VITAL will enable you to communicate regularly, consistently, and effectively after a crisis:

- **Visible.** As a leader, make sure you are front and center. Important messages should come directly from you, not a spokesperson. Share information in a timely manner.

- **In it together.** Emphasize unity, camaraderie, and the importance of coming together for better outcomes—but resist the impulse to tell people to “buck up.” Make sure they know that fear and anxiety are normal.
- **Transparent.** Ensure that all leaders are on the same page regarding what the external situation is, what challenges your organization is facing, and what you need to do to overcome them. Moving forward with resilience depends on timely, consistent communication. Share bad news and dispel rumors as soon as possible.
- **Accessible.** Use a variety of communication channels such as email, video, livestream, intranet, and text to connect the senior leader to the rest of the organization. If you haven’t held town halls in the past, implement them now. We also recommend setting up a central location (usually on your intranet site) where people can get information, receive messages, and ask questions.
- **Listening.** Remember that communication is a two-way street. It’s just as important to listen (really listen!) to your employees’ concerns, questions, criticisms, and challenges. Then, respond thoughtfully and empathetically.

LEADING THE WAY OUT OF TRAUMA

Here are a few things to keep in mind if your workplace is in a trauma situation, and how you can set a clear path.

A natural camaraderie emerges in the wake of trauma.

Let it work for you. Earlier we talked about the fight, flight, freeze response that occurs when people are traumatized. What many don’t realize is that there is a fourth “F” as well: *friend*. As we mentioned earlier, the shared experience of living through a traumatic event causes people to bond. (If you’re curious, oxytocin—or the “love hormone”—is responsible. After it is released, it can counteract high cortisol levels and temporarily mitigate the effects of fear.)

Take advantage of the fourth F as soon as possible by highlighting acts of heroism and service, and by emphasizing that “we’re all in this together.” If you don’t leverage the power of the fourth F, it may work against you. Instead of all coming together, your people may start to point fingers, assign blame, and divide into deeply polarized factions (which harms morale and resilience).

Nip polarization in the bud by using “both/and.” Earlier we described how people tend to split into opposing factions following a traumatic crisis. You can protect your company’s culture from damaging polarization—and boost resilience—by adopting a “both/and” mentality. First, throw “either/or” thinking out the window. Then, leverage the positive effects of courses A and B while mitigating as many drawbacks as possible.

For instance, in the aftermath of trauma, leaders can demonstrate commitment to goals *and* stay flexible as new

developments arise. They can zero in on details *and* see the big picture. They can focus on getting results *and* building healthy relationships. You get the picture.

As time goes on, talk openly about what happened. There’s often a temptation to shy away from talking about trauma, or to refer to it by a euphemism such as “the incident.” Instead, we recommend proactively “naming, claiming, and framing” it. This is vital for resilience because everyone needs to understand what happened, emotionally process it, and seek help if necessary. Naming, claiming, and framing also gives everyone a shared language to discuss the trauma—which reinforces organizational unity.

Find ways to convey unity, hope, and meaning. People need to see that coming together in response to trauma ensures better outcomes in both the short and long term. Double down on messages that connect to team-building, camaraderie, and purpose. Show plenty of empathy and avoid blame or finger-pointing. (This creates an “us versus them” mentality. If you see this happening, denounce it.)

You might also give people meaningful projects to do. For example, start a fundraiser for a cause or group connected to the trauma your organization has experienced. Having something to rally behind will help with bonding and team-building and enhance a collective sense of belonging.

Knowing how to recognize, face, and overcome organizational trauma should be an important part of every leader’s resilience toolkit. Especially in today’s unpredictable business climate, you can’t control everything, but you can be prepared to navigate whatever crisis comes your way. The sooner you begin to mitigate damage and start the healing process, the better positioned your organization will be to recover and thrive in the future. [AQ](#)

Dr. Mark Goulston, MD, FAPA, is the co-author of Trauma to Triumph: A Roadmap for Leading Through Disruption and Thriving on the Other Side (HarperCollins Leadership, March 2021) and Why Cope When You Can Heal?: How Healthcare Heroes of COVID-19 Can Recover from PTSD (Harper Horizon, December 2020). He is a board-certified psychiatrist, fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, former assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at UCLA-NPI, and a former FBI and police hostage negotiation trainer. He is the creator of Theory Y Executive Coaching that he provides to CEOs, presidents, founders, and entrepreneurs, and is a TEDx and international keynote speaker.

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FIVE WAYS

to Develop Leadership in the Post-Pandemic Future

BY MOSTAFA SAYYADI

As we continue to move toward a post-pandemic world, there is a critical question around how a company's characteristics impact leadership development.



Business literature, to date, has failed to provide a comprehensive framework that incorporates all the internal resources that can help or hinder how leaders are developed. What's more, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to examining the implications of these specific company characteristics.

With this in mind, I conducted research with 48 executives in North America, across a range of industries, to better understand the factors influencing leadership development. Many agreed that while leadership development has become a focal point for their organization, it has not been aligned closely enough with internal resources to enable it to drive the organization's success. Following my discussions—which took the form of telephone interviews—I found that leadership development is heavily influenced by the characteristics of organizations themselves in five specific areas: structure, culture, strategy, intercompany social networks, and stakeholder orientation.

THE AREAS THAT CAN AFFECT LEADERSHIP

Corporate structure. Leaders seek to inspire their followers to generate new solutions and create a better environment. The executives I spoke to suggested that a highly centralized structure has a negative impact on creative leadership, while decentralization positively contributes to leaders developing a more innovative milieu.

Decentralized structures play a crucial role when it comes to facilitating the exchange of ideas and the implementation of more innovative solutions. This is because they empower decision making at all levels of the organization. Highly formalized structures are also more bureaucratic, which hinders the development of leadership that aims to transform existing situations and build a better environment.

Corporate culture. When I asked the executives how corporate culture can work best for them, they argued that trust is an important component of a collaborative culture, as it helps to develop and maintain organizational communication.

From a cultural perspective, collaboration and trust are both critical aspects of leadership development, since they help leaders to develop relationships with their subordinates. A leader's ability to build a more innovative environment is also highly dependent on the extent to which their subordinates trust them. Hence a corporate culture that instills trust in subordinates enables leaders because it mobilizes their followers' support for the leadership vision. Distrust, on the other hand, impairs leadership development.

Corporate strategy. Another priority for executives was corporate strategy, encompassing analysis, defensiveness, proactiveness, and planning for the future. The aim of analysis is to find the best solution for solving corporate

problems or achieving objectives through the assessment of various options. Future planning contributes to a leader's ability to develop a more future-oriented vision for their organization.

I asked the executives how they felt about these two approaches. They responded that the strategic aspects of both analysis and future planning may have a positive impact on leadership development. In fact, these approaches help executives to develop a shared long-term vision for the future. Moreover, analysis creates more knowledge, which can improve leadership effectiveness through generating innovative solutions to address both organizational problems and strategic development. Every executive I spoke to mentioned that leaders' effectiveness is improved when they take a proactive approach that searches out better strategic initiatives in the business environment. Thus, corporate strategy is positively related to leadership development.

Intercompany social networks. The executives stated that intercompany social networks (social networks that include peers within different organizations) improve leadership effectiveness by nurturing a more innovative environment. They argued that intercompany social networks positively influence leaders' views and encourage them to further develop their relationships with subordinates. They also noted that intercompany social networks can positively contribute to leaders effectively empowering their followers. This may be due to companies that encourage intercompany social networks also tending to be more capable when it comes to promoting effective learning.

Stakeholder orientation. Stakeholder orientation is another important aspect of leadership development in the post-COVID-19 world. By definition, stakeholder orientation encourages leaders to adopt a more comprehensive vision that incorporates stakeholders' attitudes. Also, when leaders have stakeholder orientation, they can propel knowledge exchange with stakeholders themselves.

The executives argued that a higher degree of innovation results when organizations exchange more knowledge with various groups, including stakeholders. At the same time, the exchange of knowledge can have a strong influence on learning within organizations. Knowledge exchanged with various stakeholders may help leaders to identify better opportunities in the current business environment.

Leadership development can help companies weather how the Covid-19 pandemic affected their businesses by producing leaders who can innovate and empower their teams. [AQ](#)

Mostafa Sayyadi helps companies to succeed by improving the effectiveness of their leaders. He has contributed to numerous business publications and is co-author of Post-Pandemic Recovery.

Resiliency Encompasses Opposite Traits: **SOLID** and **FLEXIBLE**

BY LUCRECIA IRUELA

Before the pandemic, resilience was already essential to business leaders' success.

Resilience helps executives soldier through obstacles in their organizations and climb the ladder to success. Executives have married resilience with adaptability to adjust to their rapidly changing environments. Adaptability and resilience are necessary not only in our immediate circles, but globally. We feel clueless now as to what the future looks like. Thus, we must reinforce our resiliency and review it from every angle and form.

DEFINING RESILIENCE

Resilience. It's a word that has been used and overused to describe what it takes to overcome difficulties. "Resilience" comes from the Latin verb *resilire*, which means to "rebound or recoil." However, the concept of resilience is broader. It encompasses many more aspects than the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties.

So how can we clearly identify it, and help leaders identify it?

I define resilience as "perseverance and endurance with ease." Whether we're executives or homemakers, resilience

should apply these days. When we have it, we are rooted, more balanced, and brighter. Resilience can also be a synonym for jumping forward. Leaders need certain characteristics to express resilience: In Latin, these are *commits*, or ease of manner, openness, and flexibility; *clementia*, or gentleness; and last but not least, *firmitas*, which is being solid, with tenacity, strength of mind, and the ability to stick to a purpose.

THE ROLE OF COACHING IN LEARNING RESILIENCE

Leaders and executives need to develop new ways to cope with change and resistance. This is where executive coaches can come in. I believe that executive and leadership coaching is more necessary now than ever. As a coach, I work with executives and C-levels in Silicon Valley, where the pressure to create a big impact, innovate, and reach excellence exists at all times. The world is experiencing a level of disruption without precedent. Fear and stagnation are not options. The best tool to thrive is modifying our perceptions, interpretations, and responses differently.

“When executives trust each other, they are closer to their people. The secret sauce is simply investing time and a willingness to grow together.”

However, because of the pandemic, 42% of coaches have experienced reduced income and 32% have experienced reduced hours, according to the “2021 COVID-19 and the Coaching Industry Snapshot Survey” conducted by the International Coaching Federation.

What can we surmise from these statistics? In theory, leadership coaching is in high demand, but not so much in practice. It’s simply another “to-do list” item for companies. And in the coronavirus bubble, it’s not always easy to find a private space while working from home to reflect and practice—not to mention finding extra value to stay another hour in the virtual session.

Additionally, many people are not ready for the vulnerability that comes with engaging in the coaching process. At the beginning of being coached, we must look into a figurative mirror and be prepared to feel lost. Coaching takes clients on a new journey, filled with contradictions and uncomfortable revelations. Overcoming those obstacles is half of the equation in developing the much-needed “resilience toolkit” that’s necessary to thrive in our current world.

Whatever our personal circumstances or levels of leadership are within the company, we all need to stop and reflect. It’s the only way to digest all the components that can potentially bring peace to the situation. The best practices mold our brains to flexibility. This helps leaders dissolve rigid attachments to feelings, strategies, and viewpoints.

THE PATH TO RESILIENCE

Executives must have three strategic components for understanding and experiencing resilience. These are having a strong vision, understanding what it takes, and shaping the environment.

Having a strong vision. Just as the North Star infallibly guides us on the sea or ground, leaders must have a personal “North Star” of a vision that will help them think in new directions without hesitation. Purpose creates the path to success because leaders can envision the company’s desired future position. There can be multiple ways to accomplish goals, to see differently, to modify, to think and rethink—but a strong vision is first and foremost because it’s the engine that can be used to move forward.

Understanding what it takes. Whatever the size of their organization or their industry, leaders must weigh all the risks, whether they’re a member of the board of directors,

the CEO, or an executive. Thinking ahead is integral to resilience, and it lends clarity to shaping the whole picture.

Being able to make new decisions is characteristic of adaptability, because there is always a need to change policies, procedures, and structures as necessary. Start-ups are more used to making these changes than corporations, but the pandemic has forced many companies to review their corporate social responsibility, workforce capacity, teams structure, and diversity. However, in corporations it is more difficult to be open to these conversations and measurements.

At an individual level, we need to be ready and flexible to face or even establish new directions assigned to departments and teams. Strategies and decisions will change rapidly, based on data or “nowcasting”—monitoring, updating, and changing decisions.

Shaping the environment. Teams need stability and security to operate. However, they need to be flexible and drive change too. Achieving that balance can be tricky. When the environment or culture is challenging, leaders tend to fight, flee, or freeze. Coaches, mentors, and sponsors can help navigate the situation more comfortably when this occurs. However, the willingness to understand others, be humble to prime trust, and meet others’ needs comes from inside. The new mindset is crucial to soften the stiffness. Conversations and connections help teams cooperate. When executives trust each other, they are closer to their people. The secret sauce is simply investing time and a willingness to grow together.

Changing a toxic environment to a positive one is a responsibility everyone bears in the company. It is true that organizational culture emanates from the top. However, teams need to maintain positive vibes.

The bottom line is to accept that we will experience opposite forces. But compromise is the key to “jump ahead.” Resilience encompasses various attributes that leaders need in today’s world. Perseverance and endurance with ease. We can do better, get better, and be better. [AQ](#)

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MANAGERS

Are You Contributing to Your
Team Members' Burnout?

BY SHARON MELNICK AND LAINE JOELSON COHEN



The ongoing challenges of remote work, hybrid environments, and business pivots have resulted in 79% of employees experiencing mild, moderate, or severe burnout.

Turnover is at an all-time high, and the news is filled with stories of “the Great Resignation.”

One of the main contributors to employee burnout is the perceived lack of control over workflow and lack of manager support in addressing it, as identified in a July 2019 article in *Harvard Business Review*. Rework, perception of wasted time, and lack of clarity cause wear and tear on team members’ energy.

A powerful determinant of employee motivation, focus, and loyalty starts with the specific communication between a manager and his or her team. As a manager, you create “the weather” for your team. You not only scope the work but also set the tone and culture for the team. You are the primary “face” of the company for your employee. In fact, according to *It’s the Manager: Gallup finds that the quality of managers and team leaders is the single biggest factor in your organization’s long-term success* (Gallup Press, 2019), 70% of employee engagement is determined by an employee’s manager.

And as stated in McKinsey & Co.’s October 9, 2020 *The Shortlist*, 75% of employees say the most stressful aspect of their job is their immediate boss. Reducing employee burnout starts with the manager-employee relationship.

ACCESSING THE RESTORATIVE PART OF THE BRAIN

The first step to making a more positive impact as a manager is to become more aware of how people receive information when they’re under stress. Many people don’t know that we have two parts of our brain that respond to everyday work: the Active and the Restorative.

Active. Any demand stimulates the “Active” part of our brains. In this “on” mode, we react to whatever stimuli is right in front of us, such as new work assigned, the ping of the instant message, or a rising fear that our manager thinks we are not doing enough. Its survival-based roots steer us to conserve energy by doing things “just as we’ve always done them.”

This Active part of the brain is excellent at execution, but it lacks discernment. It can put us on a treadmill, focusing us only on getting through the moment (without any planning or mindfulness about the implications) and preoccupying us with our own situation (with less consideration of what others around us need).

Restorative. In contrast, the “Restorative” part of our brains helps us see the big picture. In this “off” mode, we can connect the dots between our work and that of the rest of the organization, and we can have new ideas. We can discern other people’s true intent and revitalize our energy.

Sustained energy comes from repeatedly seesawing between the Active and Restorative modes of performance—using up energy reserves, then replenishing them. The Restorative mode enables strategic and innovative thinking. It yields calm and a sense of control. This mode is the key to preventing burnout, yet we can only experience it under conditions perceived as safe—whether that’s finding calm within ourselves or having an environment perceived as supportive.

The relentless and unfiltered buildup of to-do items keeps most employees (and managers) in a state of being *only* in Active mode. Managers can impact this by communicating in a way that provides a sense of safety, which enables employees to access the Restorative mode as well. Maximizing employees’ sense of control also helps them to access both the Active and Restorative modes.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The second step to shifting your impact as a manager is to become more aware of how the way you communicate affects your team’s stress level and ability to perform.

First, take a self-check:

- What is your stress level on a scale of 1-10?
- How does your stress level impact how you show up?
- Do you know how close each member of your team is to burnout?
- Are you clearing away your team’s obstacles, or creating them?
- Do you ask questions to confirm understanding and ensure alignment?

With this self-check in mind, you might have discovered opportunities to be more intentional in your communication. Here are practical strategies that can help you reduce the likelihood of burnout in your team members.

ASSIGNING WORK

When assigning work, require yourself to take a step back to consider the workload a team member already has and discern



“State your expectations up-front, ask open-ended questions to gauge understanding, and invite your team members to ask questions of you—then build in brief check-ins for ongoing feedback.”

whether this is an idea ready to be assigned or one you need to further develop. This mindfulness in planning will increase the chance that you set your employees up for success.

Start well. Start with a clear picture in your own mind of the broad outcome you want before initiating communication. Make your vision and success metrics so clear that you can paint a picture for your team members, and ask them to reflect it back to you so you know they can see it too. Stressed-out brains have a reduced capacity to remember information, so repeating your main messages at the start and end of each meeting provides the best shot that your employees will successfully hold onto your vision.

Distinguish brainstorming interactions from discussions on work assignments. State your expectations up-front, ask open-ended questions to gauge understanding, and invite your team members to ask questions of you—then build in brief check-ins for ongoing feedback.

Use clear, simple language to prioritize. Assigning new work can tip the scales for your already busy and stressed-out team. Building in a conversation around prioritization gives your team members the opportunity to have clarity and give you transparency into the workload and when you can reasonably expect the work can get done. This will also give you an opportunity to help reallocate and re-prioritize as necessary.

Check understanding. Ask questions to confirm understanding, such as “What do you see as the outcome

we’re trying to achieve?”; “By when will you reasonably be able to complete the work?”; “What concerns do you have?” These simple questions help head off misalignments before time is wasted and give you both a sense of confidence that you can move forward successfully.

PLANNING MEETINGS

Few things are more infuriating than meetings that lead nowhere and decisions that are left dangling. Here are some approaches that prevent wasted time and energy.

Do we need to meet? Ask yourself the purpose of the meeting; can you achieve your goal in another way? For instance, if informing people is the goal, can you send an email or post an update on a shared site instead?

Why are we here? Ensure that the meeting purpose is clear and circulate an agenda. Giving your participants a clear understanding of the outcomes you wish to achieve will increase the likelihood they will be achieved and ensure that you get the right people in the room.

Who should attend? Avoid “team swarm” by carefully considering who needs to attend. As an invitee, make sure you understand why you are being asked to attend and ask for clarification if needed.

Have a post-meeting follow-up process that includes a summary of what decisions were made, which remain open, and what next steps are pending.

MAKING DECISIONS

Work often stalls when decision-making rights aren't clear. Many employees operate under the default assumption that decision making sits at the top and wait for permission before they take action. Leaders in this situation can become overwhelmed by ever-growing inboxes about the decisions they need to make. Employees become disengaged. Work stalls.

You can make a difference by leading transparent discussions about decision-making rights, timeline expectations, and how progress will be communicated. Providing clarity around where others have the power to make decisions and where they don't moves work forward and reduces stress.

GIVING FEEDBACK

Clear, intentional communication prevents misunderstandings, which can lead to unnecessary friction and "extra cognitive load."

Positive feedback is an investment in your employee's "resilience bank" and a way to provide clarity on what great looks like. When you proactively "catch people doing things right," you'll help your team members feel valued and enable them to be more open when you need to course correct.

When course-correcting an employee, use a caring tone to reduce defensiveness. Under stress, information is filtered through the emotional centers of the brain, and team members are more likely to take things personally, interpret ambiguity in a negative way, and rehash scenarios. Being aware of your own tone and sharing a path forward will eliminate the ambiguity and instill confidence for a positive outcome.

Provide concrete examples so the person can learn from your feedback and clearly understand what behavior to replicate or change. Describe what their actions look like in the ideal, which provides a benchmark to work toward. Make it forward-looking with constructive suggestions, an example of who does this well, or ideas on where to find valuable learning tools or information.

CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Contributing to your employees' stress and burnout are the conversations they are unsure or afraid of having with you. This causes a lot of mental swirl. Some common things we hear are:

- How do I know when I've done enough to shut down for the day or take a break?
- When is it okay to ask for help, and will I be judged?
- If I need help or make a mistake, will my reputation as a high performer suffer?

When team members don't feel "psychologically safe," they will waste cognitive resources trying to decide whether to

share their ideas and can become resentful about their team experience.

Creating an environment where your team is comfortable with asking questions is the first step to reducing internal swirl. By sharing how you are addressing your own challenges and asking your team for input and perspectives, you signal that this type of exchange is not only acceptable but expected. This will increase the likelihood that your team will leverage each other for problem-solving support and surface risks early.

MAKE GOOD USE OF ONE-TO-ONES

Having regular one-to-ones with your team members is one way to create the space for unscripted, uninterrupted conversation. Status updates are important, but be sure to leave time for checking in, coaching, and career conversations. When team members know they have dedicated time to get the support they need, it reduces their anxiety.

This will also give you an opportunity to gauge how they are doing, whether they are on track, and determine where you can support them.

If you have a large team, save one-to-ones for coaching and career conversations and set up "office hours" to give your team access to you for questions and support. Ultimately, having this access will reduce stress on your team and minimize the interruptions you experience from unscheduled virtual or in-person "drop-ins."

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER FOR TEAM SUCCESS

As a manager, you play a key role in helping to prevent burnout in team members and unlocking their best productivity (with the added benefit that you will be freed up to work on the most meaningful initiatives). By consistently applying these simple communication strategies and making intentional conversations part of the fabric of interaction, you will increase your team's sense of clarity and control. Team members will respond by initiating conversations and taking more responsibility for managing their own workload. You will have succeeded in creating the weather of resilience on the team. [AQ](#)

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It's Not Enough to Be RESILIENT

BY JANICE PERKINS

If the past two years have taught us anything, it's that successful leaders must be resilient.

Companies must be filled with employees and cultures of resilience. Is that enough? Will that sustain us?

The Merriam-Webster definition of resilience is the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens; or the ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, pressed, bent, etc. Sure, we have bounced back over the last two years, but we've been sent back and forth like a ping-pong match or a pinball machine. Resilience can win the race with one or two setbacks. But when you face prolonged stress and trauma, how can you keep moving forward?

Continual crisis and uncertainty beg for us to have additional character qualities that can give more buoyancy to our resilience. The questions we need to answer as leaders today are, how can I sustain and maintain resilience daily? How can I remain resilient?

REGULATING OUR STRESS

Our brains and bodies are not designed to handle prolonged, ongoing stress. The parasympathetic portion of our autonomic nervous system—the part of the system that conserves the body's natural activity and relaxes the individual once an emergency has passed—has a window of tolerance in which we can maintain decorum and utilize resilience. But when our minds and bodies endure too much stress outside of this window, our sympathetic nervous

system steps up to bat, and we can enter fight, flight, or freeze mode. During prolonged stress, we must regulate this system and expand our window of tolerance or calm ourselves down.

Here are seven things you can do to help expand your window of tolerance. All of these methods are ways of staying calm and reframing your tolerance.

Be more stubborn. Careful here, I don't want you to become rigid. But there is a level of defiance that is required today that says, "I got this, it's not going to take me down." Dig in and put up a mental wall that does not allow for failure or disappointment. Expect more to come and be ready for it. Set your face like flint and move forward. It's the kind of stiff-backed attitude that a toddler displays when trying not to get buckled into the car seat for an extended car ride. Be stubborn against the crisis—not in denial, but stubborn, unyielding, resolute.

Keep it simple, keep it moving. Don't stop, but pause to breathe. Look left and right and take an assessment of the landscape, like a 30-second timeout in a ball game. These small moments of reflection and huddling up can revive and remind a team of purpose and goals. Review and communicate the common goals everyone in the organization has and what you stand for together. Simplify the direction and goals of the organization and use this time to unify company culture around these goals and the values that will be used to execute them. Then assign and act. No



one likes meetings used just to regroup and plan, with no action. Simplify and keep moving.

Adapt, accept, and innovate. In my lifetime, there has never been more of an incubator for adaptation and innovation than now. The companies that did both of these things throughout the pandemic have gained customers and market share and have grown in the past two years. It's not too late to join them. Ask your customers questions, get curious and examine their viewpoints. Get a new perspective by involving unusual voices from all areas of your organization in the discussion. What can we see by looking at a problem differently? Brainstorm offsite. Changing your geographical landscape can shift mental perspective as well.

Take advantage of the opportunity for change and embrace it. We are not going back to where we were. The new normal is now like shifting sand beneath us. All new ideas are in pencil, nothing is permanent. In his book *Win the Day*, author Mark Batterson uses the phrase, "Let go of dead yesterdays and unborn tomorrows." We must let go of where we were, the past and the normal that is not coming back, and where we thought we were going. When we release these anchors in our mind, true innovation can take place.

Be gritty. Angela Duckworth, in her new study on the subject, says that grit is evident in all high achievers. The higher the grit in a person, the more deliberately they practiced, got feedback, and reflected on their work. Grit isn't just the

practice; it is the mindset. It is the motivation that comes from deep within that pushes you when no one is looking.

When attached to your purpose and talents, grit can elevate and keep you going. It is the spare tire, the extra tank of gas, the AAA tow truck. Grit is the thing inside of you that moves you forward when you are empty, exhausted, overwhelmed, and uncertain. Take the time to reassess your aspiration, your meaning, your purpose in life. Is it well defined? Has your purpose gotten foggy? Take it back out and polish it. Know it. Reacquaint yourself with it and realign with your intrinsic motivation. The results will surprise you.

The concept of kaizen comes from Eiji Toyoda in the 1950s, who after visiting American auto manufacturers designed a better, more efficient way of working. Kaizen means an uncompromising, tenacious commitment to continuous improvement. Your grit must be sprinkled with a bit of kaizen. Like a windup toy that you wind and point in a direction toward a goal, you must be persistent in pursuit of new horizons and improvement. Hold fast to your values, the belief in your people, and what you must give to your clients and communities. Company culture bonded, committed, and moving in the same direction will be unstoppable.

Look on the bright side. Winston Churchill said, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity, an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." Hope is the bedrock of optimism. Hope is a belief that it is obtainable. It implies some expectation of obtaining the good desired. It always



gives pleasure or joy, whereas wish and desire may produce or be accompanied with pain and anxiety. Hope has confidence in a future event; it is the highest degree of well-founded expectation of good—the source of ineffable, unspeakable happiness. Hope inspires others. Hope creates followers. Hope does even more than that. Hope is critical when uncertainty and trauma are looming around.

Rebounding through a prolonged crisis can have a negative impact on our attitude. Hope fills us with positivity and allows us to look forward optimistically, build dreams, and take risks. Science has proven that hope in the mind mimics morphine as a stress and pain reducer. For those who have hope, the body naturally releases endorphins and enkephalins that reduce pain and in effect give comfort.

Belly laugh more. In an article in *Harvard Business Review*, Betty-Ann Heggie says we should all laugh more in the office. She cites research from the Mayo Clinic showing that laughter can positively affect your heart rate and blood pressure and leave you feeling calm and relaxed. It can even increase productivity. Laughter releases endorphins, stimulates circulation, and gets more oxygen to the brain to release stress. Laughing at yourself is even better. There is grace for yourself when you can laugh at mistakes, failures, or missteps. We are all human, after all.

Where does laughter come from? What we need to be the giver and supplier of laughter long term, especially through crisis or trauma, is joy.

Emotions like joy and hope and love are steadfast. Even when your child misbehaves, your love doesn't change. You can be disappointed and love at the same time. You can be overwhelmed and hopeful. You can be mourning and have joy. When you belly laugh from a place of joy despite circumstances, it spreads and has deep healing properties. Joy leaks and spreads. When your joy tank is full, laughter comes easier and more often. Smiles amid stress are

more common. Hard work without anxiety is more evident. Outcomes and innovations thrive.

Give it away. Share joy and hope with someone, or with many someones. Both emotions are multipliers. In the way that rabbits and mice multiply, you will be shocked by how much joy and hope are restored to you when given away. The resonance of your own soul and mind deepen to more joy and hope, and the positive impact you have on others will spread and multiply even more. My friend and author, Howard Prager, says in his book *Make Someone's Day* that simply giving away even a small act of kindness can have a lasting effect on someone else in a positive life-changing way.

John Baldoni, in his book *Grace: A Leader's Guide to a Better Us*, describes grace as kindness executed in actions toward others. It reveals our character and is only evident when acted upon. When we work to make the lives of others better and give away and spread hope and joy, then grace is manifested in our company culture and communities.

Resilience by itself can be about bouncing back to where we were, but the veneer of resilience can be hollow and full of worry. By using these steps to establish sustainable patterns of resiliency, an organization can perpetuate growth, decrease risk, increase positive company culture, and optimize output. An individual applying these steps can improve mental health, shift perspective, accept change, and improve outcomes. [AQ](#)

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How to Come Back from **ADVERSITY**

BY BILL FLYNN

Resilience is defined as the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness; or elasticity. To build resilience, people must go through adversity.



“Leaders need to fire themselves from the day-to-day administrative activities so this opening in their workdays can be filled with the difficult task of predicting the future and preparing the team to handle whatever may come their way.”

And people experiencing adversity must see that there is a way to the other side. The more often this happens successfully, the greater the confidence of the team to tackle the next difficult challenge.

To this end, the leader’s job is to create the environment for each team member to come to realize this on his or her own and as part of a team. The leader must establish the trust and faith in each other that, as trite as it sounds, reinforces the belief that “we can get through this together.”

THE PRINCIPLES OF ESTABLISHING RESILIENCE

There are a number of established principles in the management science literature that point to how leaders can do this successfully. Several of what I believe are the key ones are discussed here.

I have all the freedom I need to decide how to get my work done. Cornell University conducted a study a number of years ago where several hundred businesses were divided into two groups. One group was led via command and control. This is sometimes known as the “genius with a thousand helpers” model. The other was given autonomy to make their own decision based on a small number of key business principles.

The second group outperformed the former by several hundred percentage points based on key financial metrics. The results were unequivocal and exemplary. This backs up work done by Marcus Buckingham, Amy Edmondson, and any researcher who studies high-performing teams, teams of teams, and psychological safety in the workplace.

For this to happen, leaders at all levels—and especially the head of the company or organization—need to begin to fire themselves from the day-to-day administrative activities as much and as soon as possible. This will provide time and space to create an environment where they are completely or mostly unnecessary to run the day-to-day. This opening in their workdays can then be filled with the difficult task of predicting the future and preparing the team and the framework to be able to handle whatever may come their way—the very embodiment of resilience.

My team leader tells me what I need to know before I need to know it. Leading a team is a learned and vital skill that

most are not taught. Understanding the key outcome and output(s) of the team and the different and varied functions that need to be performed, and the forging of myriad idiosyncratic people into a well-rounded team to contribute optimally to the betterment of the whole, are essential to being a great leader.

When this is done well, the future is primarily an act of creation versus prediction. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, we can fairly accurately forecast the next two to three years of the business and industry with careful and deliberate planning.

Leaders are able to coach and guide each team member with greater accuracy and confidence because they have already foreseen what is to come and what will be necessary to prepare for. Creating a Functional Organizational Chart and Key Process Flow Map are excellent tools to help leaders attract, onboard, and grow their teams with the right skills, knowledge, and abilities for optimal contribution to the overall mission of the business.

I trust my team leader. It is said that trust arrives on foot and leaves in a Ferrari. Once lost, it will take quite some time to earn that trust back. The best way to avoid this is to share the brutal truth at nearly all times—some truths are unable to be shared due to privacy and other concerns. When the brutal truth is shared, especially when the leader shows her vulnerability and humanness, that trust is not only secured but enhanced.

This act tacitly gives permission to everyone else to do the same. When this occurs without retaliation, ridicule, or retribution, magic happens. Velocity is added to the business. Corrective action to fix previously unknown hidden problems is provided swiftly and more accurately to prevent reoccurrence.

As Amy Edmondson, the coiner of the term “psychological safety,” said in her May 2014 TEDx talk on that topic, “It turns out that no one wakes up in the morning and jumps out of bed because they can’t wait to get to work today to look ignorant, incompetent, intrusive, or negative. No, on average, we prefer to look smart, and helpful, and positive.... The good news about all this is that it’s very easy to manage. Don’t want to look ignorant? Don’t ask questions. Don’t want to look incompetent? Don’t admit weakness or mistake. Don’t want to look intrusive?”

Don't offer ideas. And if you don't want to look negative, by all means, don't criticize the status quo."

When you trust your team leaders to be human, they will trust you since you have built up a past reservoir to draw upon when things are bleakest.

I am encouraged to take risks. There is a difference between reversible and irreversible decisions. Create a decision-making framework that uncovers that difference and provides for a thoughtful, deliberate, and highly likely outcome.

Helping your team distinguish between decisions that are very difficult or impossible to unwind and those that are safe-to-fail will create an environment that Edmondson describes above. One where your team members are not afraid to make mistakes.

People will be much more likely to take calculated risks. This practice will strengthen a habit that can only enhance the business's strengths and the team's capacity to grow and flex as the market or technology or other fluid factors change.

The days of routinized work are mostly behind us. Creativity, insight, and innovation will be critical as we move further into the millennium. Creating and bolstering the skills needed to take risks has to begin now, as the pace of these aforementioned fluid factors seems to only be increasing. Leaders need to push the authority down to where the knowledge and key interaction are to keep pace. The old days of "running it up the flagpole" and then waiting for a go/no-go decision from leadership are bygone for the most part.

In business and in life, few things truly do matter, but those that do, matter tremendously. The key to effective leadership and running a successful business that is efficient, effective, and resilient is figuring out what few things truly matter. Identify those few things that do matter to your team and your customers. Strip away the things that matter less so you can pursue perfection for the few things that truly matter.

As a leader, your job is no longer about running the ship, but understanding the direction of the seas and the impact of the wind—to navigate, not steer, and to figure out where you are going over the next few years with such clarity and vivid detail that you describe the future as if you have already arrived.

Your team is thirsty for this. They want to know, "Where are we going and how will we recognize it when we arrive?" To do this, you must, as quickly as possible, fire yourself from the day-to-day. Make yourself useless so you can focus on the essential. According to Greg McKeown, from his book *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, "Essentialism is not about how to get more things done; it's about how to get the right things done. It doesn't mean just doing less for the sake of less either. It is about making the wisest possible investment of your time and energy in order to operate at your highest point of contribution by doing only what is essential."

For a leader to go further, faster, it is essential to ignore the siren song of the tyranny of the moment, the trivial but familiar, and the mink holes (which are really just rat holes that feel warm and comfortable). The key is to find out what truly matters to your customers and team members. Create the space and time to think, to ponder, to ask questions of childlike curiosity, and to create the environment so the ones nearest the problem have the authority and the framework to make the best possible decision on their own. Freeing you up to create and continually validate or update the framework that drives the business so that if you took a monthlong vacation, from the outside, no one would even notice you were gone.

Throw out the rule book. Most were designed for the 1% while pissing off the other 99% anyway. As has been widely attributed to inspirational speaker Simon Sinek, "Rule books tell people what to do. Frameworks guide people how to act. Rule books insist on discipline. Frameworks allow for creativity (and resilience)." I personally like the rule book that has one rule: "Do what is best for the company and the customer."

With a solid framework and the right trusted team in place, you will only need this one rule. With so much change coming at an increased pace, leaders have to get out of the way and allow the capable, knowledgeable, and trusted team to take care of the business. You hired these great people, after all! As Richard Branson says, "You have to train people so well that they can leave and treat them so well that they never want to."

When you have extraordinary confidence in your highly skilled and engaged teams, they perform extraordinarily.

Peter Drucker taught us that effective executives do not make a great many decisions. They concentrate on what is important. They try to make the few important decisions on the highest level of conceptual understanding. They try to find the constants in a situation, to think through what is strategic and generic rather than "solve problems."

The best way to solve problems is to avoid them whenever possible. One of the best ways to do this is to create a cohesive, aligned, and resilient team that is well-trained to spot small issues well before they become major problems. That all starts with you, the leader, firing yourself from the day-to-day. [AQ](#)

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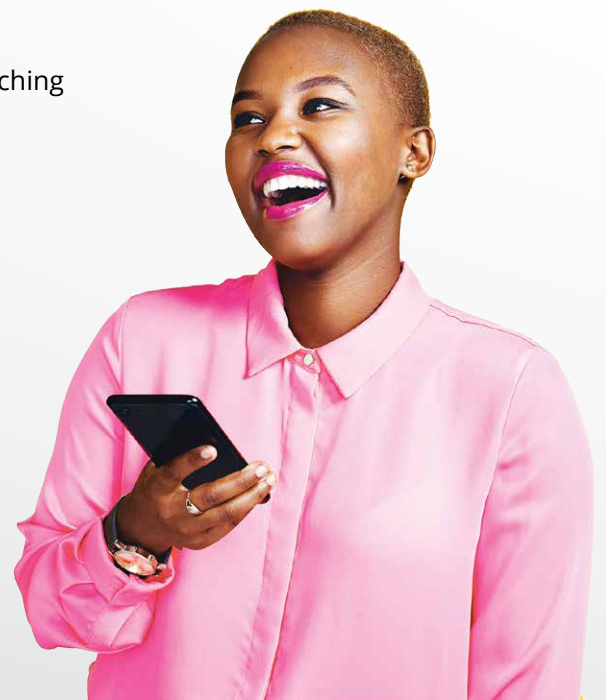
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Inclusiveness should be more than just a policy

In fact, employees who feel their voice is heard are 4.6 times more likely to perform their best work.*

AMA's curated diversity and inclusion (D&I) content can help you build the equity, belonging and allyship needed to achieve true inclusion in your organization. Our instructor-led virtual and on demand solutions help you maximize reinforcement and sustainment—and are backed by AMA's expertise.

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