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# 1

## Build resilient people

### Try this

Respond ALWAYS – SOMETIMES – NEVER

Do you:

- Avoid conflict whenever possible?
- Find it hard to set boundaries?
- Attempt only what you know you will succeed at?
- Feel most comfortable when in a relationship?
- Always forgive others, even when you are still hurt by their actions?
- Think you are taken advantage of/treated like a 'doormat'?
- Prioritise the needs of others before your own?

(People Pleaser Quiz adapted from Psychologica.co)

If you said 'ALWAYS' most often, you tend to put the needs of others before those of your own. You may even feel more comfortable doing so, or base your happiness on theirs; for example, 'If they are happy I'm happy'.

If you said 'SOMETIMES' most often, you may be more balanced in your interactions with others – giving and taking as you wish the relationships to allow.



If you said 'NEVER' most often, you may be very focused on protecting your needs and emotions (and therefore may be most in need of this chapter, although it's a useful reminder for those on 'ALWAYS' or 'SOMETIMES').

While a short quiz is no substitute for a formal assessment, this simple thought exercise encourages a greater awareness of how you perceive yourself within your world. The answers are not binding, fixed nor predictive, but if you have such a low sense of self that you most often try to please others, or so great that you seek mainly to please yourself, this is not effective for building resilience.

One of the responses to the self-compassion approach of *The Leader's Guide to Mindfulness* was a question mark over whether mindfulness made one 'selfish'. My perspective is always no. Mindful meditation was originally employed to raise awareness of the self so that you could live better, which in turn meant you would make a more effective (positive) impact on those around you. Through affixing your mask first, you can help others more readily. Resilience starts from the same foundation. Build the self and those around you will likely benefit.

**Therefore, this chapter will teach you to be self-ish.**

There's no need to be 'hard to get' if you are 'hard to earn'

That is not to say you need to be:

self-important

self-serving

self-sabotaging

self-destructive

. . . nor indeed 'selfish' as the term is commonly used.

Being self-*ish* means you need to think about your behaviours, your choices and your needs, because unless you are aware of, and to some extent can exert power over them – you will only ever be responsive to things that happen to you (too low a sense of self), OR isolate the people who might have been your greatest allies (too great a sense of self). Neither of these outcomes will lead to healthy choices, especially when faced with challenge. In the former case your own contribution is so negated that you yourself can become a burden to those you are trying to support, and in the latter you may find you have alienated the people who could have benefitted from your input.

The importance of being self-*ish* is that only through a *balance of self-knowledge, how you interact with your world, and mastery over your choices (with awareness of consequence)* can resilience be achieved. Through casting a lens on, and *improving* the actions of your *self*, you are better able to:

- understand and assert your value within a situation and be most likely to contribute to the solution;
- form healthy collaborations which meet your needs and those of your wider community and which are long-lasting and supportive;
- grow.

## Resilience roots within a healthy sense of self

The development of a healthy self-awareness and a sense of self occurs through childhood. Children learn, through their experiences within their environment to trust, develop autonomy, take initiative, become industrious, form their identity, engage in intimacy, generate productively and live with integrity (Erikson, 1958, 1963). Unfortunately, if the child does not establish that firm sense of who they are, their behaviours may become those of mistrust, doubt and avoidance of shame, guilt and fear, inferiority, role confusion, isolation, stagnation and despair (Erikson, 1958, 1963). Too weak a sense of self can result in the belief that everyone knows better than you and instead of engaging with your own potential you become an unquestioning drone (likely becoming more and more unhappy with your life); if your sense of self is too much, people may perceive this as arrogance, and find this to be distasteful. Even when surrounded with others who may have a well-developed sense of self, askewed (i.e. self-serving or self-destructive) behaviour can affect the group. Resilience means striking a balance – being self-ish (self-focused or self-aware enough to contribute with purpose and fulfilment – to the best of your ability), *because* of the knowledge that you belong to a wider community.

Without being self-*ish*, unpleasant and unproductive behaviours (e.g. self-sabotage, self-centredness, self-servance or self-destruction) may occur. That is also when those around you may suffer collaterally. Yet, show yourself compassion, devote time to identify and nurture what is important to your personal effectiveness, and you will be stronger, and this will enable you to be strong for others.

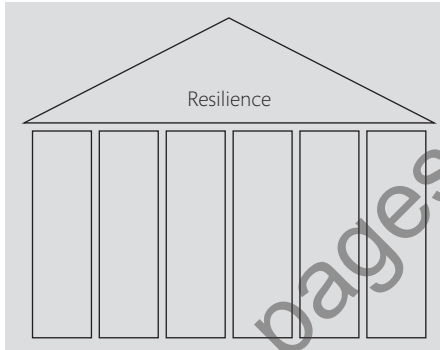
## Becoming resilient: What builds you up?

The foundations of resilience are often presented in the form of pillars:

What are yours?

**Reflect**

*Identify up to six things that keep you going, especially through challenge.*



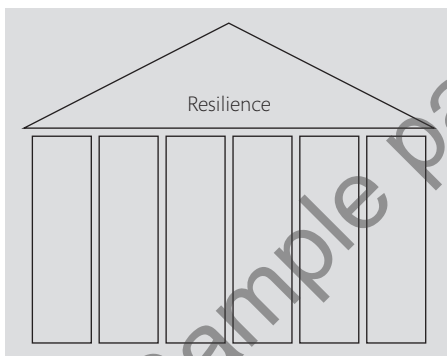
Many writers have looked at theirs:



The Defense Logistics Agency proposes four: Mental health, Physical health, Social health, Spiritual health.



The Wellbeing Project suggests five: Energy, Future focus, Inner drive, Flexible thinking, Strong relationships ... as does 'Bounce Back': Self-care, Self-awareness, Mindfulness, Relationships, Purpose.



Dr Arielle Schwartz offers six: Growth mindset, Emotional Intelligence, Community connections, Self-expression, Embodiment, Choice & control

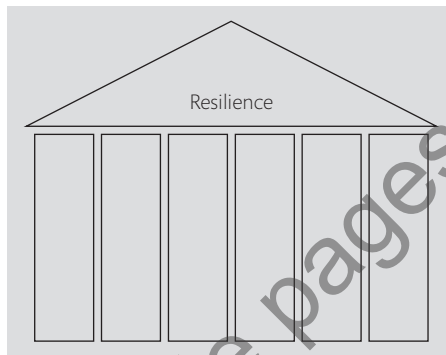
... so does EQ Works: Satisfaction with lifestyle, Supportive relationships, Physical Wellbeing, Solution-focused coping, Emotion-focused coping, Positive beliefs.

Knowing what keeps your 'temple' standing will be essential not only for being able to thrive by pushing boundaries or reaching upwards in 'normality', but for rebuilding and surviving when things get difficult. This is applicable on the large, as well as small scale: even if you need the motivation to achieve a small goal, attending to one of your 'pillars' may energise you enough to keep going.



**Try this**

Write out the pillars which are significant to your ability to succeed, and shade in how plentiful that resource is at the moment. Then, if any pillars are lacking, find a way to fill or replenish them. Do the same with your teams too – and you can also do this for your organisation as a whole:



What you may find is that when you suddenly attend to 'pillars' that have been neglected previously, the relationship that you have with them may have changed when you weren't looking. For example, if your family is a source (or pillar) of strength, but you haven't spent as much time with them – remember they will still have continued to grow, and you struggle to pick up again where you left off. Use the NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) technique of 'match, pace, lead' for reforming the bonds:

- Observe the situation for what it is (match)
- Ask to join in with what they are doing (pace alongside – for as long as it takes to be comfortable again)
- Then invite them to do something with you (lead).

This technique can be scaled up further to community groups or wider networks you wish to collaborate with. It's not always about enforcing your step onto them – it often works best to take a measured approach.



Then reflect on the same exercise in a couple of weeks – what improved and how? Reflection is key to recognising that goal achievement is the **start** not the end. Once things are normalised, why stop at ‘maintenance’?

## In order to grow after your pillars are strong, keep pushing your comfort zone

Another notable model of resilience is that of the comfort zone.

|                     |
|---------------------|
| <b>Panic zone</b>   |
| <b>Stretch zone</b> |
| <b>Comfort zone</b> |

When simply going about your daily life, you are often in the ‘comfort zone’. When you try a new skill, or undertake a challenge, it may push you into the stretch zone, and when things get tricky very fast or unexpectedly it may mean you fall into the panic zone. Psychologically, as the ‘panic zone’ is not a pleasant state to be in, understandably you may prefer to avoid it. But testing yourself, especially when the challenge is not essential to your survival, is a good opportunity to check on your resilience when you don’t *need* it.

As a leader (and subsequently you may do so for your teams) challenge yourself to move beyond your comfort zone on a regular basis into a stretch zone, and tap into what might lie beyond – the ‘panic’ zone. For example, perhaps it is ‘comfortable’ for you to develop yourself and

form partnerships. It may be a stretch for you to agree on a common agenda for that partnership, and a 'panic' for you to allow those partnerships to take a leading role, but by taking small steps regularly your 'stretch zone' becomes your new comfort zone.

### Try this

Regularly do little things which push you outside your comfort zone, even as simple as ordering a different drink, or upping the ante within a hobby. Even if you have to do these things alone, remember that if you master them, you can then help others who may be afraid.

Building up little acts that broaden your world makes it easier to face – or even take up – a bigger challenge later on.

*This week:* Undertake a challenge – you don't even need to tell anyone you are doing it (yet). But perhaps it's something you never thought you would do, or you longed for, or perhaps it is even on your 'bucket list'.

Once you are comfortable again, encourage others through talking about your efforts (and struggles!) as well as celebrating your achievements.

## Incorporate a 'resilience-based' lifestyle: McEwen's R@W Sustain Model

Kathryn McEwen's R@W Sustain Model is a seven-step elaboration of the process of resilience that can be maintained long term.

1. Recognise your personal values (focus on the self).
2. Align with organisational core values. (That is, make sure you are living your values every day. This is easier to

- curate when in a position of leadership, and helpful to be aware of when deciding to remain within a team. Further it can bring a sense of focus to your longer term goals.)
3. Maintain a positive perspective and work through setbacks (easier when you believe in what you are aiming for – i.e. if the organisation's values are in line with yours).
  4. Manage stressors as common practice (as with point 3).
  5. Establish interaction and co-operation as the norm rather than competition. (When you are living your values, and they are broadly in line with those of your organisation (or community), you are likely to attract similar-minded people to your team. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.)
  6. Maintain mental and physical health (something still sometimes overlooked in organisations with a preference in some areas to allow people to be 'signed off sick' rather than establishing clear support networks).
  7. Develop your wider network successfully. (A simple example is, while it may be community minded to source locally, the local source must be *capable* of producing what is needed so they must sometimes be trained or mentored, supported and sometimes even financed. How can the resilient leader ensure a return on their wider investment? . . . Again awareness of and connection to the overall vision can help.)

The key to this model is to recognise your values – *and live them regularly*. If what you value is out of synchronicity with what you are doing, this leads to great emotional and mental discomfort, which in turn can limit your ability to focus on anything productive. This is what to turn to first.