



Resilience is a Daily Habit

The phrase “resilience is a habit” came to me a couple weeks ago while cold temperatures blanketed the southern United States, millions were without power and clean water on top of the already devastating impacts of the pandemic. The grim daily toll of new hospitalizations and deaths with accompanying suffering and grief, the physical separation, the economic toll of shuttered businesses and jobs, leaving millions in housing and food insecurity, felt especially overwhelming at that moment.

While our individual experiences have been different, we have all experienced some disruption, separation, and setbacks, during this past year. Many are grieving losses. Worldwide pandemics are thankfully rare, but each of us, each of the people you lead or work with, can have “pandemic level” challenges in their lives in “normal” times. Other more “normal” life challenges meet us daily, requiring emotional resilience to maintain our equilibrium. Emotional resilience-challenging episodes can originate in our personal or public spheres, but often spill over.

Though the literal definition of resilience emphasizes acquired strength through flexibility, give, and elasticity, we frequently misapply the concept of resilience. Equating resilience with stoicism in the face of extraordinary challenges or a short downtime with a hyper focus on the snapback is embedded in our culture. Check the Google images for resilience. Even in our workplace policies, for example, the three-days allocated for grief and only for immediate family, are emblematic of this concept. I

understand the need for timekeeping policies, but time blocking grief helps to create an expectation that it's not OK to require more time. It also can be an awkward conversation for leaders to have with team members who are struggling.

The true essence of resilience is to repeatedly rebound from setbacks. Consider more of the synonyms for resilience: flexibility, pliability, suppleness, plasticity, and elasticity. Resilience's definition parallels physical flexibility and like physical flexibility, requires repeated practices or habit. We achieve that emotional flexibility by repeating the good practices you have likely heard of for achieving balance.

- Make regular time for yourself
- Choose or form an intimate community of friends and stay connected
- Embrace physical and mental health
- Find or reignite a passion

While these good practices are well known, we fail in achieving them due to unreasonable expectations to make wholesale changes. Making time for yourself does not have to be an elaborate spa day, it could be as simple as a 10-minute meditation before bed or 10 minutes driveway decompression before entering your home. Physical health can start with committing to a 15-minute walk at lunch three days per week. We cannot successfully execute these habits at once. We must layer them over time. Build resilience habits into systems (e.g., with calendar appointments and checklists) until they become a part of who we are. And, when we drift from doing them, we should be gentle with ourselves and start again.

Leadership in the workplace is critical in this area as well. One of the ways leaders make a difference is by normalizing team members not feeling 10 out of 10 every day. Taking physical and emotional pulse checks at the beginning of your one-on-one meetings or small group meetings can be helpful. Leaders can gauge well-being through conversation or using a symbol or a score, like the pain scales or mental health scales we are familiar with from clinical encounters.

Some leaders shy away from this because they fear learning about something they cannot fix, or perhaps they don't believe it's pertinent to the workplace. Pulse checks do not mean you have to solve the challenges or learn the details, but by asking, you begin to make it normal for them to communicate their challenges and by doing so, make it normal to address them. Leaders and colleagues can express empathy or compassion and/or direct them to resources and/or encourage them to take a break.

Finally, while small bursts of regular breaks for yourself are an essential habit, we all ultimately need a clean break. Many of us haven't taken any meaningful time to recharge since March 2020. Your time away may not be the milestone birthday trip you envisioned before the pandemic or the large family gathering at the beach but take some time anyway. The waiting for things to be normal could be

making you emotionally tight. Your team and your colleagues need your full emotional resilience in this time, perhaps now more than ever.

About the author:

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