



Resilience: 9 stepping- stones to a more resilient life

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Introduction



Welcome to this deep dive into the topic of resilience, authored by David Tong, an experienced coach, consultant, psychologist and member of The OCM coaching team.

In authoring it, David has drawn on his own experience as a coach and psychologist, using an eclectic range of research sources. This presentation will be very valuable for people who want to find out a lot more about resilience and think of it through a range of different lenses.

So, thank you to those reading this who are taking an interest in this important topic. And thank you David Tong for authoring this comprehensive presentation.

Please get in touch with Graham Clark, MD of OCM Enable on graham.clark@theoem.co.uk if you'd like to talk about how to build resilience, either in yourself or in the people around you.

The nine steps to a more resilient life

Resilience is partly about being able to *bounce back*, but more importantly it is about building the *capacity to cope* with day-to-day pressures. An expert on resilience, who talks very practically on this subject is Lucy Hone; she advises on disaster recovery in New Zealand and has also experienced personal tragedy, that she has had to overcome.

She has given a compelling TED talk on the subject and I recommend it – ‘The Three Secrets of Resilient People’, TEDx Christchurch.

I have expanded on Lucy Hone’s thinking to create a ‘9 step model of resilience’.

MINDSET	MANAGING	MOTIVATION & ME
Perspective	Prioritisation	Purpose
Positivity	Pragmatism	Person #1
Plasticity	People	Pause



Steps 1-3: Mindset

The creation of a resilient mindset

Perspective

When something unwanted occurs, we should try to avoid asking, 'why is this happening to me'? This starts us down the path of victimhood - which holds us back from taking an active response to a threat. Instead, our capacity to cope is increased if we recognise that 'bad stuff' will happen.

A perspective of 'acceptance' is a surprisingly powerful response because it enables us to organise our thoughts quickly and productively instead of tormenting ourselves with a period of emotional anguish when we feel the victim.

Another way that we can develop a coping perspective is to keep things in proportion. Some people immediately see the difficulties they encounter as catastrophes and our primeval threat response short-circuits us into this type of reaction. But if we engage our rational brain to ask, 'what's the worst that can happen?' this will often help us return to a more balanced view where we can think constructively.

Positivity

People with a positive outlook tend to cope better under pressure. They will see more possible solutions and believe things will eventually get better, giving them the motivation to endure.

If you see yourself as a 'glass half-empty' person, but don't want to feel this way, there are techniques you can adopt to change your mindset. Start by 'tuning in to the good things in life', noting those things you can be grateful for, recording small events that make you smile and regularly acknowledging your colleagues for their help and ideas. This may sound trite, but there is strong evidence from modern neuroscience that this type of mindset shift is possible. You may be cynical but if you are struggling with resilience, experimenting with ways of becoming more positive is a good investment.

Plasticity

As we try to build a resilient mindset our focus needs to be directed at being adaptable not just strong - keep in mind that the strongest tree sways in the wind. Another saying that some people find helpful in building adaptability is: 'we may not be able to stop the waves, but we can learn to surf them'. The lesson here is that we may not have much control over external events, but we can learn to control our reactions to them.

Here are two techniques that will help us take control of a tough situation. Before we react or respond we should ask, 'is this action going to help or hurt me?' Sometimes, when under pressure, we divert into negative behaviour such as revenge or self-pity, so quickly bringing to mind the challenge 'will this help or hurt me?' can steer us towards a better response.

The second technique is called the re-frame. This is best explained by an example. If we are under time pressure, we should try not see our 15-minute morning walk to the station as a frustrating start to the day but re-frame it as a simple way of building exercise into our schedule. In other words, we turn our negative mindset around and see the situation in a positive light. The re-frame is a great way to start building a more adaptable mindset.



Steps 4-6: Managing

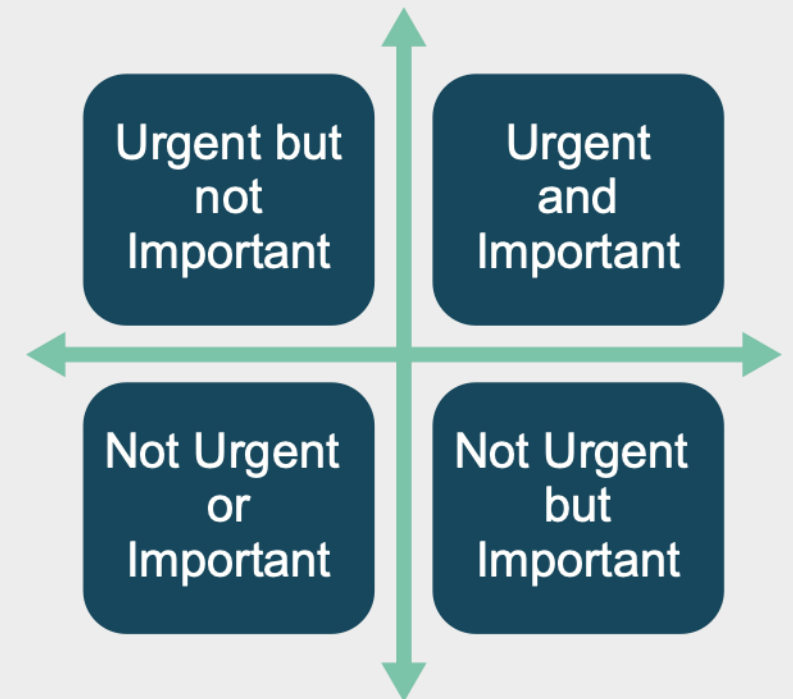
A key element of becoming more resilient is to transition from a state where we feel a victim to one where we feel we have agency to take control. Here I have set out three techniques that help us manage the demands upon us.

Prioritisation

This is a technique for managing our workload that many of us use already. With a simple tweak we can make it even more effective. Consider segmenting your 'to do' list into four quadrants to highlight both the importance and urgency of an issue.

This simple technique is helpful because it highlights some unwanted aspects of the way we plan our work. Items which are urgent but not important are often prioritised because they represent 'quick wins', however this can be a trap because we tackle them first when our mind is rested and fresh - then we leave the important things to a later time when we are tired and ready to stop.

This kind of prioritisation grid can also reveal that important things, like our own self-development and learning, are neglected because they are not urgent. If your work-life consistently prevents you from tackling really important personal priorities, then this may raise a bigger question about whether this situation is sustainable – are the sacrifices you are making worth it or is it time to find another gear?



Pragmatism

We can learn to manage not just the demands which others make of us, but those we make of ourselves. Simply put pragmatism means – ‘never let great be the enemy of the good’. This can be hard to achieve when you want to give your best, but sometimes we have to adjust our standards and just get the work out of the door. Ask yourself how much extra impact you will get from every extra bit of effort you put in. The law of diminishing returns suggests there is a trade-off to be made here.

People

Resilience is often a group characteristic not an individual one. So, don't try to cope in isolation from your team – look first to build the group's capacity.

When you are under less pressure, this is a good time to build your network with people who may be able to support you in tougher times. Working in a modern, complex organisation means you will not be able to respond to every point of pressure alone – so it is important to have allies to draw on – and then have the confidence to ask them for help.

It is also important to be able connect with someone who you can be really honest with about your work situation; someone who will help you offload the pressure and help you gain some perspective about the situation you are in.



Steps 4-6: Mindset

This final section on the subject of building a more resilient life deals with Motivation and Me. It examines the motivating factors that will help pull you through a period of difficulty and discusses how you prepare yourself physically and mentally to cope with challenges.

Purpose

Our purpose is what shapes our life. Some of us seek power and influence, others want to live a creative life or to prioritise their family. If your purpose has real meaning to you this helps build resilience because it diminishes the impact of setbacks; they become minor 'bumps in the road' on the long-term journey.

So, what is your purpose in life? That's a tough question. We are so driven by keeping our 'heads above water' dealing with short-term goals and objectives, that we are unfamiliar with thinking about our big-picture motivations. You may therefore need some help from a family member, close friend or a coach to really think through and be honest about what you want out of life and whether your current path is taking you in the right direction.

If you are able to articulate your purpose this can be a really useful benchmark when things get tough. It can highlight that things are getting too much, that the short-term is suffocating the long-term and things need to change; equally it can help you see what's really important and that you need to dig-in to stay on course.

Person #1

In the long-term, your capacity to cope will be enhanced if you develop new skills and a fresh way of looking at problems. Therefore, one of the best ways to build resilience is to be a lifelong learner – invest in yourself to grow your capacity – new experiences will help you see things differently and set new goals. With so many learning resources available online or via podcasts, it makes sense to take advantage of them.

Optimum performance also requires you to take care of yourself physically – exercise, diet and hydration all help your body and brain function and if you create a strong level of underlying fitness then you can draw on this in a challenging situation. If you struggle with the self-discipline to do these things, is now the time to build on all that walking you did in lockdown?

Pause

Another way to take care of yourself is to pause; take a break from work and build time for reflection. Taking a break can involve a regular vacation or it can involve mindful activities like exercise or reading. Reflection is important because it allows you to take stock of what is happening and try to get some distance between you and the stressful situation you are experiencing. To do this you may want to keep a daily journal - this 'objectifies' your anxieties, making it easier to put them aside, giving you the chance to rest and re-group.

You can also use periods of reflection to work out your stress triggers – when are you most vulnerable to pressure? – what emotions take over? – have you worked through similar difficulties in the past? - what resources in yourself did you draw on then? Using a rigorous reflection process to build self-awareness and reveal the ways you cope best can be one of the biggest steps forward towards resilience.

It is important that reflection does not become a time when you just dwell on the difficulties you are experiencing but is an opportunity to really think through what you can do about it. A technique to help purposeful reflection is visualisation. If you were to watch a video of yourself at work, would you like the person you see? - would you be proud of how they handle situations? If the answer is 'no', then try to visualise what different behaviours you would like to see and start to build a plan to transition to the new you.



Contact us to
find out more.

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