

How you can be more resilient

1st October 2016

Resilience, Pressure and Stress

In a recent Health and Safety Executive survey, one in six of all working individuals in the UK reported that their job is very or extremely stressful. They also state that around 9.9 million working days are lost each year to stress, depression and anxiety in the UK.

Workplace stress is different for everyone - what is stressful for one person may not be stressful for another. It can depend on your personality type and how you have learned to respond to pressure. Carole Pemberton describes how our resilience can be a more elastic rather than permanent capacity - we sometimes lose our resilience or it is reduced for a while and we need to find ways of regaining our capacity to be flexible (in our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours) when faced by a life disruption or extended periods of pressure. She contests however that, with support, there is every chance we will emerge from difficulty stronger, wiser and more able - not just to cope, but perhaps even to thrive.

Negative Effects

When we feel in the grip of stress, all sorts of usual activities becomes difficult for us. There is the obvious effect - like being reactive, procrastinating, and having difficulty making good decisions. but we also lose our capacity for empathy, start to prioritise things over people and do anything we can to stay in our comfort zone, avoiding anything new or different..

The good news is that we can learn the skills and abilities that help us to stay effective under pressure. Key capabilities for resilience include emotional competencies, problem solving capabilities, self-belief, realistic optimism, flexibility, interpersonal skills, building good support networks and having a sense of purpose and perspective.

These go hand in hand with developing greater self awareness and greater emotional intelligence. You can read more about Emotional Intelligence and the EQi self assessment tool here. A survey like this can really help someone become more aware of the areas they need to concentrate on for themselves.

The root cause of your stress

Nick Petrie at the Centre for Creative Leadership has done some interesting research on the challenges faced by leaders: stress and burnout come top of the list.

Pressure

He says its important that we understand the difference between pressure - the external demands of

work and life - job, deadlines, family etc, and stress. Stress is what people do with that pressure in their minds. And the consequences can be very real and very painful, so it takes a huge amount of effort, just to keep going. He cites Dr Derek Rogers, who describes rumination as “the mental process of thinking over and over about something” – either something that has happened in the past, or one that might happen in the future. This kind of rumination causes chronically high levels of adrenaline and cortisol, a cocktail of hormones that puts great strain on the body.

Wake Up

According to Petrie, there are 4 things you can do to become less stressed and more resilient. The first step is very simple. Wake Up - **be present**. Be aware of where you are and what you are doing right now. Your ability to be present has a huge impact on your performance - psychologists call it being "in the flow". Secondly, you need to **control your attention** - famous leaders through the ages have had that ability to make people feel like they are the only person in the room. The key to holding your attention is practice - and keep focused on your senses - what you can see, hear or feel. As an exercise you can pay great attention right to your breathing, to the contact you have with the back or chair, to the sights and sounds that you can experience right now. Thirdly, according to Petrie, you need to **detach** - the ability to get appropriate distance from the situations you are facing. This gives you a much better sense of perspective and can also help you to work out what are the things you can control (your own choices for example) and not worry about the things you cant (what your boss might say or do next).

The final key to building resilience is to **let go**. The leaders who are best at letting go, will ask themselves how much this really matters.

You can read the whole article here. <http://insights.ccl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WakeUp.pdf>

Finally, consider the mythical story of the man fighting his demons in the form of a tug of war. The monster is holding the rope on the other side of a fiery pit and the more the man pulls on the rope, the more the monster pulls back drawing the man closer to certain death. The man holds for, fighting for his life, tugging away. It takes some time and a great deal of courage for the man to realise that all he needs to do to win the fight, is simply to drop the rope.....

ends...