**Resiliency: Avoiding the Victim Reaction**

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Sadly, some people get stuck in the victim/blaming mode when their lives are disrupted. They reject all suggestions on how to cope with what happened. They won’t take steps to overcome their difficulties even after the crisis is over. Getting stuck in this frame of mind is like tying a rope around your feet and then trying to run a raceit’s a major handicap. Victim thinking keeps people feeling helpless, and by blaming others for their bad situations, they place responsibility on others for making their lives better.

**"Reaction"** is used here in the sense of a reflex that happens without any conscious thought or feeling of choices.

**"Response"** indicates that your actions after a threat or setback are guided by conscious choices.

Blaming others for ruining the life you had will block you from bouncing back. Blaming an organization’s executives, "the government," self-serving politicians, administrators who lack emotional intelligence, cheap foreign labor, stock market managers, taxpayers, or any person or group for ruining your life keeps you in a non-resilient victim state in which you do not take resiliency actions.

Your opinion is probably right, of course. As corporate consultant Gary Hamel has observed, "The world is becoming turbulent faster than organizations are becoming resilient."2 The chaos of change in today’s world is beyond the ability of most organizations to handle well. Some executives and administrators manage their organizations in ways that hamper employee resiliency. Changes in the workplace occur so often now that very few employees have up-to-date job descriptions. And it isn’t just frequent, disruptive change that must be handled. Morale suffers when friendships with co-workers are disrupted by reorganization, downsizing, and layoffs. Pride in one’s work can be hard to maintain when a system you developed for doing things is tossed out and a new system that doesn’t work as well is imposed on you.

When groups of employees make lists of their challenges and difficulties, they often tell me that there may be an impressive mission statement posted in the front lobby, but back where they work, they feel pressured to do more work of better quality in less time, with fewer people, in new ways, using new technology and new methods on a reduced budgetwhile worrying if their jobs are safe. An older manager in a large retail store said, "It used to be that when you took on a bigger workload, worked through your lunch hour, and took work home, you were trying to get a promotion. Now it means you may be able to keep your job three months longer."

The shock of an unexpected layoff can be devastating to someone who has enjoyed strong career progress and expects even more career success. Some people feel crushed and remain depressed for a long time. Some may settle for much lower paying jobs and drift into bitterness about how they feel mistreated. A former manager of a manufacturing plant kept telling upper level executives that they shouldn’t change anything in "his" plant because everything was working fine and his operation was profitable. When they fired him because he refused to consider making changes they wanted, he did not cope well. Three years later, he still felt angry and bitter as he worked to support his family by driving a taxicab in Chicagoan occupation he felt was beneath him.

Negative emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety, distress, helplessness, and hopelessness decrease your ability to solve the problems you face, and they weaken your resiliency. Constant fears and worries weaken your immune system and increase your vulnerability to illnesses. Taking tranquilizers is not a good long-term solution; neither is using alcohol to sleep at night and stimulants to become energized in the morning.

The situation is serious. At the present time, one out of six Americans uses tranquilizers regularly. According to current US Food and Drug Administration figures, approximately 1.5 million adults are tranquilizer addicts, and tranquilizer mis-users currently outnumber abusers of illicit drugs.3

A significant benefit from developing resiliency strengths is that you cope so well that you are less likely to need tranquilizers. If the organization you work for is unstable because the executives and administrators can’t manage rapid change, it’s possible to find ways to handle the pressure and keep bouncing back without anxiety attacks.

**The Resiliency Response: Not Easy, But Worth the Effort**

Resiliency means being able to bounce back from life developments that may feel totally overwhelming at first. When resilient people have their lives disrupted they handle their feelings in healthy ways. They allow themselves to feel grief, anger, loss, and confusion when hurt and distressed, but they don’t let it become a permanent feeling state. An unexpected outcome is that they not only heal, they often bounce back stronger than before. They are examples of Wilhelm Nietzsche’s famous statement, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger."4

This is why resilient people usually handle major difficulties easier than others. They expect to rebuild their disrupted lives in a new way that works for them, and the struggle to overcome adversity develops new strengths in them.

Resilience is more important than ever in today’s world. The volatile and chaotic period we are going through will not end soon. To sustain a good life for yourself and your family, you must be much more resilient than people had to be in the past. People with resiliency skills have a significant advantage over those who feel helpless or react like victims. In this world of life-disrupting, nonstop change

* Corporations with highly resilient employees have an advantage over their less resilient competitors.
* During downsizing, a resilient worker with a wide range of skills has better chance of being kept on.
* When many people are applying for one job, a resilient person has a better chance of being hired.
* When your old job skills are no longer needed, you are quick to learn a new way to earn an income.
* During economic hardship, resilient people give their families a better chance of pulling through and bouncing back.
* Resilient people help their communities get through hard times better.
* resiliency is crucial when there are the added challenges of physical injury or living through a terrorist attack.
* A resilient person is best at making difficult situations work well.
* Resilient people are less likely to become ill during difficult times.

Resiliency is an essential skill in every job sector in corporations, small businesses, public agencies, professional services, and the self-employed especially during times of turmoil. It is important to understand that when you are hit with life-disrupting events, you will never be the same again. You either cope or you crumble; you become better or bitter; you emerge stronger or weaker.

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