

Resilient Leadership

Resilience – A psychological term referring to the ability of an individual to cope successfully with adversity – to survive and thrive.

Research connects resilience to a portfolio of behaviors –

- Self regulation, perseverance, “grit”
- Interpersonal relationships
- Meaning making

What implication does it have for leaders and organizations?

Resilient Leadership - What is it?

Resilient Leadership is a new way of SEEING, THINKING, and LEADING that helps leaders navigate the hidden dynamics of organizations more effectively

Resilient Leaders are able to:

- Lead with calm, clarity, and conviction in the midst of anxiety provoked by increasing complexity and accelerating change. They stay calm, stay the course, and stay connected.
- Lead from strength. They know how to care for themselves emotionally, spiritually, and physically and can sustain their leadership efforts over time

Discussion (or small group?): Can you provide an example of a resilient leader in your experience or in the public eye? What were the circumstances? How did this leader impact others? What difference did it make? Debrief

Good news – Resilience can be learned! It is a muscle that needs exercise – We are going to focus on 3 Core Practices of Resilient leaders. If you are interested in learning more – you may be interested in Resilient Leadership 2.0 by Bob Duggan and Bridgette Theurer

Resilient Leadership Core practices:

1. Be a Systems Thinker

- Leaders “think systems” by reflecting thoughtfully on the actions, reactions, and interactions they have observed among people within emotional system of which they are a part. In thinking systems, a leader seeks to understand more deeply how these interactions form patterns that may be hindering (or promoting) effective action.
- Get on the balcony – be a systems thinker by thoughtfully reflecting on what you observe and consciously choosing your response.

The image is that of a crowded ballroom full of dancers, with a balcony at one end. As you dance with your partner you mentally put yourself up on the balcony. From the dance floor you can only see and feel your own perspective and corners of others perspective. From the balcony, you can see fully how you are interacting with your partner, and you can also see patterns of other dancers and the overall flow in way you can't from the dance floor. To get on the balcony means you can observe the flow of reactive, automatic, instinctual, and automatic functioning in yourself and others – you observe with a more detached curiosity which allows a broader set of leadership moves.

Partner Discussion (Take 9 question Systems Thinker assessment, debrief with partner with provided coaching questions)

Coaching Questions:

- In what areas or situations are you most able to “be on the balcony”? What impact does it have on you? What impact does it have on the team?
- In what areas do you struggle to “be on the balcony”? What impact does it have on you? What impact does it have on the team?
- What are 1-2 areas you want to focus on to improve your ability to be a “systems thinker”?

Group Debrief:

- What insights did you have from the survey?
- What are some of the areas of focus or best practices you agreed to going forward?

2. Be a Step Down Transformer

- A Step Down Performer is a leader who exerts a calming influence not only in acute situations but also in the midst of routine, daily pressures and stressors. It is a term used to describe a leader’s key responsibility when dealing with a chronically anxious system. A Step Down transformer cultivates a curious mindset and brings thoughtful problem solving, allowing others to perform at high levels.
- A leader’s nature is contagious. Remember the movie the Proposal? Sandra Bullock plays an edgy, harsh, manager of a PR firm who rules with an iron fist. In one scene, she walks through the office on her way to fire someone. Employees duck for cover and send each other messages “Watch Out!”, and “The witch is on her broom!” even though they had no knowledge of where she was headed. An extreme example of the impact of the leader’s presence. A leader’s primary tool for influencing emotional systems is the quality of his/her presence.
- How does a step down performer communicate?
 - o Quick to observe, listen and be curious rather than react
 - o Use playfulness to lessen tension in self and others, don't take yourself too seriously
 - o Asks questions, reframe issues

- Invite the group to step back and see the bigger picture
- Focus on facts rather than assumptions, judgments, gossip
- Brings clarity to rational systems by communicating and regularly clarifying roles, goals, and priorities

Partner Discussion (Take a 9 question Step Down Transformer assessment, debrief with partner with provided coaching questions)

Coaching Questions:

- In what situations do you find it easiest to be a “step down performer” for your team? What situations are most challenging?
- What words would you use to describe the quality of your presence in the last couple of weeks, as felt by your employees or other key stakeholders? Distracted? Energized? Anxious? Enthused? Focused?
- What words describe the quality of your presence at home, as felt by your family and friends?

Group Debrief:

- What insights did you have from the survey?
- What are some of the areas of focus or best practices you agreed to going forward? (suggest - self care, meditation, journaling, peer coach, exercise, sleep, time mgmt.)

3. Lead with Conviction

- Communicate where you stand
- Embody your length

Individual Reflection/Table Discussion: Think of a time you acted boldly despite the fear and anxiety swirling around you?

What resources did you draw on to summon your courage?

Are there specific places in your leadership or life where you see a need for greater boldness on your part?

What might that look like?

Closing – You are about to begin a deeper dive into the topic of resilience beginning with this session. In order to deepen your connection with the topic and with each other – you will be meeting with a peer “coach” in between each of your sessions. I will be sending you a guide for the conversation as a follow up to this session. The peer coaching conversation will be focused on an additional core practice of resilient leadership. We are asking you meet between now and the next session.

For myself and for my clients, I have become intrigued with the idea of asking people to describe how they want to be in a word form vs. what specific things

they will do. Plans and specifics matter, but sometimes a description allows you to respond even more effectively to the changes and shifts that naturally occur in life. So – we are going to try that today as a final exercise. Pick a word inspired by our conversations today that describes how you want to be as a leader. It should be a word that reinforces your resilience as a leader.

(Calm, strong, transformative, grounded, present, etc) Don't overthink it – and you can change it over the course of the year if you like. Take a moment and consider your word.

***Are you a Systems Thinker?**

To assess the extent to which you currently think systems, rate yourself using the following scale; 0 = rarely true; 1 = sometimes true; 2 = often true. Use your results to pinpoint areas of strength and areas you can improve with intentional practice.

_____ When faced with perplexing challenges within my team, I step back to think about what might be going on in the larger system that could be contributing to what I see.

_____ I seek to understand how my actions and reactions are being felt by the larger system of which I am a part (even by those parts with which I may not be in direct contact).

_____ When anxiety and reactivity are on the rise within the system I lead, I am able to stay above the fray and think my way through situations rather than succumb to the emotional pressures around me.

_____ When I look at the specific symptoms that surfaces, either within a person or within an organization (i.e. increased conflict), I am able to see it as a window into understanding more deeply how the system as a whole is functioning.

_____ When I experience resistance to important change initiatives, I am able to recognize it as a natural reaction – the system striving to maintain the status quo – rather than take it personally.

_____ When a reactive pattern emerges within my organization (e.g. gossiping and scapegoating), I become curious about the multiple factors that might be contributing to it rather than adopt a simple cause and effect explanation

_____ My awareness of how triangles (a triad formed between three people to lower anxiety between two of the people, may be healthy or unhealthy) tend to proliferate throughout a system helps me to pause before bringing a third party into an anxious situation between myself and another person

_____ When people try to involve me in their issues with another person or department, I am able to maintain emotional neutrality and avoid taking sides.

_____ When I am not getting the results I want from my team, one of the first questions I ask myself is, "What is my part in this?"

***Are you a Step Down Performer?**

To assess the extent to which you currently think systems, rate yourself using the following scale; 0 = rarely true; 1 = sometimes true; 2 = often true. Use your results to pinpoint areas of strength and areas you can improve with intentional practice.

_____ When I walk into a room where tensions and emotions are running high, my presence tends to have a calming effect on other and promotes greater thoughtfulness.

_____ If there is confusion on my team about roles, responsibilities, or priorities, I step in quickly to provide clarity and direction.

_____ I notice when people are making untested assumptions, passing judgment, or gossiping, and I refocus them on the facts.

_____ When other are wanting a quick fix, I become curious and ask questions rather than simply react.

_____ When the mood on my team becomes deadly serious, I use playfulness and/or humor to lighten things up or defuse tensions.

_____ I don't take myself too seriously.

_____ I notice when I am feeling and/or telegraphing anxiety and take steps to lower it so I don't "infect" others.

_____ When I notice that members of my team are becoming reactive, rather than pass judgment, I get curious about what might be going on in the system (or in them) and take steps calculated to lower anxiety.

_____ I take responsibility for my own reactive behaviors and engage in daily/weekly practices (e.g., exercise, yoga, meditation, centering, etc.) that help me lower my anxiety and stay calm under pressure.

