



The Human Dimension

THE LEADER WITHIN

July 2009

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"During times of change and complexity we help busy executives and their teams deliver against their most important priorities by focussing on what is most valuable - the 'human dimension' of their organisation."

We find improved performance is the reward for your investing in people.

The emphasis in THE LEADER WITHIN is on the changes and growth we make within ourselves, as leadership is basically a personal growth experience over time.

'For things to change first I must change.'

Sustainable Resilience

Almost nine out of ten Australians are stressed and most blame their jobs, a recent poll shows. A national poll commissioned by Lifeline Australia found 87% of 1200 respondents said they were stressed and 41% indicated they were experiencing "unhealthy levels of stress". Work was the no.1 cause of this year's poll followed by finances, thoughts about the future, health and personal relationships. In other parts of the world, and increasingly in Australia too, causes may be due more to lack of work and resulting financial pressures. What is true across the board is that large numbers of people experience large amounts of stress daily.

Many workplaces are making increased demands on their people, workloads, deadlines, expectations – often with reduced resources. It is not surprising that more and more people are finding these pressures causing them to feel stressed. Learning to respond to situations by using your personal resilience can be one of the most powerful choices open to you.

"When people feel strong and resilient – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually they perform better, with more passion, for longer. They win, their families win and the corporations that employ them win." (Loehr and Schwartz)

In our increasingly pressured, and often frenetic, lives we need to have a range of core competencies to handle ourselves, our work and others. One key competency is our personal resilience. We have a choice when under pressure – to be resilient or to 'give in'.

Resilience can be thought of as 'our ability to bounce back', or even grow, in the face of pressures and threats. Although some people appear naturally more resilient than others, we can develop even stronger personal resilience skills and attitudes.

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances. When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves". Victor Frankl

When we are feeling more resilient the typical behaviours we will demonstrate will include: being proactive; confident; focused; organised; adaptable; and energetic. One of the reasons for this is that we are able to call on our personal resilience when we feel as though we are aligned – our values and beliefs are linked through our attitudes to our behaviours. We can also learn to think about "difficult situations" differently and use a more positive thinking pattern and reframe our thoughts.

In our leadership courses, we discuss our personal resiliency in relation to the metaphor of an earthenware nurturing pot. When this vessel empties through stressors in our life, it is much more likely to crack under further pressure. When this vessel is full however, we are much more resilient in the face of challenges and pressures in our life.

For many of us, we wait until we are feeling exhausted, run-down, perhaps even ill, before we consciously choose to build our wellbeing and energy levels again. Let's imagine for a moment that Anna is such a person. A busy executive and mother of two young children, Anna starts her day early, prepares breakfasts for her children, skips her own breakfast as she rushes to pack lunches for the day, drops her children to school and then races to get to work by 8am. Her day is filled with back-to-back meetings, phone calls and endless emails to reply to. Throughout the day, she can feel a headache building, but she ignores this and continues on until 5pm when she races to pick up her children from afterschool care. By the time the children are fed, have done their homework and are in bed, she feels completely exhausted, her head is throbbing and she feels stressed and edgy as she debriefs the day with her husband. Presuming this is a standard day in Anna's working week, we can imagine her nurturing pot stays close to empty most of the time and if an unexpected stressor adds pressure to her life (e.g. illness in the family), her ability to respond effectively will be greatly diminished.

So what can Anna do to begin to fill her nurturing pot and increase her personal resilience? Below are some examples of suggestions from participants in our workshops:

- Get a good night's sleep
- Spend quality time with family/friends
- Schedule a regular massage
- Go for a daily walk
- Do some exercise
- Eat healthy food
- Meditate

- Learn relaxation strategies
- Have a long bath
- Watch a comedy, have a good laugh
- Talk to her personal coach

On one level, we all know this, it's commonsense. And yet, for hundreds and hundreds of people that we work with in our programs, a common problem many face is that they ignore the warning signs that their 'nurturing pot' is becoming empty, and place their own health and wellbeing as a lower priority than everyone, and everything, else.

In order to ensure that we are not always 'running on empty', it's important that we not only pay attention to warning signs that our body is sending us, but that we maintain high levels of resilience the whole time.

We therefore need to make building personal resilience a *habit*. Something we prioritize on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis. For many of us, choosing to do regular activities for our personal wellbeing can seem selfish. However, unless we make a commitment to keep our personal resilience high, we cannot sustain our effectiveness in our professional or personal lives on a long term basis.

Call to Action:

Our company mission is '*to reawaken the human spirit*'. Our programs and coaches work with leaders and their teams to assist them to accomplish this.

If we wish to respond from a more optimum place in all circumstances here are some things we can do:

1. **Make a commitment to keep your nurturing pot full.** Write down ten daily, weekly, monthly and yearly habits you will commit to doing in order to ensure you maintain high levels of personal resilience. Make sure your choices are sustainable and realistic.
2. **Take time out regularly to check in with yourself.** Pay attention to your feelings of health and wellbeing, notice when your shoulders are becoming tense for example, or you're feeling more temperamental. Take time out regularly during the day to do some deep breathing, have a stretch, go for a walk, or just get a change of scenery.
3. **Reduce the factors that negatively affect your resilience levels.** Identify the factors (thought patterns, situations, relationships etc) that seem to reduce your feeling of resiliency, and commit to do something about them.
4. **Count your blessings.** Noticing and acknowledging the things in your life for which you are grateful is an immediate and highly effective way to fill your nurturing pot. Positive psychology research shows that keeping a regular 'gratitude journal', by writing down the things we are grateful for in our life and why we are grateful for them, greatly increases our feelings of positive efficacy and wellbeing.

5. **Share this principle with your family and friends.** By encouraging others in your life to do the same, you can find creative ways to support each other and nurture your relationships at the same time.
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