

## Strategies for Developing Resiliency in Your Workforce

Change is natural in any organization, but these days the change seems to be magnified and increasing in intensity. Some days we might feel like we have things under control while others cause anxiety and stress. It's important to learn about the traits you can learn to adapt to difficult experiences and come out even stronger personally and professionally.

### Resilient Trait #1: Realistic Optimism

**Become skilled at noticing positive outcomes and satisfying experiences** - Very often, people tend to overlook the small improvements in their lives while looking for the “big, miraculous changes.” This can result in two major blocks to realistic optimism: (a) decreased motivation to continue to work on the small changes that so often are the reason for eventually large changes (b) an inability to notice that it normally takes hundreds small changes to create big changes that we desire (which can result in a basic ignorance of how big changes actually come about). Noticing and celebrating the small changes can be a big step toward optimism based in realism.

**Develop ways to re-frame “failure” as just another step toward positive outcomes and/or satisfying experiences** - Many people who are both optimistic and realistic realize that failure can be used to help promote success. Instead of looking at failure as a disappointment, people with more realistic optimism tend to see it as a signal to improve their plan or that what they are currently doing will not get them the outcomes they desire. Instead of feeling like a failure, they simply adjust their plans or their outlook on what it means to have not accomplished their desired outcomes.

**Create realistic goals for life** - SMART goals are (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time Bound). The goal “Become a better person and leader” is much less specific, measurable and realistic than a goal like “Read one chapter in my favorite self-improvement or leadership book and implement 1 idea from that book every month by the 15th of each month.”

## Resilient Trait #2: Assertiveness

Being assertive means that you express yourself effectively and stand up for your point of view, while also respecting the rights and beliefs of others. Being assertive can also help boost your self-esteem and earn others' respect. This can help with stress management, especially if you tend to take on too many responsibilities because you have a hard time saying no.

- Anticipate things you will need to know or learn new skills before you need them.
- Develop a mindset that looks to solve problems instead of dwelling on them.
- Communicate your feelings and needs in a manner that respects others.
- React to positive and negative emotions without aggression or resorting to passivity.
- Stay organized. A life of disorganization gets worse when times are tough. (Bills, household, chores, clutter, etc.).

If your style is passive, you may seem to be shy or overly easygoing. You may routinely say things such as, "I'll just go with whatever the group decides." You tend to avoid conflict. Why is that a problem? Because the message you're sending is that your thoughts and feelings aren't as important as those of other people. In essence, when you're too passive, you give others the license to disregard your wants and needs.

Consider this example: You say yes when a colleague asks you to take over a project, even though your plate is full and the extra works means you'll have to work overtime and miss your daughter's soccer game. Your intention may be to keep the peace. But always saying yes can poison your relationships. And worse, it may cause you internal conflict because your needs and those of your family always come second.

The internal conflict that can be created by passive behavior can lead to:

- Stress
- Resentment
- Seething anger
- Feelings of victimization
- Desire to exact revenge

## Resilient Trait #3: Thought Awareness

Toxic thinking consists of thoughts that habitually forecast disaster, perpetuate worry, instill doubt, obsess on perfection, describe self (or another) as a victim, or point fingers at others. Thought stopping is the most common technique used to introduce positive thoughts and eliminating negative.

- **Become Aware of Your Internal Conversations** - The first step toward improving our thoughts is to REALLY listen to our self-talk. Are your thoughts positive or negative? Do they lift you up or do they bring you down? Do they inspire or do they impede? Keep a log of thoughts that you have during difficult situations if it's helpful.
- **Take Control of Your Thinking** - If you catch yourself thinking negatively, you can stop your thought process mid-stream by literally saying to yourself "STOP!" Saying this aloud will be powerful and will make you more aware of the frequency and circumstances of these negative internal conversations. Another trick is to walk around with a rubber band around your wrist. As you notice negative self-talk, pull the band away and let it snap back. It'll hurt a little and serve as a slightly negative consequence that will both make you more aware of your thoughts and help put a stop to them!

- **Replace Negative Influences with Positive Ones** - It is important that you identify external negative factors in your life which may be holding your thoughts hostage. For instance, your mental state can become toxic by being around friends who are negative. If you are not vigilant enough, you will start to adopt their thoughts as your own. Hence, be alert to what your negative influences are.
- **Confront Fears** - Fear is often what holds you back from your success. You are scared of taking chances because you fear losing the security that you enjoy now. You try to convince yourself that you are happy in your current state when in fact, you are not. Your self-talk may sound positive in your attempt to lie to yourself. But somehow, there is an inner knowing that you are shortchanging yourself. Ask yourself what you are afraid of. What can be the worst that can happen? Take a step-by-step approach in breaking down your fears and see if there is any way round to looking at things more positively. When you confront your fears, you will often realize that the worst-case scenario is not as bad as you think. In fact, the benefits of change are worth the risk. Your inner talk begins to change at this point.
- **Focus on Enjoyable Experiences** - It is much easier to have a positive attitude if you focus on the enjoyable moments in life rather than the difficult ones. While there will inevitably be challenges, you need to remember that life consists of ups and downs and the good times are forged through the bad. So, choose to fill your mind with positive images and thoughts. Make it a conscious habit. Simply bring your mind back every time it goes astray in its thoughts. For a start, if you can be grateful for what you have presently, your self-talk will also change to be in alignment with one of joy. A state of gratitude does wonders to your psyche.

## Resilient Trait #4: Build Social Support

A social support network is made up of friends, family, and peers. A social support network is different from a support group, which is generally a structured meeting run by a mental health professional. Although both can play an important role in times of stress, a social support network is something you can develop when you're not under stress. It provides the comfort of knowing that your friends are there for you if you need them. A support system benefits you in the following ways:

- **Sense of belonging.** Spending time with people helps ward off loneliness and allow you to gain a fresh perspective during times of change and difficulty. Just knowing you're not alone can go a long way toward coping with stress.
- **Increased sense of self-worth.** Having people who call you a friend reinforces the idea that you're a good person to be around.
- **Feeling of security.** Your social network gives you access to information, advice, guidance, and other types of assistance should you need them. It's comforting to know that you have people you can turn to in a time of need.

## Where do you start?

Most of the strategies above can help change how you think and react to life's circumstances. It took time for you to learn to behave or respond in ways that are not productive and therefore make you less resilient. It's expected that to change your behavior will take time, so begin small. Look at even just one of these areas to see where you can make improvement. If you're feeling overwhelmed and feel you just can't do this on your own, contact the professionals through your NexGen EAP benefit to connect with a qualified professional who can get you started on the right track in developing skills for resiliency.