



## MAKE RESILIENCE A BUSINESS ASSET

Most people want meaningful and enriched lives for themselves and significant others. Why is this so hard to accomplish and blend together in one's personal life, the workplace, and the community? **Or, how do individual employee habits, attitudes, beliefs, skills, motivation, and values align with the organization's goals to form a mutual partnership of trust and higher morale so individuals, teams, and companies grow and benefit emotionally and financially?**

Once people know the "why" and "what" of resilience and positive psychology components, they will be able to learn the "how" to achieve their present and future goals, make the best out of any stressful situation, and become stronger and more emotionally agile, with a clear focus on their immediate choices and the potential consequences.

Human capital is an important investment. Equally important is psychological capital<sup>1</sup>, the positive resources of efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. These resources may be the key to helping employees move from less stress to more energy and to improving the workplace culture fit with the employee's skills, knowledge, and attitudes. The progression should move towards talent optimization, training, and retaining high performers with high resilience. Research supports that highly resilient leaders are more successful, creative, and innovative and display more emotional stability, strength, honor, and integrity when faced with adversity.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence shows that resilience and the emerging field of organizational behavior, along with positive organizational scholarship, can improve engagement, performance, and productivity; increase individual's cognitive flexibility to adapt to change with a calm assertiveness, and encourage striving towards success and personal accountability.<sup>3</sup>

One powerful predictor of resilience is the perceived support of others. With higher resilient employees, managers, and leaders, a company creates more resilient leadership, enhances effective communications, improves deliberate decision-making, increases positive attitudes, and builds an infrastructure that emphasizes the interdependence of all team members in attaining organizational and personal goals. This culture is marked by group identity (belonging) and group cohesiveness (willingness to advocate for others). Resilient leadership is most needed during a time of crisis. A resilient leader not only minimizes the detrimental aspects of a crisis, but also uses the situation to foster growth.<sup>4</sup>

Companies need to manage the consequences and history of past performances, build resilience into their organizations, and use resilience to help cultures thrive when strategies sometimes fail. Resilience should be practiced and rehearsed. In

Lisa Valiklangas's book, *The Resilient Organization: How Adaptive Cultures Thrive Even When Strategies Fail*, she quoted a manager in a US corporation in a quest for resilience who said, "Resilience is like a muscle – we will need to build it so that we have it when the tiger is on our tail."<sup>5</sup>

A company with resilient leaders at all levels, due to improved morale and trust, commitment to the mission and vision, and a positive mindset can help to reduce employee absenteeism, presenteeism, and disability claims (less accidents and injuries) and improve health and quality of life in the most cost-effective manner.

### *Definition of Resilience*

Many researchers and the general public have varied ideas of what resilience is, and some would say it is bouncing back from some crisis and handling stress better. Steven Southwick and Dennis Charney, report<sup>6</sup> that there are ten elements of resilience. These are: realistic optimism, facing fear, moral compass, religion and spirituality, social support, resilient role model, physical fitness, brain fitness, cognitive and emotional agility, meaning and purpose. These all lead to stress hardiness or stress inoculation.

Gail Wagnild, as Senior Research Consultant, has been studying and doing research on resilience for over 25 years. **She defines resilience as a learned behavior and as the ability to proactively adapt to change, challenge, and adversity.**<sup>7</sup> Thus, one can learn to minimize stress, anxiety, or depression, which is prevalent in all organizations, and learn to thrive rather than "fight or flee" as the typical stress response. Understanding and knowing your **Resilience Core, comprised of Purpose (most important), Perseverance, Self-Reliance, Equanimity, and Authenticity**, allows one to recognize, build, and strengthen their internal core no matter what external events are occurring.

This leads to internal motivation and a proactive, preventive position where a person wants to improve their attitude and behaviors out of desire, drive, determination and autonomous motivation (choice), rather than for some controlled extrinsic motivation like a “carrot or stick.” As Michelle Segar’s research<sup>8</sup> supports, for a behavior to be sustainable people need to focus on the “why” first (same as purpose) so they have energy and vitality to do the daily activities they want to do immediately. Behavior change then is perceived as an ongoing wellbeing “gift” to self, rather than as a “chore.”

### *Individual Resilience Can Be Measured*

Gail Wagnild has developed and tested a Resilience Scale<sup>9</sup> that measures the Resilience Core and consists of fourteen items. It takes fewer than five minutes to self-administer and produces scores in the range from low to high resilience. Each item is positively stated and shows you what is “right” with you rather than what is “wrong” with you. This is a highly valid and reliable assessment with an internal consistency reliability of .89-.94. It has been translated into more than 47 languages. Immediate feedback is available to the individual with interpretation of their scores.

### *Culture of Organizational Resilience Audit- Employee Perception of the Workplace*

Gail Wagnild and team developed the Culture of Organizational Resilience Audit (CORA)<sup>10</sup> that measures a culture of resilience along nine conceptual areas including leadership, engagement, communications, purpose and meaning, and a sense of community. Twenty-one positively stated items help both the individual employee and the employer understand how they perceive the culture of their organization. The CORA takes about ten minutes to answer. Immediate feedback is available to the individual with an interpretation of their score. Aggregate feedback is available to the organization. All information is de-identified and adheres to all privacy rules and regulations. This assessment provides direction to an organization to recognize, build, and strengthen a resilient workforce.

### *HHI Resilience Impact Estimator (RIE)*

John Riedel<sup>11</sup> has created the RIE, a tool that calculates the total cost impact of depression and stress in the workplace and the benefits of resilience self-directed training. Data to populate the RIE was generated from a comprehensive review of well-designed research studies that assessed the direct medical costs and productivity loss due to stress and depression

Depression and stress are prevalent in employee populations and the cost for organizations is staggering. The World Health Organization states depression will be

the number one disability worldwide in 2020. On average, in the United States, 8.7% of employees struggle with depression while 24.6% of employees report high levels of stress. The prevalence of depression is higher for women and those of middle age. The total burden of depression and stress includes direct medical costs, absenteeism, and poor performance on the job (presenteeism). Annualized depression-related costs average \$13,123 while stress costs are, on average, \$4,821.

This means that a company with 1,000 employees has 87 employees struggling with depression and 246 employees at high levels of stress costing \$2,194,914 annually. Of course, these are only the financial costs. They don't take into account the personal challenges of losing a sense of purpose and meaning in life, the effort to maintain a balanced outlook, or the effects of spillover and crossover.

The RIE provides a detailed picture of how much depression and stress is costing a company. More importantly, it highlights the benefits of a unique training program called *Resilience for Workplace Wellness*. This program is designed to help employees adapt, learn, and grow stronger in the face of change, challenge, and adversity. *Resilience for Workplace Wellness* can help a company reduce the prevalence and severity of depression and stress.

The RIE takes into account the number of eligible employees, an estimated program participation rate, the total cost burden per employee, and the monthly costs of the program. The user can modify these variables in order to determine their impact on the total cost for a specific workforce. Plus it provides a summary of the cost benefit breakeven point—the required reduction in depression and stress symptoms necessary for the program to pay for itself.

### ***Integration of Complex Research Into Workplace Application for Success***

Integrating combined theories, approaches, and models has allowed our team to take the best of each. For example, we adapt assessments, such as the Resilience Scale and the Culture of Organizational Resilience Audit, along with our Do, Learn, and Change Model. Do refers to a new positive mindset; Learn refers to purpose and why this is critical; and Change refers to having the choice for increased energy capacity and capability for a meaningful, purposeful, harmoniously passionate lifestyle. How refreshing to apply positive psychology, behavior economics, and decision-making science to health, wellness, and wellbeing so people can prioritize their own decisions and be responsible and accountable in order to strengthen their positive emotions, logical thoughts, and coping strategies!

The theory of broaden and build was first introduced in Barbara Fredrickson's work on positive psychology and in her book, *Positivity*;<sup>12</sup> autonomous choice was introduced by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in their work on self-determination theory.<sup>13</sup> *Resilience for Workplace Wellness* developers also borrowed from the aspirational model of Michael O'Donnell, incorporating awareness, motivation,

skills, and opportunity (AMS0)<sup>14</sup>, and the Pro Change model of James Prochaska and Wayne Velicer.<sup>15</sup> The father of the movement that emphasizes building on what is right versus what is wrong or missing, is Martin Seligman and his work on strength building and authentic happiness. His latest book, *Flourish*,<sup>16</sup> showed that optimism is a skill of emotional intelligence, which is learned. Optimism not only allows for better problem solving, it is the fuel that ignites resilience and, especially, equanimity.

*Resilience for Workplace Wellness* experts have taken solid research and translated it into practical applications for college and university students and the corporate workplace. Best of all, the learning system approach for online, interactive tools and resources, is based on our four S's. These are:

- 1) **Strategic** — Modules are built with a present and future vision that reinforces good choices and healthy lifelong habits.
- 2) **Systems-thinking** — Modules integrate positive psychology including resilience, happiness, mindfulness, and brain fitness as well as physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of health to show that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- 3) **Strengths-based** — Modules teach and model how to play to your strengths and the strengths of others to build greater capacity for achievement and engagement as research supports people are six times more engaged.
- 4) **Sustainability** — Modules weave the theme of “recognize, build, and strengthen resilience” through real life stories and interactivity. Resilience builds intrinsic motivation, which powerfully sustains behavior unlike extrinsic motivation.

### *Self-Engagement and Resilient Leadership Starts With One Person at a Time*

For years, Gallup reports have consistently shown how more than 70 percent of the workforce is not actively engaged with purpose or passion to give their best discretionary efforts daily. In other words, less than 30 percent go the extra mile out of choice and willingness (intrinsic motivation). Rose Gantner reported these results in her book, *Workplace Wellness: Performance With A Purpose*.<sup>17</sup> Research also supports that if employees are permitted to play to their strengths, which are recognized and agreed upon with a supervisor, they are six times more engaged in the workplace; and, if they have one good friend at work, they are seven times more engaged.<sup>18</sup> When employees can work on complex tasks in teams, productivity can range from a ratio of 6:1 to 9:1.<sup>19</sup> Engagement is defined as the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals.

Multiple reasons for the disengaged dilemma can be offered. These include chronic fatigue (40 percent of workforce),<sup>20</sup> working more than 40 hours per week without breaks or regular vacations, frustration when one cannot reach a desired goal, and being connected 24/7 digitally. Nancy Spangler, consultant to the Partnership for

Workplace Mental Health, and colleagues conducted a collaborative research project with forty-six employer representatives.<sup>21</sup> Executive leaders of companies with strong stress and resiliency practices were described as employee-centered and as having strong communication skills. Implementing practical solutions to building resilience also emphasized the importance of trust, both in relationships and in the stability of the organization.

Other research for disengaged workers show people experience less pleasure over time. Aspirations rise and people expect more.<sup>22</sup> Multi-tasking, procrastination, rumination, and lack of frequent positive encouragement from supervisors and others are also present.<sup>23</sup> All of these factors result in more turnover, accidents, injuries, increased disability and worker's compensation claims, in addition to losses in institutional knowledge and high performers' creativity. Nancy Rothbard's research<sup>24</sup> shows burnout is a strong predictor of turnover while engagement is a strong predictor of performance. Just think of the many promising careers that failed to materialize because of burnout or the inability to handle the pressure- lack of resilience.

No one will disagree that chronic stress manifests itself cognitively, emotionally, and physically. Any one of these stress-related conditions alone affects engagement, performance, morale, and trust. Interestingly, Gallup also showed that even in these difficult economic times, the amount of on-the-job stress (lack of role clarity, lack of opportunities to advancement, poor supervisors who do not positively reinforce employee strengths) is more than twice the amount of stress about job security.<sup>25</sup>

According to the Great Places to Work Institute, US job satisfaction was so low in 2010 that 45 percent of employees intended to start searching for new employment when the economy recovered.<sup>26</sup> A Right Management Survey, 2011, polling Human Resources leaders and executives, reported 60 percent of organizations are suffering from negativity detrimental to performance and productivity.<sup>27</sup> It doesn't have to be this way. Trevor Wilson states that positive psychology will help revolutionize the way we manage people and that human equity will be the new paradigm, replacing the typical management model that focuses on correcting employee weaknesses rather than leveraging employee strengths.<sup>28</sup>

A great work environment is a place where employees trust the people for whom they work, have pride in what they do, are recognized for their achievements, and enjoy the people with whom they work. Employers want a ready, resilient, and engaged workforce committed to the company goals, vision, and mission. They want to be able to recruit the top talent and train and retain high performers. Talented, high performing employees want recognition, certainty, autonomy, competence, growth opportunities, relatedness, and fairness. Let's get a win-win value proposition based on return on value, not return on investment.

There are some companies who demonstrate such an optimal work environment. These include Campbell Soup, Google, Zappos, SAS, Southwest Airlines, Starbucks,



Amazon, Coca Cola, and Home Depot. Any employer can utilize the basic tools. For example, replace a bad habit with a good one, “plan” versus just “do,” practice and rehearse for anticipated crises, and learn to communicate more effectively and in a timely, honest manner with all employees.

Why is this critical? We must win in the workplace if we are to win in the marketplace and our jobs affect our health, wellbeing, our family, relationships, and our lives. Active levels of engagement and resilience are related. When highly resilient, one is less stressed, more optimistic, and has increased energy and vitality to give best discretionary efforts daily out of choice and willingness, not just for a paycheck. Highly resilient employees will consistently go the extra mile to be a high performer.

Companies with high engagement scores have customer loyalty rates that are two times higher than those of companies with low engagement scores. “Engaged” companies have five times higher total shareholder returns and six percent higher net profit margins than do “non-engaged” companies.<sup>29</sup> Rudy Karsan and Kevin Kruse write in their 2011 book, *We*, that going from having a bad boss to creating a Best Place To Work requires effort on the part of both the employee and the manager to create a thriving culture that fosters feelings of full engagement. It is a mutual partnership with shared responsibility and accountability.<sup>30</sup> Wayne Baker, Rob Cross, and Melissa Wooten<sup>31</sup> found that high performing companies have three times more positive energizers (high performers) than average organizations.

### *Organizational Resilience and Resilient Leadership*

Andrew Zolli<sup>32</sup> clearly defines **organizational resilience as the ability of people, communities, and systems to maintain their core purpose and integrity amid unforeseen shock and surprises. By encouraging adaptation, agility, and cooperation, this new approach will not only help us weather disruptions, but will also bring us to a different way of being in and engaging with the world.**

We know that leaders manage culture and culture drives results. Generally, there are two types of leaders, task-oriented and relationship-oriented leaders. Few can integrate the best of these characteristics.

George Everly, Director, Resiliency Sciences Institute at the University of Maryland, reports<sup>33</sup> that building resilience takes creating a culture of resilient leadership. It is possible to make a better employee, manager, and leader. If people are trained, they can shift their attitudes to building organizational resilience. It is possible to ultimately shift the culture of the entire organization. He defines resilient leadership as behaviors that help others withstand crises and adapt from adversity. His key elements for being immune to stress and taming it are to have a positive attitude, build a healthy lifestyle, and train to strengthen resilience. Leadership is the ability to influence others towards these specific actions, directions, or goals. Everyone in

the company has the potential to be a resilient leader, if they choose to and are motivated to continually learn.

## Notes

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