

Turbulence begets Resilience

A wise man once said that "Most of our obstacles would melt away if, instead of cowering before them, we should make up our minds to walk boldly through them."

Amidst the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression, many of us find ourselves caught in a tidal wave of change and ambiguity. In a business world characterised by mergers, acquisitions and downsizing, redundancy is becoming commonplace. The impact on those losing their jobs and those left behind, is significant.

Job loss, sits alongside loss of a loved one and divorce, as one of the top 10 traumatic and life-changing events. Those who lose their jobs often experience financial strain, along with a loss of personal control, decreased emotional functioning and increased health concerns. Those who keep their jobs, feel guilty, uncertain of their futures and vulnerable. Research indicates that "survivors" of redundancy experience lower levels of engagement and performance, with a flow-on effect on organisational productivity.

As we sit here, contemplating the fallout from the Global Financial Crisis, we ask ourselves similar questions:

- How long will this last?
- How bad will it get?
- How will I be impacted?

Without solid answers, we turn to the question of:

How can we best weather the storm?

How is it that some people seem to take this in their stride, while others languish in the turmoil and ambiguity of such significant change?

When seeking inspiration, we often look to those who appear to "bounce back" from adversity. Consider Nelson Mandela – jailed for decades in South Africa during apartheid and later elected as one of the most popular leaders of his country. There are many such famous role models but this ability to flourish in the face of adversity can also be seen closer to home. Little Sophie Delezio who experienced multiple life changing accidents, continues to face the world with a beaming smile, a positive attitude and irrepressible optimism. This dynamic quality is known as *resilience*.

What is Resilience?

The psychological concept of resilience first emerged in the 1970s in the context of a study of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Researchers sought to understand how, despite enduring such adversity, some children were able to rebound and become productive adults. More recent research has identified that resilience also operates within adults and is a significant factor in moderating the negative effects of life-changing events.

Resilience is generally defined as the capacity to remain both flexible and strong amidst ambiguity and change. Indeed, resilient people have been found to go one step further, turning adversity into growth opportunities.

Specifically, resilient people are said to:

- a) report positive outcomes despite the experience of adversity;
- b) remain positive or effective during adverse circumstances;
- c) "bounce back" or recover after a significant trauma.

The ability to remain resilient is emerging as one of the most important skills for employees and job seekers dealing with accelerated organisational change, wide scale downsizing and the most challenging job market they are likely to see in their life times.

Recent research suggests that resilience is not a personality trait we are born with, nor a quality reserved for a lucky select few. Everyone can learn to be resilient.

So... how do we build personal resilience?

- Develop goals for your personal and professional life and get input from others to help clarify these goals. Identify a first step in your plan, and do it in the next week.
- Focus on any positives that might unfold as a result of your current situation.
- Take time out for replenishing activities and practice stress reduction techniques like deep breathing or meditation.
- Gather information on trends affecting your industry and profession.
- Find a mentor with whom you can discuss your plans and receive guidance and advice.
- Create a list of all of the people in your network and identify those with whom you can discuss your job concerns, family issues and personal fears.
- Undertake research to understand more about the situation you are in and how others might have successfully found their way through it.

And how might we build resilience in others?

- Listen to understand your own and others' feelings, concerns and ideas. Be visible and available.
- Educate and inform yourself and others of trends, changes and available resources.
- Communicate and behave in a consistent way.
- Coach and motivate others to take action and improve effectiveness, ensuring you model resilient behaviours.
- Encourage people to explore options, make choices and participate in the new organisational structure.



Upcoming Study

Inspired by an interest in the topic and its significance to current times, Kelly Wilson a Senior Consultant with the LHH Brisbane office is commencing an Honours thesis with the Queensland University of Technology, to explore resilience as it relates to those experiencing involuntary redundancy. It is envisaged that the results will provide important information to further inform development of 'best practice' models for LHH clients and add to the broader body of resilience knowledge. We look forward to sharing the results with you at a later date.

Through My Eyes: a story of organisational change through the eyes of different participants

A resilient "survivor"

We had a major announcement at work this week and it has been nearly impossible to get anything done for the last few days. Even though it didn't come as a surprise, there was shocked silence when our Managing Director spoke to us all in the staff auditorium and announced the new structure. I think a lot of people were not expecting the staff cuts to be as big as they were. The weird thing is, everyone in the room still had a job, but you wouldn't have known it at the time, by the way they all reacted.

Personally, I was relieved. I could see the sense in the decisions that were made and frankly, I could also see the opportunities that opened up for me. It's not the first time something in my life has changed and it won't be the last. Yes, I feel for the guys who were let go but it sounds to me like they have been taken care of as well as possible in terms of retrenchment benefits. They are even getting some help to search for new jobs.

The biggest challenge for me right now is to stay focused on my work, when so many people around me are standing around having a whinge about the changes, instead of getting stuck in and making things happen. I'm not sure what to say to them without ticking them off; the last time I suggested they get over it and focus on what needs to be done, they looked at me like I had just clubbed a baby seal. I wish our boss would step up to the plate and give us some direction on this so I don't feel like the odd one out.

There is a lot of potential in this company and I'm really glad to still be a part of it. I just can't figure out how to get that across to my team mates. Somebody needs to help the others see this situation more positively. I don't know how, and I don't know who does.



Notice of Termination and Redundancy Pay

On 1 January 2010 many of the substantive provisions of the new *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) will become operative, including new minimum employment conditions relating to termination and redundancy pay. Some of the notable changes include:

- An employer must not terminate an employee's employment unless the employer has given an employee written notice **on the day** of the termination (which cannot be before the day the notice is given). A penalty of \$33,000 applies; and
- Both Award and non-Award (e.g. the General Manager) covered employees will become entitled to redundancy pay of up to 16 weeks (and in some cases more). Some exceptions apply including but not limited to:
 - circumstances where the businesses employs fewer than 15 employees;
 - where the employee has less than 12 months service,
 - where an employee refuses suitable alternative employment;
 - casual employees.