



CREIGHTON  
HEALTHCARE  
EXECUTIVE  
EDUCATION

ELEVATE *your* EXPERTISE

# RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

Creighton  
UNIVERSITY

Heider  
College of Business



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

Resilience is an important quality to possess because we will all face adversity at some point in our lives. The good news is that resilience can be cultivated. It's not an innate, you-either-have-it-or-don't characteristic. It's a learned skill that can be intentionally nurtured and strengthened.

Resilience is the reason some individuals are able to overcome undesirable circumstances in life and go on to grow and even thrive. Alternatively, those who lack resilience can often get "stuck" in negative situations and struggle to pull themselves back up when faced with challenges.

So, how important is it for leaders to have well-developed resilience? And, are there strategies to increase your resilience? In this paper, we will explore the impact of resilience on overall leadership ability and discuss how to increase your level of resilience so you can be a more effective leader.

## WHAT *is* RESILIENCE?

---

At its core, resilience is the ability to recover quickly from a difficult situation. Picture a rubber band. An effective rubber band will recoil to its original shape after being stretched to its limit. However, a brittle rubber band that has lost its elasticity risks snapping when stretched.

Individuals who develop resilience are able to spring back after experiencing hardship, much like a healthy rubber band; those who break under pressure resemble the worn rubber band.

Now add to this fundamental definition of resilience—bouncing back into shape—by further defining resilience as not simply bouncing back but bouncing up, or rising through adversity.

Dr. Julie Freischlag, CEO of Wake Forest Baptist Health and Dean of Wake Forest School of Medicine, describes resilience as, "the ability to 'bounce back' from some sort of life disruption or change, typically something that is undesirable, like losing a job or a loved one. At its heart, it is the ability to grow and to learn from a life disruption. In this way, resilience transforms us. So rather than bouncing back, which implies going back to the way things were, I like to think of resilience as the ability to bounce up." Dr. Freischlag's eloquent words are a great way to think about the transformational power of resilience.

---

RESILIENCE *is*  
BOUNCING BACK,  
*and* THEN SOME.  
INSTEAD OF LETTING A  
SITUATION SET US BACK,  
WE'RE ADDING  
*or* LAYERING ON  
SOME NEW ELEMENTS,  
SOME NEW SKILLS  
*or* SOME NEW CAPACITY.  
NOW *that's* LEARNED  
EXPERIENCE.

---

## HOW IMPORTANT *is* RESILIENCE *for* LEADERS?

---

Resilience isn't only for the select few; we all need to strengthen our ability to recover and rise above difficulties.

It's not a matter of if but when we will face adversity of some sort. Examples include the loss of a job, being passed over for a promotion, divorce, a failed project, a bad outcome, loss of a loved one or a poor performance evaluation.

Just like the airlines stress the importance of putting on your own mask first before helping others during an unexpected loss of cabin pressure, in order to lead others, we must first learn to lead ourselves. Harvard Business School Professor Nancy Koehn put it best when she said, "Resilience is the capacity to

not only endure great challenges, but to get stronger in the midst of them. This is such an extraordinarily important capability because we live in a world that's one nonstop crisis—one calamity, one emergency, one unexpected, often difficult surprise—after another like waves breaking on the shore." As Dr. Koehn eludes to, and as any leader knows, putting out fires can be a large part of the leadership role. Having a well-developed sense of resilience as a leader is like having that mask in your hand—always ready to put on at a moment's notice—while also guiding others to put on their own masks.

As a leader, you are responsible for the morale and well-being of your team

when times get tough. You must be able to skillfully manage strong feelings in yourself and others. A leader must have the ability to respond and take action that is grounded in logic and clear thinking, not driven by emotion or impulse.

Resilient leaders can maintain their energy levels under pressure and are equipped to cope with and adapt to unforeseen changes. They form caring and trusting bonds with their teams that can help keep them engaged in their work. The ability to remain cool under stress, evaluate a situation and respond in an objective manner, and to manage a team with empathy are all traits of resilience that can set a leader apart from their peers.

## HABITS + WELL-BEING = RESILIENCE

---

Habits are important. They make our behaviors more efficient by reducing decision-making fatigue and freeing up mental energy for more demanding tasks. And what we do—our behaviors, our habits—dictate what and who we become.

***But how do habits develop resilience?***

---

HABITS DRIVE  
BEHAVIORS,  
BEHAVIORS *are the*  
FOUNDATION  
*of* WELL-BEING *and*  
WELL-BEING HELPS US  
WITHSTAND ADVERSITY—  
*to be* RESILIENT.

---

Well-being is innate. It flourishes from the inside out. It cannot be bought or chased, but it can be cultivated. Gallup defines well-being as the intersection of purpose, social, financial, community and physical elements of living.

- ***Purpose*** is liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals
- ***Social*** is enjoying supportive relationships and having love in your life
- ***Financial*** is managing your economic life to reduce stress and increase security
- ***Community*** is liking where you live, feeling safe in your environment and having pride in your community
- ***Physical*** is maintaining good health and having enough energy to perform daily tasks

Feelings of well-being are seriously lacking in society today. According to a recent Gallup poll, only 5% of individuals living in the U.S. are thriving in all five elements of well-being. Twelve percent experience four; 14%, three; 17%, two; 22%, one; and 28% experience none.

Why should employers care about their employees' well-being? Some may dismiss it as "soft," or a nice-to-have, but research confirms a compelling business case. Well-being greatly enhances job performance. Individuals who experience four of the five categories missed 70% fewer work days per year, are 45% more adaptive to change and are 59% less likely to look for new jobs.

---

# FOUR WAYS *to* BUILD RESILIENCE

The good news is we can take steps to improve our resilience. Resilient people make it a habit to:

- 1. Invest in growth:**  
In the words of Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffett, lifelong learning builds like compound interest. Remain curious. Read edifying books, listen to podcasts, keep up on the latest best practices in your field by reading professional journals.
- 2. Curate your circle:**  
Carefully select your companions. Consider Jim Rohn's Rule of Five: Who we are will largely be shaped by the five people with whom we keep closest company. They will influence our habits, which establishes our well-being and influences our performance.
- 3. Know your purpose:**  
The more clarity you have about your purpose, the better you are able to sustain and avoid burnout. Why do you exist? What makes you thrive? Burnout results because we forget why we do what we do.
- 4. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable:**  
The more you condition yourself to embrace challenges—even on a micro level, such as a strenuous workout or having a hard conversation—the better you will withstand macro difficulties. Being uncomfortable primes the pump of resilience.

---

## CONCLUSION

Albert Camus, the Nobel Prize winning French-Algerian philosopher, spoke of resilience when he wrote, "In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer ... no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger—something better, pushing right back."

Because adversity is inevitable, resilience is a vital skill for leaders to possess. Learning how to effectively navigate both the positive and negative experiences across our lifespan builds our resilience over time. Being a resilient leader means taking time to reflect and then intentionally controlling our responses to setbacks in ways that inspire the trust, respect and confidence of our teams and stewards the organizations and communities that we serve.

---

## LEARN MORE

For more information on Creighton's Healthcare Executive Education programs, ***please contact the Director of Healthcare Leadership Programs, Laurie Baedke, FACHE, FACMPE, at [lauriebaedke@creighton.edu](mailto:lauriebaedke@creighton.edu) or 402.280.4948.*** Laurie is a well-known speaker and co-author of the book *The Emerging Healthcare Leader—A Field Guide*. She has studied resilience and well-being extensively and presents nationally on the topics.



---

## REFERENCES

**Bouncing Up: Resilience and Women in Academic Medicine.** Julie Ann Freischlag, MD, FACS, and Michelle M. Silva, BA. Page 3. [health.ucdavis.edu/leadership/speeches-writings/PDFs/JACS\\_Resilience%20Article\\_April2016.pdf](http://health.ucdavis.edu/leadership/speeches-writings/PDFs/JACS_Resilience%20Article_April2016.pdf)

**Creatures of Habit: The Neuroscience of Habit and Purposeful Behavior.** A. Mendelsohn. Biological Psychiatry. June 1, 2019. 85: e49-e51.

**Psychology of Habit.** W. Wood and D. Runger. Annual Review Psychology. 67:289-314.

**Well-Being Enhances Benefits of Employee Engagement.** D. Witters and S. Agrawal. October 27, 2015. [gallup.com/workplace/236483/enhances-benefits-employee-engagement.aspx](http://gallup.com/workplace/236483/enhances-benefits-employee-engagement.aspx)