



## Building your personal resilience as a manager

Resilient managers, like resilient people, can bounce back from adversity, stay focused and productive through change, and thrive when things get tough. In this article, you'll read about key ways to build your personal resilience as a manager.

### Examining your personal resilience

People who are resilient tend to display some common traits. They are able to deal with uncertainty, they seek to understand and engage with alternate perspectives, and they choose to react positively to adversity and change. Resilience is about learning how to keep yourself recharged and grounded, not just simply enduring or coping.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you examine your own personal resilience and way to keep yourself recharged. Do you:

- Take care of yourself by monitoring how you react to overload, adversity, and stress?
- Intentionally seek out and find ways to decompress (rest, rejuvenate, eat a healthy diet, exercise)?
- Try to influence the outcomes of the changes going on around you?
- See change as instrumental in opening up new, fulfilling pathways for living?
- View your work and personal life as important and worthwhile enough to warrant your ongoing commitment, and attention to each as separate and distinct?
- Evaluate and maintain your personal and professional boundaries?
- Understand the power of engaging and empowering others, finding win-win solutions, and establishing personal support systems?

If you said yes to these questions, you probably have a strong sense of resilience. However, if you feel there may be room for improvement, it is possible to work toward greater personal resiliency.

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## Building your personal resilience

It's important for you to develop your own resilience because maintaining your health, energy, and focus are key to getting the work done and motivating the people you manage. If you constantly feel exhausted and overwhelmed, it will be difficult to do these things.

Here are some ways you can build your resilience:

**Take care of yourself.** Get regular medical checkups. Exercise regularly. Meditate. Maintain a healthy diet. Make time for personal priorities and relationships.

**Be familiar with the signs of stress and overload in yourself.** These include:

- sleep problems
- trouble concentrating
- physical discomfort such as headaches; stomachaches; neck, shoulder, or back pain
- heart palpitations
- lack of energy
- irritability
- withdrawing from family or friends
- tearfulness or frequent crying
- drinking, eating, or smoking more than usual
- lower productivity at work.

**Pay extra attention to taking care of yourself during stressful times.** Maintaining a sense of balance between work and personal life can be challenging, particularly for managers in challenging times. But if you're physically exhausted, overloaded, or overextended, it's more important than ever to disconnect, rest, eat well, exercise, and find ways to rejuvenate.

**Force yourself to take a lunch break.** Consider scheduling a permanent appointment on your calendar at lunch and leave the workplace so that you recharge and take a break.

**Make sure to take periodic “detachment breaks” in your day.** It is easy to become so focused in your work that you lose track of time and your own well-being. Be intentional about stepping away for 5 or 10 minutes throughout the day to breath, stretch, and momentarily disconnect. Studies show that this keep you fresh and will help you better focus when you return to your tasks at hand.

**Be intentional about nurturing your own resilience.** It may be tempting to start early in the morning and crash your way through a long to-do list without a break, but too many days of doing that is counterproductive. Whatever you do to recharge your batteries, do it intentionally.

**Be a role model while making time for things outside of work.** Let your team know what you're doing to nurture your own resilience. Maybe let them know you schedule regular sessions in the gym. Or maybe there's a hobby or personal commitment that renews your spirit. Make it clear by word and action that you are paying attention to your own well-being which builds resilience. This empowers your team to do the same.

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**Spend quality time and energy with the people you care about.** This reinforces your commitment to your values and helps you achieve satisfaction from meeting personal priorities and commitments.

**Carve out "me" time.** You'll function much more effectively in your role as a manager if you designate time for yourself, whether it's to work on a craft, exercise, listen to music, try out a new recipe, or read.

**Have regular meetings with your manager to ask for what you need.** This is particularly important if you feel your workload is unreasonable or overwhelming. Ask for what you need and be open to new ways of addressing your workload and stress.

**Foster a positive attitude.** Work with employees to help them turn challenges into opportunities.

Building your resilience will help you have confidence in your ability to influence positive outcomes for you and your team while being productive and refreshed at work.

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## Manager tips: Ways to motivate employees

Your ability to lead and motivate people is critical to your success as a manager. Motivation is the drive or determination to get something done. While it's an internal force that exists in each individual employee, managers who understand how to enhance employee motivation have the ability to increase team productivity and morale.

When people work together well, there's energy and enthusiasm. When they don't, employees can become dissatisfied or bored with their jobs, and then productivity declines.

As a manager, your ability to build team success is directly affected by how well you can create a highly motivating work environment for each of your employees.

**Find out what motivates your employees.** Motivation is highly individual, so what motivates you does not necessarily motivate others on your team. In your one-on-one time with the people who report to you, find out what's most important to them. Is it time off with their family? Recognition from you? The opportunity to learn a new skill?

Many managers are surprised to learn that many of the things that employees find to be the most motivating actually focus on doing good work, having the right tools and resources, learning new skills, knowing that their work creates value, and being part of a successful team.

**Help your employees prioritize work to focus on the most important tasks.** Your employees need to understand your department's key goals and how their work goals support team performance and organizational success. For instance, make sure employees understand why customer service is a priority, even when things are very busy. They need to be able to know how the organization benefits when your team meets or exceeds customer-service measures. Ensure that your employees appreciate the value of their work to increase their sense of purpose and satisfaction.

**Train and explain.** Make sure your employees have the skills and knowledge to do their work effectively. If they don't, teach them or arrange for them to get the training they need. Explain tasks carefully so that employees know what is expected. Provide regular feedback to keep them on track. Know what work assignments each of your employees enjoys the most and where they excel. When possible, include some of these work tasks in their assignments regularly.

**Let people work.** Your job is to explain the "what" and "why" of the work and to see that your employees have the skills and tools to do the work. Their job is to get the work done in the way they find most efficient. Keep track of people's progress, but avoid micromanaging or second-guessing people's work.

Within reason, be patient when employees make mistakes -- it's how people learn. Be available to coach, and periodically ask if there are things getting in the way with which you can help. Clearing work obstacles is one of the most positive things you can do as a manager to motivate employees.

**Be generous with positive feedback and recognition.** They are the most powerful motivators, as well as the least costly or complex, and yet many managers chronically under-utilize them.

- Look for and reward progress and even small achievements, not just the big accomplishments.

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- Acknowledge good work often. Don't use general platitudes like "good job." Be specific about what is good about the effort. Say, "Bill, the way you got that report ready on time and mistake-free, even though we were short-staffed yesterday, really made a difference. Thank you."
- Use your creativity to think of surprising, fun, and meaningful rewards. Special recognition, even something as simple as a handwritten note from you for a job well done can be more motivating than a "standard" reward.
- Encourage senior leaders to offer positive feedback. When an individual reaches a goal, a few words from a senior vice-president to group members can have a big effect on morale.

**Expect excellence.** People will put their hearts into work if they think the team and the organization are striving for excellence, especially when they feel a sense of purpose in their work and know it is appreciated.

**Care about people and show that you care.** A positive relationship with their supervisor is a strong motivator for most people. Make time to talk with your staff about things beyond the immediate tasks-at-hand. Ask people how they are doing. Ask what they think of their work. Ask if there are things that are getting in the way of their doing good work.

Don't open your email or look at papers on your desk when someone is talking with you. Your employees are much more likely to care about work if they know that you listen and care about them. Rudeness and lack of respect are always big "de-motivators."

**Hire and keep people who are good at the job.** People who chronically underperform create an uneven distribution of work on a team. This can lead to resentment from those who are doing their jobs well, and to frustration among those who are having trouble because they do not have the basic skills to succeed.

**Deal promptly with performance problems and hiring mistakes.** Know about your organization's "probationary" or "orientation" periods, which encourage managers to quickly recognize when new hires aren't working out and allow them to respond effectively. And make sure high-performers know that they are valued.

**Lead by example.** Be energetic and positive, and your energy will be contagious. Show what it means to focus on the customer and deliver excellent results. Work hard to model important and healthy values. Some managers are authoritarian in style and believe that fear is a motivator -- but it's not. While people will react to intimidation for a short time, a longer period of resentment and lack of motivation will generally follow.

**If you have questions about ways to motivate employees, contact your human resources (HR) team or the EAP.** Your HR representative or the program may be able to offer ideas and guidance. Or, for more information on motivation, consider reading Daniel Pink's well-regarded book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*.

**Encourage employees to contact the program if they're struggling with motivation or satisfaction at work.** Whatever the issue, the program that provided this article may be able to offer practical help and support.

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