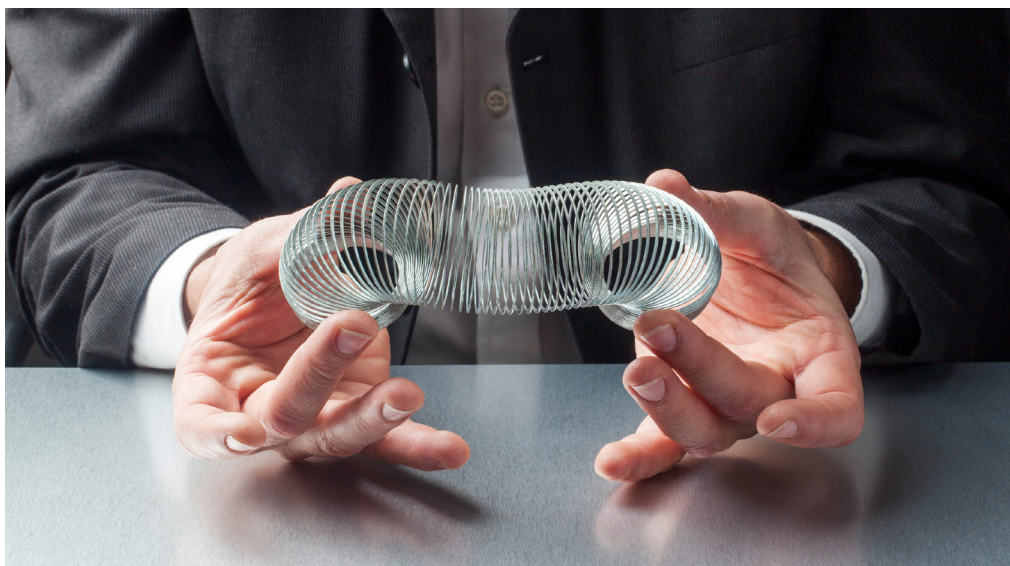


Building Resilience: Bounce, Bend, Stretch or Break?

In modern psychology being resilient means to 'bounce back' from a dramatic change or a traumatic event. In education, resilience describes the trait needed to become adaptable in today's VUCA world: times that are volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.



'Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress...'

American Psychological Association, 2016

Developing resilience is an active, lifelong process of doing, reflecting and redoing. **Resilient school leaders** can role model and explicitly discuss their own development, such as what skills individuals need to build resilience and how to develop these skills.

How people develop resilience will be unique depending on individual differences such as culture, physical wellbeing, and past experiences. Individuals respond in their own way to a potentially stressful situation, and their response may be different on any given day, depending on what else is happening for them. What may be a manageable situation one day, may be the cause of stress on another. An idiom that illustrates this is 'the straw that broke the camel's back.' It is important to understand how that final straw came to be placed on an already overloaded back, and recognise that straw as part of a much bigger picture.

Strategies for building resilience

Self-regulation, developing relationships and control of internal locus can help build resilience.

Self-regulation

Individuals who self-regulate can control their behaviour, emotions, and thoughts to respond appropriately to different situations. An individual with a high level of self-regulation can pre-empt stressful situations, prepare for them, and build capacity to respond positively.

Self-regulation includes asking questions such as:

- What causes me to feel stressed/worried?

- What do I do when I feel stressed?
- When have I already demonstrated resilience?
- What did I do to bounce back?
- How did this experience change me?
- What early warning signs/risk factors can I look for in the future?
- What can I put in place to proactively avoid 'breaking'?

Relationships

These can help develop trust and encouragement.

A positive school culture fosters supportive relationships through:

- community, such as social clubs, inclusive wellbeing activities, and acknowledging and celebrating personal milestones and professional achievements
- clear communication which avoids misunderstandings and develops trust. This includes transparent decision-making processes, and using multiple means of representing information such as electronic and physical notice boards
- collaboration with others that can build relationships and rapport. It is an opportunity to learn from, and about, each other. Knowing others' strengths means recognising when others need support. It also means identifying whom to ask for support when needed.

'The key to resilience is trying really hard, then stopping, recovering, and then trying again.'

Achor and Gielan,
2016



Internal locus of control

Individuals are more resilient if they believe they have control over most aspects of their life and can influence what happens to them. People who have a strong internal locus of control tend to be more creative, positive and motivated workers. Fostering a culture of autonomy includes:

- professional/career discussions through coaching and mentoring, and setting and achieving realistic, meaningful goals
- identifying the processes to air grievances such as consulting a counsellor, union representative or grievance officer
- seeking out opportunities to engage in professional learning and leadership roles whether positional or non-positional.

There will always be change and adversity; being resilient means adapting, and having the skills to pre-empt and prepare for challenges. People are more confident setting goals and striving to meet high expectations when they know they have the network and resources to celebrate successes, and the skills and support to reflect and redo as needed. Humans have the capacity to go beyond 'bouncing back'; to adapt and evolve as wiser, more resilient individuals ready to set goals and achieve again.

Key Points

Being resilient means knowing you will 'bounce back' and evolve

- Being prepared for change presents opportunities for risk-taking and growth.
- Identifying potential breaking points and having support networks in place builds resilience.
- Preparation and practice gives people the opportunity to manage adversity and 'bounce back' quickly.

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