



STEPHEN F. HAYES/ALAMY

Weathering the storm

Resilient managers thrive during a recession, explains **Maurice Quinlan**

Resilience is an essential management skill in today's challenging economic environment. Pressure and stress are present in all areas of daily living including our personal lives, families and work. There is also pressure on managers to obtain increased results with lower costs and fewer people. Resilient managers thrive on adversity and excel during recessionary times. By confronting challenges in a positive manner they turn problems into solutions and opportunities for business growth. Resilient managers also strive to maintain a work-life balance and their physical and mental health. This effort is rewarded with improved personal energy for a busy work environment.

Why is resilience sought?

The widely held view is that change is constant and that the pace of work is increasing. Innovation and knowledge are viewed as essential for the next stage in managing sustainable global economies. Being innovative in the management of human

resources is as important as the hard skills, if not more so. Managers will require development of personal resilience skills to meet adversities, which may include constant change, job uncertainty and job loss. In their personal lives they may experience financial difficulties, house repossession, divorce and mental health problems. Resilient managers adjust and recover from adversity or change, bounce back and wind up stronger or better. Lessons and experiences are used to confront future challenges.

How is resilience developed?

According to Al Siebert¹, author of *The resiliency advantage*, 'resiliency can't be taught, but it can be learned'. Resilience may be learned from negotiating development periods in life, from early childhood to midlife transition and beyond. Life events, such as the loss of a loved one or divorce, may provide the opportunity to become more resilient. In their careers many managers experience job loss on multiple occasions and overcoming this

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experience may also foster resilience. Some individuals will be enabled by their life experiences and others disabled. Reaching out for the support of friends, family and community is necessary during difficult periods. Resilient managers view crisis as an opportunity, accentuate the positive and minimise the negative. They can also influence change by adapting how they think and using their instincts to overcome problems and setbacks, and bounce back in a very positive manner.

Health, wellbeing and the work-life balance

As the global economy grew at an accelerated pace, a long-hours culture became the norm and the work-life balance became an issue. Work-life balance is essential to ensure employee health and wellbeing. Integrating work and life commitments will assist managers in being more productive. Employers are now aware of the potential conflict between work and life commitments and the impact on work performance. Working 70 to 80 hours per week in a pressurised work environment will lead to a work-life imbalance and a risk of burnout and ill health. Personal energy requires replenishment. In order to maintain positive health the human body requires nurturing and development in the following four key areas: emotional, physical, mental and spiritual health. Managers should be discouraged from taking work home or from forfeiting or cancelling holidays. Contact by email or mobile phone while on holiday should be discouraged. This time should be seen as important in replenishing personal energy and assisting in the return to work of a rejuvenated employee.

What are the net benefits?

Resilient managers create resilient organisations and developing resilient manager training will contribute to corporate success. This investment will assist managers in balancing all areas of their lives and will result in improved personal health and productivity. Resilient organisations need their people to be engaged and committed in order to sustain organisations in the current challenging times. ■

Reference

1 Siebert A. *The resiliency advantage: master change, thrive under pressure, and bounce back from setbacks*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc; 2005.

See also...

■ *Maurice Quinlan's seminar, 'Developing a resilient workforce'*, at: www.eapinstitute.com

■ National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance Policies: www.worklifebalance.ie

Assessing p

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The *Britain Under Pressure* research, commissioned by Friends Provident, reported its findings in November 2008¹. The report found that almost 29 million people in the UK – nearly two-thirds of the nation – felt more stressed, less fit and healthy, and more prone to illness, than they did just three years earlier – and more than 10 per cent reported that any stress they were experiencing came from work. Despite all the evidence of the cost of stress-related illnesses to business, many companies do not take time to identify what pressures are on their workforce and/or take any action to promote and enhance employee health and resilience, to sustain staff performance in their staff. In difficult economic times it is even more important for businesses to take these actions to promote the physical and mental wellbeing of their staff and ensure competitive advantage.

The first step to helping people become more resilient to pressure is to identify where the pressure on them actually comes from and what effect it has on the individual. Pressure is a continuum – from the very positive pressure of challenge, which encourages personal development, to the very negative pressure of stress, which is entirely destructive. There are many workplace stress surveys and questionnaires, and most mirror the Management Standards set by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 2004². The HSE identified six key components of work/life that if not properly managed can cause ill health and poor wellbeing, lower levels of performance and increased sickness absence. They can be described as the primary sources of stress at work as follows:

- work demands – including issues such as workload, work patterns and processes
- level of control – how much say the person has in the way they manage their work and their time
- support – the level of encouragement and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
- relationships – the quality of relationships with management, peers, direct reports and suppliers; and the organisation's processes for dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- role – people's understanding of their role within the organisation and whether they receive the necessary development
- change – whether and how change is managed and communicated in the organisation.