

# The Resilience Advantage

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## Preface

OK, I'm evangelist. I admit it. But I think we've been looking at stress all wrong. In the process, most of us have become cynical about the very notion of stress management. My goal is to change your perspective on stress. Rather than seeing it as something you fear or run away from, you can begin to see stress as the challenge that makes us stronger. Stress is here to stay and you can't manage stress any better than you can manage gravity. I believe that we need to embrace a different approach: resilience. Stress resilience approaches go far beyond the coping strategies inherent in stress management models.

Resilience helps individuals and organizations thrive in the face of daily challenges like the monotonous drive into work, the overloaded email box, or the sometimes-overwhelming family chores we face upon arriving home. Resilience also helps us address critical life experiences like work emergencies, personal health challenges and community disasters.

Stress resilience changes the way we think about the challenges and stresses we face. It can also change how a team or an entire organization approaches the demands faced in the workplace. And the truth is, business already uses resilience models; having back-up systems for information technology; using alternative vendors to make sure that if one fails to deliver a product on time there is another available; building contingencies into their operations for crises and emergencies. While companies embrace these models and even have a name for them, "business resiliency," we almost always fail to see that resilience is more than processes and redundancies. It's also about people and how they can do their jobs at the highest level possible.

As you read this booklet, keep in mind that individuals, workplace teams, companies and organizations have already demonstrated many resilience skills. We've already faced incredible challenges, planned how we wanted to address them, managed them effectively and learned from our lessons. Resilience is not a new concept and the evidence for resilience is all around us. How the people of the Gulf Coast are coping with the back-to-back disasters of Katrina and the Oil Spill. How the people of Japan are recovering from the life-shattering effects of this past spring's tsunami. How the US is recovering from the tragic events of 9/11. Yet with all these macro examples of resilience, let's not overlook the big and small resilience issues in your life and work. Perhaps you've lost a loved one recently, or your job was terminated and you've had to find new ways to make a living. Maybe workplace demands mean that you are putting in longer hours and are "on duty" 24/7 causing you headaches and aggravation. Though these challenges are tough, almost all of us find, in the long run, a way to get through them and we're often stronger as a result.

There are three key mechanisms that will help you develop a Resilience Mindset:

- ① **Preparation and Hardiness**
- ② **Navigation**
- ③ **Recovery and Bounce-Back**

Understand these mechanisms of resilience, build them into your daily life and you and your company will see real changes in how you can make stress work for you.



## Chapter 1: The King is Dead; Long Live the King

Stress Management, as a concept of how we can live and address the increasingly high levels of stress in our lives and in our organizations, is no longer a model that works. It's been a great ride and we've learned a great deal over these past 80 or so years that teachers, coaches, psychologists, physicians, and management consultants have been teaching us about stress management. But, it is time to move onto new ideas that help us manage the complexity of 21st century life.

Don't misunderstand me, the stress management world has taught us a lot and yielded fantastic tools for understanding how stress works and how we can cope with the overwhelming nature of it. In fact, for the past 30 years or so, I have provided hundreds of sessions on stress management to everyone from corporate executives to teachers and students, health care workers, parents with a newborn or teenagers, professional and amateur athletes. In all these sessions, attendees walk away with a more relaxed and confident feeling about how they can address stress; but, unfortunately, the skills we worked on don't easily transfer to a day-to-day ability to put them into play. Perhaps it is because of the hectic natures of our days, or that the "management" tools become too easily overwhelmed by the stress.

As a result of this observation over the years, I've started to look for an alternative way to think about stress and how it impacts us. Initially, I talked with CEOs, corporate medical directors, doctors, lawyers, managers, first responders and line staff about how they deal with stress. Everybody's list was a little different, but most are variations of those listed on the Mayo Clinic's website. Some folks had their favorites, but I never heard anyone describe an approach that they stuck with, that worked for them over the long term, and that really made a difference in how they "managed" stress. Perhaps stress management has just not kept pace with the increased stress that has entered our lives

### Mayo Clinic's Top Ten Ways to Manage Stress

- 1 - Get active
- 2 - Meditate
- 3 - Laugh
- 4 - Connect
- 5 - Assert Yourself
- 6 - Do Yoga
- 7 - Sleep
- 8 - Journal
- 9 - Get musical
- 10 - Seek Counsel

over the past 20 years or so. Technology and the Internet have increased demands on us at work and at home taking valuable downtime away as we are on a 2-way, 24/7 information blitz. Families are more complex as our kids and aging parents have increased expectations for everything from chauffeur services to healthcare support. And, work has seen an explosion of requirements as economic conditions have brought about global convulsions, triggering an increase in expectations with decreased resources.

We don't just need a new approach to addressing the stress in our lives. I believe we need to learn how to use the stress in our lives to bring about a greater sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from what we are doing. Chris Waddell was an excellent collegiate skier when a skiing accident left him paralyzed. Within a year, Chris was back on the slopes and over the next 11 years he became one of the most decorated Paralympics athlete. In 2009, Chris was looking for a new challenge and challenged himself to become the first paraplegic to reach the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro unassisted. While most of us will not challenge ourselves to this kind of amazing feat, it is possible to search for and perhaps find more delight, grace and success in our lives as we face the daily reality (and perhaps the more catastrophic realities) of stressful events.

This is what resilience is all about.



*"It's time to move onto new ideas  
that help us manage the complexity  
of 21st century life."*



# 2

## Chapter 2: Changing the Paradigm

Stress resilience was born out of research on young children from the Island of Kauai. In this research, conducted by Emmy Warner, she followed the entire group of children born in 1955, numbering some 698 children. Many of their parents were quite poor and many had histories of alcoholism and mental illness. Over the years that she tracked their behavior, she discovered that approximately 2/3 of the children grew into adolescence engaging in destructive behaviors such as substance abuse, chronic unemployment and criminal histories. But her research also discovered that 1/3 of the children overcame their adversity and grew up to be successful and competent individuals. Out of her research came the first set of questions about what it takes to overcome stressful situations in ways that not only help us survive but actually thrive.

This concept of thriving is a key element of stress resilience. Unlike stress management, which merely focuses on what we can do to cope or “manage” stress, resilience provides us the opportunity to “take on” stress, learn and grow from it and use our experiences as fuel to improve who we are and how we act. Unlike stress management techniques, resilience involves creating a mindset about what to expect and how to approach challenging situations.



In this comparison of **stress management vs. stress resilience**, you can begin to see some of the key differences.

Event Stress	Stress Management Model	Stress Resilience Model
What is stress?	Something that should be avoided as much as possible.	Daily events that provide opportunities to challenge you.
When do you deal with the stress?	Cope with it as best as you can and then deal with it after it is over.	Before, during and after: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare and plan ahead of time.</li> <li>• Navigate stress as it is happening .</li> <li>• Use bounce-back strategies to recover more quickly.</li> </ul>
How do you recognize stress?	Pay attention to physical signs that you may experience after the stress like rapid heart rate, sweating, anxiety, stomach distress.	Anticipate situations where stress is likely to occur and begin considering options for how you want to deal with it.
What do you have to do personally to address stress in your life?	Manage your impulses to either fight it or run away from it.	Use a number of different tools so that you are in charge of your stress instead of letting it control you.
What are organizational strategies you can use for work and home?	None. Stress management tools are designed for personal use only.	Organizations (work, family and civic groups) are amazingly resilient due to (among other things) the kind of support that we provide to each other. Building on these and other tools can help create more effective organizations.



## Resilience's Time (Chapter 2 continued)

In the past ten years, there has been an explosion of attention and work around stress resilience. New research focuses on what happens when things go well, leading to the development of a new field of psychology known as "positive psychology." Government and industry have both embraced resilience as a mechanism for ensuring that our businesses run effectively and smoothly in the face of dangerous situations. Born out of the terrible events of 9/11, organizations now use business resiliency practices that ensure continuity for most routine events and some less unpredictable ones such as fire, natural disasters and even terrorism.

### The Mechanisms of Resilience



These adaptations (anticipating future risks and planning for them) are good models for exploring how we can apply what we know about personal resilience strategies, to improve how employees function in the workplace. With resilience we stop thinking about stress as singular events that we must respond to (as in the "stress management" model), but instead consider a predictable sequence of activities that comprise the mechanisms of resilience.

### 1 Preparation and Hardiness:

Recognizing that stressful events will occur means that we cannot only prepare for them, but we can build hardiness ahead of such occurrences. As individuals, we can think through how an event might occur and strengthen ourselves by being physically and mentally fit and by rehearsing for an upcoming event. Twelve years ago, I began training for a 500 mile, 7- day bike ride which I was motivated to do in memory of my son who had died of AIDS. I began my training in the heat of a Texas summer, following the recommended training regiment that included evening rides, longer weekend rides and participation in monthly weekend races. By the time the event came in October, I was ready

for riding 100 miles a day and able to keep the mental focus needed to manage traffic around the highways of big cities and on the open roads of rural Texas.

## 2 **Navigation:**

Knowing an event is going to happen helps us get ready for it, but we must be able to successfully steer our way through that event like a ship navigating through a narrow channel. Being nimble and agile in the face of stress is an art form or as the writer Jamie Diaz said, “Getting Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable.”

## 3 **Recovery and Bounce-Back:**

Recovery and bounce-back is what most of us think about when we talk about resilience. But the conversation usually is about big stuff—floods, hurricanes or oil spills. We’ll be expanding our look at recovery and bounce-back for the little things, too—like how you recover and catch a “mental breath” after a tough meeting, or how you use your drive home to recover from the pressures of your day.

A colleague of mine told me about a great message that he learned early in life from his old high school football coach. It seems that Coach Brown had a commitment to his student athletes that went beyond his teaching on the football field. He wanted his team members to learn about life as well as football. Coach Brown believed in the power of three and told his players that they should prepare for and be ready to have three bad things and three good things happen in any particular time period whether a year, a day or a game. Obviously, the intensity of the events would be different. But, at the beginning of the year, realize that there will probably be three really bad things that happen and three really good things that will happen to you. And, the same will be true of your day and certainly with a football game. “Be ready and prepare for them,” he told them. “And when they happen, don’t be surprised and stay focused on what you can do to make the best of whatever the situation is.” Finally, when it is over, “take stock and evaluate what worked and what did not work, celebrate what you learned from each and then go get some rest so you are ready for tomorrow.”



## Chapter 3: The Business Case

In a 2009 study by the global consulting firm, Towers Watson, three of every five employees, stated that they were “stressed out.” The survey reveals that a high percentage of employees report excessive stress levels at work. Extreme workload demands, long hours, lack of work/life balance, 24/7 accessibility due to technology connections, poor management and a failure of strong team collaboration all contribute to these figures. But in spite of stress being one of the primary challenges to people’s health, the study found that only one in four companies are even attempting to combat stress in the workplace. Most of them are employing stress management strategies that often have very mixed results with one-third to one-half reporting little or no positive impact.

Yet, another finding of the same Tower Watson annual study, *Staying at Work*, was that companies who lead in the successful management of employee health concerns receive extraordinary financial and productivity gains. These top-tier organizations build health and wellness approaches into organizational strategic plans that are reviewed and approved by senior leadership. The plans are also communicated to and implemented to serve all employees ensuring that these ideas become a part of the organization’s workplace culture.



### Among the survey's findings ...

- 11% higher revenues per employee were realized by companies with an effective health and productivity strategy experience versus those without such a plan
- 28% higher shareholder returns
- Nearly two fewer days of employee absences from work per employee
- Lower disability costs, presenteeism and less turnover of lower overall healthcare costs
- Compared to most companies whose health care costs increase 5-10% per year, companies that have strong health and productivity programs actually have health care costs that are lower than previous years (by 1.2% year-over-year)

These results are very encouraging, but they are just the tip of the iceberg. Companies have a vested interest in improving the health of their employees. Most wellness initiatives are designed to help rein in health care costs, but the productivity payoff often far exceeds the savings that can be attributed to reduced health care insurance costs. Many of these early initiatives include activities such as employee health-risk assessments, worksite wellness programs (e.g., exercise and weight management programs), strengthening web-based offerings and improving how health carriers manage employee chronic diseases.



## The Business Case (Chapter 3 continued)

In addition to increased individual stress, there has been an incredible increase in the number and type of new business stresses over the past decade. No one could have predicted 9/11 and the disruptions this major event caused in numerous industries, such as transportation, financial services and energy. But as a result, the need for recordkeeping redundancies, hot sites and disaster recovery plans catapulted to the forefront of service providers ranging from banks to back-office investment providers and health care. Additionally, legislation such as Sarbanes-Oxley now requires companies to maintain detailed records surrounding a score of different business items. All of these examples brought sweeping changes to many industries and sectors, which put a great deal of stress on workers, teams and organizations as they struggled to cope with the pace and degree of challenges to comply with requirements. In an Information Age, there is no slow-down to changes resulting from legislation, regulatory oversight, industry and market events as well as competitive factors.

With such a prevalence of stress in today's business world, companies want to take notice of the impact of stress in light of the evidence in their own businesses. It can be difficult for organizational leaders to address stress in the workplace for several reasons, including:

- 1 Fear that opening up conversations about stress invites gripe sessions about policies, workloads and projects. Given the intensity of challenges that have been going on in the workplace during our recent economic downturn, no one wants to open up the Pandora's Box of workplace pressures.
- 2 A belief that stress is a "personal" issue that each individual must address on their own. Unfortunately, ignoring the complexity of workplace teams and culture drives the stress issue underground. Employees may learn not to talk about stress, but its effects are often paralyzing to teams and project.

3

Companies just don't know what to do to effectively address this issue. Past history suggests that just introducing workshops or educational programs in an ad hoc way is not sufficient. In fact, "bolting on" (a tactical approach) such as trying to talk about "work-life balance" or apologizing for "work overload" or even offering telecommuting programs simply do not address the issue. Companies need a strategic approach that builds resilience models into the fabric of the organization, allowing them to use resilience for a broader range of issues such as project management, safety, business continuity and employee health and performance.



# 4

## Chapter 4: The Resilience Mindset

We know that resilience works for individuals, teams, and organizations. We read about individual resilience when we see stories about people who have overcome great adversity to achieve a notable result—such as Nancy Brinker who started “Walk for the Cure” after her sister Susan Komen died from breast cancer. We know about teams that have succeeded after facing what seemed like perennial failure such as the Boston Red Sox — a team that had not won a baseball World Series since 1918 only to succeed 86 years later in 2004. And, we’ve watched as a company called Apple, reinvented itself from near bankruptcy in 1997 to become the most valuable company in the world in 2011. Resilience is all around us and we read about these amazingly resilient events every day. But, how can we be sure to put resilience into play in our lives and in our workplaces?

In 1961, meteorologist Edward Lorenz was running some weather predictions on his numerical computer and entered the decimal “.506” instead of entering the entire number that was a part of his formula “.506127.” When Lorenz ran the calculations, he discovered that those small numerical differences yielded a completely different weather prediction. After he published his findings, a colleague remarked that if his theory was accurate, then the fluttering of a butterfly’s wings in one part of the world could shift atmospheric conditions so that a dramatic weather change resulted in another part of the world. His ideas became known as the “butterfly effect.” Building resilience is a bit like the butterfly effect because small changes that we begin to make in our lives can have far reaching impacts on how we look at and experience stressful events in our lives.

Creating a “resilience mindset,” is a pathway towards creating the butterfly effect in how you address challenges and the stress in your life. No longer is every stress a PIA (pain in the ass) or an insurmountable occurrence. We want to be realistic about how we face difficulties, knowing that many of them may be challenging and recognizing that some may be harder to handle than others. The truth seems to be that in almost all instances we are, or can become, more resilient.

There are three key aspects to resilience that are needed to build your resilience mindset — Hardiness and Preparation — Successfully Navigating Events in Real Time and Bounce-Back Strategies.

*"The truth seems to be ...  
that we are, or can become, more resilient."*

## 1 **Hardiness and Preparation (H&P):**

This aspect is in two parts. The first involves becoming strong and tough. The second is planning for, and recognizing that certain stressful events will be coming your way. Or as the martial arts master says, "expect nothing, be ready for anything."

Here are some ideas for building your H&P:

- a Life is stressful. The stronger you are mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually the better able you will be to confront routine as well as unpredictable stressors. Building your strength can be purposeful but can also be learned from experience. You can certainly work out in the gym to build yourself up physically, but you may already know that getting out on a hike once a month with your partner will help clear your head and help you find a new appreciation for simple pleasures.
- b When you know that a challenging event is coming up, think about best- and worst-case scenarios, how each might play out and what would be your plan in the case of either one. Don't forget to include your most probable outcome.
- c Don't obsess about what might or might not happen. Do your anticipating and planning and then **let it go**. Don't overanalyze and don't get stuck.
- d Remember the butterfly effect and that small actions on your part (like mapping out a plan for a new project, or reading a book that is inspiring to you) can begin to reshape your approach to challenging events.



## The Resilience Mindset (Chapter 4 continued)

### 2 Navigate Successfully

While there are many ways to successfully navigate difficult challenges, one of the most important is mindfulness. In his book “Clutch,” Paul Sullivan, a New York Times columnist, describes how The University of Connecticut’s Women’s basketball team had to be totally present in their effort to win their 89th consecutive basketball game breaking the record of John Wooden from UCLA. He describes how the entire Connecticut team was focused, present, showed discipline, and had great desire in each and every moment of the game. Together, as a team, they found the winning formula to break that 40-year NCAA record.

While it is great to be clutch during an important event, successfully navigating through routine events is just as gratifying. Some great ways to find your focus include:

- a **Focus on a single Task** — Research has shown that our efficiency drops significantly when we try to do more than one thing at a time. Forget about texting and driving or talking on the phone and eating. Just eat just drive ... just text and focus on doing what you are doing.
- b **Slow Down** — John Wooden the legendary basketball coach at UCLA referenced above, used to tell his players to “be quick, but don’t hurry.” Our lives are full of things that have to get done and we can work to be quick and orderly in what we do, but if you add the element of hurriedness, our ability to be present quickly diminishes



- c **Listen to others** — I worked for a CEO once who insisted that all his key staff listen to what others were saying in staff meetings. We were told not to interrupt and we got his beady-eyed look if we did! The results were amazing. We got more work done, more quickly and more effectively than when we were each busy trying to make sure our points known.
- d **Build in Routines** — We use routines every day to help us automate our lives—preparing breakfast, checking emails, and holding staff meetings. Take notice of how you manage these routines to make sure you are being effective and efficient. Many people describe their email routine as checking mail every time their computer dings. Routine for sure, but a really big time and energy waster and one that takes you away from successfully navigating the work you need to get done each and every day.

### 3 **Bounce-Back and Recovery**

Thomas Edison was asked how many failures he had before he discovered the incandescent light bulb. He was reported to have said that he did not fail. Instead he “found 2000 ways to not make a light bulb.” His commitment to getting “back on the horse” established Edison’s success. More than any of the other resilience qualities, bounce-back is the one that is the most natural to our system. Life is about getting on with it; and so, when we encounter challenges we mostly find ways to pick ourselves up and try again. There are some simple ways to make bounce-back and recovery a bit easier.

- a **Notice What Happened** — Just like the best- and worst-case scenarios when we are anticipating an event, its important to take time to notice what worked after a particularly challenging activity and what didn’t work as well.
- b **Focus on Your Success** — Instead of spending a lot of time focusing on negatives and what didn’t work, pay attention to the things you and your team did well. Then apply, those skills to improving the areas that need additional work.



## The Resilience Mindset (Chapter 4 continued)

- c **Talk about it** — Venting is more than okay, it's absolutely essential. Find a friend, loved one or colleague — someone "safe" — and let them know that you need to let off steam. In fact, ask them to just listen for a bit and not even provide any feedback (unless you want some). Don't belabor the point. Make it short and concise. You'll feel better and your listener will appreciate knowing more about you. Team members can do this for one another.
- d **Rest** — Whether it's taking a nap on the weekend, laying down for a few minutes after work, or even taking a walk during the day, a few minutes of downtime is vital and essential for recharging your batteries.

The mechanisms of resilience hold the key for developing a Resilient Mindset. Beginning with these first steps, you will begin to think about how you might approach problems differently. It may be that you take some time the night before your daughter's big soccer tournament to sit down with her to discuss her game plan and what she thinks will be the outcome (hardiness and preparation). You may find yourself "stepping back" in a meeting and noticing, in a non-judgmental manner, how others are behaving. Seeing whether your team is functioning in an effective manner, you may discover some changes that would help improve their operations (navigation).

Finally, I love asking people how long it takes them to recover from a difficult event—whether it is fun or work. Think about your last business trip and how long it was before you felt like you had recovered and were back to 100%. Figure out your recovery time and you can begin to shorten it so that your energy comes back more quickly.



*"We know that resilience works."*

## Chapter 5: Your Resilient Place in the World

Over the past decade, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has changed its perspective on how to deal with domestic emergencies such as severe weather conditions, terrorism and pandemics. Their strategies have evolved from “protection” to “resilience.” Following Hurricane Katrina, DHS recognized that, while they must do everything they can to mitigate catastrophes whenever possible, some disasters will be unavoidable. As a country, we must prepare for such occasions individually as well as in our organizations. We are now hearing government officials encouraging people to prepare for potential disruptions by having emergency kits, backup systems, and communication devices in their homes so that each of us can be prepared for unpredicted crises.

In the same way that we know that the government cannot provide our sole protection, neither can we protect ourselves or our organizations from the constant bombardment of challenging and stressful events that occur every day. For the past 50 years or so, our approach has been to try to “manage” these events with tools for stress management. However, today we see that — like the levees of New Orleans — eventually, the rains will overwhelm the capacity of those walls to hold back the water and it will all spill over into our daily personal and working lives.

As our world becomes more complex and challenging, the levels of stress at work and at home continue to increase. Building your resilience to these challenges offers a new and effective strategy for incorporating these events into your life ... using them for growth and learning. Remember, small changes bring about big and lasting successes—The Butterfly Effect takes time, but works. In the same way, stress management techniques revolutionized how we saw and understood the impact of stress in our lives and provided us useful tools to cope with stress. Now, it is time to learn a new approach—stress resilience—that promises to help us embrace stress and use it to our advantage as an element in strengthening our skills and enhancing our capacity.



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