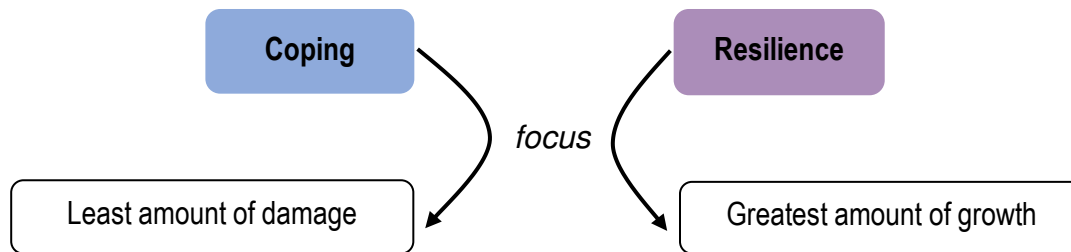


Resilience: The Skill of Persevering through Challenge

Resilience is the ability to navigate challenges and productively handle adversity. It is not a personality trait or an outcome—rather, it is a set of skills that can be developed.

Common reactions to adversity can be classified as *detrimental*, *coping*, and *resilient*.

- *Detrimental* reactions are those that may provide momentary comfort, but that can have long-term, negative consequences—e.g., emotional eating.
- *Coping* reactions are classic stress management techniques, deployed in response to emotional hardship we feel from a challenge—e.g., exercise, rest, social connections. They are necessary and lay a foundation upon which resilience can be built.
- *Resilient* reactions are those that not only help us recover faster and stronger from present stressors, but also help us to apply the lessons learned from our challenges to reduce the impact that any future stressors may have on us. Resilience skills are largely those of maintenance, practiced on an ongoing basis, to support our effectiveness in both calm and chaotic times.



Core elements of resilience include the following:

Sense of Self

Resilient individuals possess a deep awareness of and relationship with their inner self. They are able to...

- identify their strengths, motivations, preferences, limitations
- recognize their internal dialogue
- accept compliments
- celebrate their accomplishments
- promote themselves
- surround themselves with encouraging people

Resilient individuals cultivate a counterbalance of skills that they can apply to different experiences. Examples include being cautious, but knowing when to take appropriate risks. Being effective working independently, but being able to form collaborative partnerships. Having a big-picture perspective, but exploring supporting details.

Resilient individuals maintain an internal locus of control (the extent to which one believes he/she has impact on life events). Believing they are the “drivers of their success,” resilient individuals are self-determining and feel a sense of power and personal responsibility, rather than believing they are the “victims of circumstance” and seeking to place blame and feel helpless.

Reflections: *What am I most proud of myself for through this challenge?* *Who have I chosen to be during this?*

Purpose

Resilient individuals maintain a clear and holistic sense of purpose. They don't define themselves by one thing (e.g., a title, a role, a task) or one experience (e.g., a mistake, a tragedy). Thus, when circumstances shift, they are less likely to lose themselves or their way. Their purpose is rooted in **values** and is applied to the **priorities** they choose to support.

Consider developing personal and professional mission statements for yourself that you can use as your touchstone and on which you can actively focus and live when adversity arises. Some people refer to this as their "why."

Reflections: *What will this challenge have meant for me? How have I impacted others in a positive way?*

Optimism

Optimism is the interpretation of life events in a way that is mindful of their positive elements and potential. It is the ability to assume a mental attitude that is hopeful about one's future. While some people may be more naturally optimistic than others, optimism is a skill that can be learned.

A key step to "learned optimism" is to be aware of how you mentally process your experiences. Consider what internal messages you are creating and how you are describing your experiences to others. Martin E.P. Seligman, PhD, has researched optimism and found that optimists tend to describe and explain their experiences in a particular way, believing that bad things are unusual (fluke) and good things are typical (norm), that bad things have a limited impact (insignificant) and good things have a broad impact (significant), and that bad things are the result of circumstance (external) and good things are the product of their own effort (internal).¹

Optimists acknowledge challenges that exist (or could exist), while envisioning a positive outcome. That leads them to be good troubleshooters and prompts them into action toward the outcome they desire.

Reflections: *What future can I envision for myself that is motivating? What actions have I taken to create that future?*

Gratitude

Being grateful is a conscious decision to recognize the things in life that contribute to your happiness, satisfaction, and overall sense of well-being. It seems simple enough, but most of us are conditioned to focus on things that create dissatisfaction and hardship. When you deliberately start recognizing goodness, you build confidence in the fact that good things indeed do happen, and that life is not all bad. As a result, your emotional perspective and your worldview improve.

Tips for developing an "attitude of gratitude" include:

- **Gain control over your perspective.** You can intentionally choose to focus on what you don't have or on what you do have, on the worse-case scenario or on the best-case scenario, etc. Choose deliberately.
- **Stop complaining.** Complaining can be habit-forming and done without conscious thought. Break the cycle by getting an accountability buddy who alerts you of your complaining tendencies.
- **Acknowledge your blessings.** Take a moment to recognize your greatest blessings in life or engage in an ongoing practice of identifying something that makes your life easier. (Consider starting a gratitude journal.)

- **Express your gratitude to others.** Saying thank you or writing a thank you note gives you an opportunity to actively engage in gratitude instead of simply feeling grateful. Additionally, it is a practice that makes others feel good and may prompt them to express their appreciation to someone else.
- **Resist the tendency to compare.** You will always be able to find someone who has something you don't, and you will always be able to find someone who doesn't have what you do. Thus, making comparisons is a pointless exercise.
- **Recognize the value in "little" things.** We tend to overlook the value of our most simple, basic experiences. However, if you get into the habit of acknowledging them, it can be inspiring and can expand your capacity for appreciation. Think of a "little" thing for which you are grateful each day when you brush your teeth.
- **Help someone else.** By helping another person, you recognize that you have something (an ability, a resource, an experience) that someone else does not, but could benefit from. Essentially, you become someone else's blessing. In turn, the other person can be encouraged to become a blessing to someone else. What a trend to start!

Reflections: *What is something that COVID-19 couldn't negatively impact? In what way am I fortunate?*

Serendipity

Serendipity is about allowing yourself to be positively changed by challenging experiences. It is the ability to convert a disadvantage (or an element of a disadvantage) into an advantage of some sort. It is characterized by the skill to learn from hardship and to actively apply that learning to future actions. Tips for increasing your talent for serendipity include:

- **Re-defining failures as lessons** (and identifying the lesson!).
- **Creating room for curiosity about life** by wondering about things (instead of judging them) and asking lots of questions.
- **Taking the lead on your own learning and development** by seeking knowledge (instead of waiting for it to be provided or required), experimenting, and taking risks.
- **Paying attention to your intuition and instincts.** Consider what your gut is telling you and use the information it offers for your benefit.

Reflections: *What have I learned about myself, my work, or my priorities?
Going forward, what can I do differently that would be beneficial to myself or those who I impact?*

"I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it." - Maya Angelou

Which of these five elements of resilience do I see as an opportunity for me?

Sense of Self • Purpose • Optimism • Gratitude • Serendipity

¹ Seligman, M. (1990). *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. New York: Vintage Books.

Optima EAP and its Sentara partners have created a number of resources for leaders to use both to take care of themselves and to take care of their MOT during this period of unique challenge and opportunity.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING RESOURCES (available on www.OptimaEAP.com, username “Sentara”)

ARTICLES & FLYERS

- View articles covering topics such as breathing and relaxation techniques, emotional self-care, in-the-moment stress management techniques, mindfulness, and more

ASSESSMENTS

- *Resilience Scale*
- *Well-Being Assessment*

AUDIO CLIP

- Four-minute mindfulness meditation

WEBINAR RECORDINGS

- *The Power of Self-Talk*
- *Preventing and Managing Burnout*
- *Realize Your Resilience*
- *Resilience in Times of Change*

LEADER TIP SHEETS (available by contacting Optima EAP’s Training Department)

- *Empathetic Rounding*
- *End-of-Shift Emotional Pauses*

RESILIENCE RESOURCES (available on WaveNET>Channels>Learning>Team Member Development)

- Self-Care Tools
- meQuilibrium Resources

OTHER RESOURCES

OPTIMA EAP COUNSELING - 1:1 counseling; management consultations (1-800-899-8174)

CHAPLAINCY SERVICES

ONELINK LEARNING (available via WeaveNet)

- Modules on moral distress for leaders and for employees

LINKEDIN LEARNING (available via WaveNet)

- Modules on resilience, mindfulness, self-care, self-compassion, and more