

# Chapter 1

## Resilience

If I had to encourage you to have one skill that would increase your chance of surviving and thriving in the global economy, it would be to develop resilience.

At times, the word is overused but I'll explain what it means and how you can develop it.

It is the capacity to anticipate setbacks and crises. That seems a little negative, I know, but the reality is that not everything will go according to plan. The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the technological impact will bring constant change and challenges.

As an entrepreneur and a lifetime adviser to other entrepreneurs, I have found that many people expect that everything will go to plan and will be straightforward. However, business and your career will provide both opportunities and setbacks – sometimes at the same time! Sadly, I have seen

many people give up great ventures and careers when the inevitable first obstacle appears.

People tend to believe you are born confident or an entrepreneur and some people have lucky breaks, and some don't. During my time as an enterprise educator, I have heard many highly intelligent people tell me it's all down to luck as to how you and your career turn out.

Nonsense. Certainly, genetics and upbringing have an influence, but you can still have a significant impact if you are prepared to learn and find new innovative ways to meet challenges.

You can be resilient, learn from your mistakes and achieve your goals whatever happens, but you must be prepared to learn. It is not enough to have knowledge – you need to find the right strategies and change your own behaviour and mindset to survive and thrive in this colourful arena of change. You live in a different world, one that is more uncertain than the one your predecessors faced, but arguably with more opportunity as you can potentially have more global opportunities than the previous generation.

The questions are: Will you be prepared to learn the skills and the mindset? What are these? How can you learn them?

Without good resilience you might miss significant opportunities, but you will acquire the skillset. Knowing about the theories is not enough. Let's review these skills and develop a plan together so that this core skill/mindset will allow you to welcome both challenges and opportunities.

1. The first thing is to be self-aware, so ask yourself: Are you resilient? How do you act in a crisis? What do others think about your ability to cope under pressure and deal with unexpected challenges? Ask a variety of people so that you can measure the response, and look for brutal

honesty no matter how sensitive you are, and a range of responses to improve the validity of the feedback. This is something you should do on an ongoing basis.

You may not like some of the responses but if the feedback is from a variety of people these responses can provide valuable analysis on the areas you will have to work on. It is important to learn how to fail, without it destroying your dreams.

Sometimes you might feel it would be nice to avoid feedback that is indicating areas of weakness but responding to this in an appropriate and positive way will save you years of heartache and provide the opportunity to be even better prepared for future challenges.

2. What is your physical health like? The stronger and fitter you are, the better prepared you will be for any potential crisis or opportunity. What is your weight? How fit would you describe yourself?

At one point in my life, I was unfit. I was also working extremely hard, long days and hours, with poor sleep. Then I had a health scare which encouraged me to embrace physical exercise and examine my lifestyle. I now run 5 k every morning and eat healthier.

This enables me to cope much better with pressure and unexpected events. If you are physically fit, it helps with your sleeping and lifestyle.

I am not trying to turn you into a fitness fanatic but instead to make you aware that physical health plays a part in helping you manage your energy levels and be more productive in your work. You become better prepared to deal with unexpected events, crises and even those great opportunities. Develop a plan and realise that physical and mental health are vital tools for you to use.

Make a realistic plan, one with no pressure to do too much at once if you are trying to create good habits and behaviours that last. Whichever physical exercise you choose must be appropriate for your age and personal background. You also need to find something you enjoy as you are more likely to turn it into a habit. Is there a sport you like or a class to attend which is fun? The more enjoyable and convenient it is the more sustainable the impact.

Personally, I find t'ai chi to be an exercise technique that provides physical and mental health benefits and is appropriate for me. It can be practised in a group or on your own and you do not need any specialist equipment or venue.

Ultimately, you will only keep doing a physical fitness programme if it is simple and easy to undertake, with a dash of enjoyment. The key is little and often, and be aware that healthy food can enhance your physical and mental well-being.

Your mental health is equally important. There is pressure to constantly be productive, which can induce stress. This can then lead to anxiety, which is not good for either your physical or mental health. You might be young and fit at the minute, but stress can sneak up, and you need to be able to recognise when to switch off from work and learn how to relax your mind and body. Bringing yourself into a natural state of balance helps to make you more productive, more successful. What is the best way to do this?

Mindfulness is a word you will hear often, and it plays a significant role in improving mental health. It is the capacity to relax physically and mentally at any time, learning to focus your mind on what is going on now around you and how you are feeling, but remain detached so you do not respond

or react. Learning strategies to help you relax and gather your physical and mental strength are important. Learning to breathe deeply and slowly can help to reduce any potential imminent stress. One amazingly simple exercise you can practise is to breathe through your diaphragm. Slow breath in for five and out for ten. It's the outbreath that helps you to remain calm. The most important thing is to be aware of how you are feeling, and what might need to change.

The key is learning to be mindful in the moment by not reacting immediately or giving into your emotions – taking a little bit of time to adjust and refocus will prove useful. It is all about controlling and reducing any anxiety, which unfortunately has become all too common in today's business world and particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic. There are a variety of techniques you could experiment with to find what works for you.

If we can learn to accept that life moves around us at distinct levels, sometimes high sometimes low, then we can become more resilient and respond in the appropriate way. The calmer and more relaxed you are in your response to different challenges the easier it will be to find solutions and the better you will feel physically and mentally.

This strengthens your resilience. Some people are naturally calm and relaxed in all situations – perhaps personality and life experiences have taught them to take their time and relax when a problem arises. The rest of us need simple strategies with good impact.

My wife is a professional relaxation therapist, therefore I benefit and learn techniques first hand. As a meditation teacher, she ensures we start every morning with a 10–15-minute meditation. It is a myth to think you must meditate for at least an hour, 10–15 minutes is beneficial. When you are relaxed

and focused, you are much more resilient and much more likely to solve challenges and problems as they arise; therefore you become resilient.

I am not saying you must do meditation to be resilient but what you must do is understand your own stress levels and triggers, and how you cope with them. We have many more triggers now than ever before, with technology changing regularly, and our dependence on it, and how we use it. Many people find themselves in stressful situations at work and at home. This is why many people are reluctant and frightened to run their own business and find it difficult to separate home and work life on an even balance. It makes sense to find several simple strategies and techniques that will not only provide solutions but will enhance your well-being and improve your resilience significantly no matter what you face.

There are many apps around and authors who specialise in helping you to find the appropriate techniques that may suit you. You can learn and adapt more than one technique and use them in different scenarios, and all will increase your resilience.

Find what works best for you and have the strategies to remain calm whatever comes up. Not always easy I know, but when you find or create what keeps you calm your resilience level will be extraordinarily strong.

Resilience is your capacity to deal with the changes we all face in the 21st century. The more you look after yourself the less anxious you will be when challenges appear at any stage. You will bounce back whatever unexpected changes and challenges arise. You will also have the confidence that you are ready for anything. Learn to be calm in the eye of the storm. Clearly, how you respond to sudden change may be the key quality or skill we all need. No matter what our background or ability we all need to learn to bounce back in unexpected circumstances.

## The Building Blocks of Resilience

One of the most sophisticated models that anyone can learn with proven effectiveness is the model of Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania, the creator of positive psychology.

He created a highly effective research-based model for resilience building in the US army. His model is called 'PERMA', with a focus on Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment. It is recommended you work on them one at a time.

Can you remain positive in what looks to be a negative and challenging situation? It's your choice, make the right one. People who are negative with you should be used as fuel for a positive response. Enjoy proving them wrong. If you have ever been written off before you will know it can be great motivation. I was once told by an eminent academic from Queens University, that my enterprise education programme would never work. It became the number one model in the world within two years. You always have a choice as to how you react to negativity or discouragement. You can always control your response.

Keep doing the work you love and engage with externals, who are not involved in your organisation. This will keep your motivation up. You will also need people inside and outside your business or organisation who believe in you and will support you completely. This gives you the determination and the belief to keep going in tough times.

A small but motivated team can produce outstanding results. Find the people who will be with you no matter what. You only need a few and be open minded. It can be the most unexpected people.

Keep focused on your strategic purpose and you will be unstoppable. Always be focused on where you want to be and know that opportunities will appear. Celebrating small achievements will keep you motivated. One time I was making little progress, but I still believed in what I was doing. I re-evaluated how I was spending my time and how I was applying the E Factor.

One small opportunity to work with some environmental students became my first victory, and that taste of success was enough to raise my spirits and give me the passion to soar.

The best time to create habits to motivate yourself are at the start of the day and the end of the day. I am incredibly lucky my wife without fail gets us to meditate and say mantras first thing in the morning. I can honestly say I feel amazing and powerful at the end of those 15 minutes. Set your intention each morning to have a successful day.

It is also good to finish your day with gratitude for any lessons learned and the victories gained. Keep a small journal to highlight the good things. Celebrate the wins no matter how small.

Can you be grateful for the opportunity to learn lessons when things are not going according to plan? This is when you apply your resilience skills.

Remaining calm is a daily challenge but it is one that will keep you going.

Keep your belief and enjoy the learning. Learn to go lightly and laugh each day. Believe that one day you will look back at this and realise that no matter how bleak it may have looked in the short term, you persevered and saw it through. Once you get a small opening, jump into action – take that leap of faith.

Like many people I find myself being positive to others facing negative challenges but extremely hard on myself. Go

easy on yourself. We are alive, we are learning, and we will get there. You can be an unstoppable force. Just take time, get your plan, and action it.

Take time to visualise your day and rehearse your responses. There is no guarantee that everything will go according to plan, but you will increase your chances that it will happen. Visualisation is a powerful tool for you to have in your skills box, and always keep your visualisation positive.

The mind is a powerful force. Choose to reframe your thoughts and keep them positive. It isn't always easy but keep persisting. Those who are resilient and keep learning, keep putting positivity out there together with action are an unstoppable force. Are you up for it? Give up the rollercoaster rides and be empowered by what you can control.

There is unmistakable evidence now that resilience skills can be taught and need to be. I do understand that changes can challenge our anxiety and push up the stress levels but if we can accept this and work on positive responses as opposed to reactions there are massive opportunities to learn and grow.

So how can you prepare for this? Practise thinking positively under pressure. Focus on what you can contribute. Should you begin to feel overwhelmed, distract yourself and refocus, and breathe – slowly, deeply and gently.

Why do you need to keep learning? Well, you may have been trained in how to pass exams, could you train another person? We will all need to interact with new people and innovative ideas.

Put yourself into situations that will require you to use these E-Factor skills and then begin to teach someone else. That will really increase your learning.

The reality is that you must, as part of your resilience strategy, take control of your own learning.

As part of your resilience development, you must learn what is needed now. It's an exciting time to be learning and developing and part of your resilience training is to accept this and prepare yourself to prosper and succeed as a global citizen.

You will become more adaptable than the previous generation. Accept that you must learn differently and that much of your learning to date is of limited use in training to be a global citizen.

Perhaps one of the finest examples of adaptive learning I have seen recently has been the new wellness training designed by Hilary Scott, a professional relaxation therapist in Northern Ireland. Noting that people either attended a mindfulness class, a meditation session, t'ai chi, or yoga, for example, she created a programme that brings the six biggest stress relievers and relaxation techniques into a one-hour session – 'Six in Sixty'. The variety of learning and the impact on our mind and body is incredibly significant and inventive. Most of us lose attention after the initial impact of achieving the feel-good factor, and our mind begins to wander. Hitting that spot six times in an unusual way has an incredible impact on our mind and body. If you're going to be resilient in this new world, this is an example of a model that could benefit you.

## **Creating and Implementing Your Resilience Plan**

There is a significant difference between creating a plan and turning it into a workable model.

It is noticeably clear that building resilience is vital in the global economy where changes occur swiftly, depending on events that happen in one country impacting on other countries around the world.

Resilience is the keystone to any change or development plan as the nature of the Fourth Industrial Revolution ensures that constant adaptability and innovation is required to keep projects on track.

Key staff and leaders need to have developed unconscious competency and the habits to ensure they cope with change on any scale, not only to safeguard the project but also to keep their own mental and physical states at a healthy level.

Any organisation and its employees need to be able to cope with change, adapt and perform in a variety of circumstances. Plans need to be put into place to make the team high-level resilient performers no matter what internal or external challenges the organisation faces.

Individual, team and corporate resilient plans must all interlock and be adaptable to the level of corporate change required. Without this in place not only are individuals and teams vulnerable but potentially also the organisation.

## **Opportunities and Threats**

Occasions will arise for organisations and key individuals to take advantage of new opportunities, both on a personal and corporate level. However, if the response is not adequate there will be significant threats to the sustainability of the organisation at all levels. Due to technological shifts, there is a strong likelihood of uncertainty and of challenges and opportunities that any organisation must meet and where possible use for the benefit of their long-term competitive advantage.

Individuals and teams do not always respond well to change and want to preserve the status quo; this is not possible now. Organisations now understand that change and technology challenges are here, bringing stiff competition. To work

effectively with others, they need to understand that where resilience has not been embedded into the skill set on a corporate or individual basis there will be a threat on some scale to corporate performance and staff competency.

The reality is that outside pressure will not allow organisations to ignore internal or external threats. Resilience must therefore be embedded not only at executive level but also throughout the organisation.

The stronger the habits and the links between teams the better chance the organisation has of long-term survival. Many situations present both opportunities and threats to corporate survival and progression. The organisational plan must take account of this. There are similarities in organisations, except in small businesses run by individuals. They depend very much on the individual resilience of the owner or leader while large organisations are much more complex.

Your responsibility as an individual is to be prepared to learn and adapt, seek help where appropriate and monitor your progress on an ongoing basis. Your commitment to life-long learning is key here and adaptability and innovation will be required. Understanding your organisation and the threats and opportunities it faces is paramount. Developing and implementing the right habits and behaviours is vital to survival and growth.

## **How Is Resilience Achieved?**

Resilience should be adapted as the key corporate and individual habit with ongoing training and monitoring.

External audits of performance levels are important with the need for corrective action mandatory where appropriate.

Eventually all anyone can do is to build and maintain their own personal resilience and support others where possible to do the same.

Everyone is responsible for their own behaviour or habits and if you have responsibility for others, you must support and encourage them. As an individual, whatever your job or business, you must first focus on your own development. Ultimately you must be responsible for building your own set of skills.

If you are a senior manager or a business owner you may have to encourage others to do the same, but your main responsibility is to look after your own personal development and where appropriate encourage others.

There is no point focusing on resilience habits once a month, or once a week. It is much better to spend 15–30 minutes every day. You are also setting an example for other people you might influence. To obtain the correct mindset, you could begin your day with some meditation, mindfulness or relaxation practice not lasting longer than 15 minutes. End the day by writing up your journal for 5 minutes. Focus on the following. What did you learn? What are you thankful for today? What would you like to achieve tomorrow? What could you have done differently today?

Keep your practices short and simple to build up the habit and routine. You are trying to achieve a practice that you would miss if you didn't keep it up.

A habit every day is more likely to happen if you keep it short, simple and consistent – it is less likely to be affected by any outside events and more likely to become a daily regime and will be much more effective.

Master resilience and you are ready to use the other E-Factor competencies to achieve your dreams and help others.

The words of Rudyard Kipling, in his famous poem 'If', resonate with me: 'If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you'. It will help you perform well, cope with pressure and use the other E-Factor competencies to achieve results.