

September 2013 Long-term Career Success Requires Resilience

“Life doesn’t get easier or more forgiving; we get stronger and more resilient.” ~ Steve Maraboli

There are certainly benefits to striving for perfection in our work performance. After all, the best remedy for mistakes is probably not to make them in the first place. However, it is not realistic to believe that we can ever perform our work mistake-free because no one is perfect and there are plenty of land mines and pitfalls in the work environment to trip us up.

Avoiding mistakes may not be the best approach to take in our work. Instead, developing the resilience needed to respond and learn from our mistakes may be the best path to pursue. A recent article in the Harvard Business Review’s (HBR) Blog Network* reports on research that suggests that the ability to be flexible and learn from our mistakes is a critical skill that can make the ultimate difference between winning and losing. People who are resilient are also confident and demonstrate the ability to:

- Embrace accountability by taking responsibility for their actions and showing remorse or eagerness to fix the problem or repair the damage.
- Collaborate with others in responding to mistakes and achieving common goals. “Going it alone” suggests a lack of respect and confidence in others (or perhaps oneself).
- Take the initiative to move forward in a positive, proactive manner, resisting the temptation to focus primarily on the mistake itself.

“No matter how much falls on us, we keep plowing ahead. That’s the only way to keep the roads clear.” ~ Greg Kincaid

Demonstrating resilience in the face of adversity is important because it builds character and forces us to take a long-range view of our work and careers. The HBR article highlights several roadblocks to embracing and developing resiliency skills.

- Negative attitudes, such as complacency, arrogance, and greed can reduce resilience, while humility and a strong sense of purpose and sacrifice for the common good can strengthen it.
- Refusing to accept less as a consequence of mistakes or misdeeds. Often, the willingness to assume a short-term diminished role within the workplace generates respect from others that aids in future role enhancements or even promotions.
- General laziness or the lack of understanding and commitment to higher goals and behaviors. Resilience requires focus and draws from strength of character, self-control, and a core set of values critical to successful performance.

The way we respond to our mistakes or adversity generated by environmental factors—often out of our control—demonstrates our maturity and commitment to the organization’s mission, as well as flexibility and confidence. These are attributes that do not go unnoticed by the people around us.

***“Resilience is accepting your new reality, even if it’s less good than the one you had before.”
Elizabeth Edwards***

*Rosabeth Moss Kanter. “*Surprises Are the New Normal; Resilience Is the New Skill*” HBR Blog Network (July 17, 2013)