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BUILDING LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

Patrick Sanaghan

President, The Sanaghan Group

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AUTHOR

PATRICK SANAGHAN, Ed.D.
PRESIDENT, THE SANAGHAN GROUP

Dr. Sanaghan serves as the head of The Sanaghan Group, an organizational firm specializing in leadership development, executive coaching, strategic planning, and leadership transitions. Pat has worked with over 200 campuses and hundreds of organizations in the last twenty-five years. He has taught leadership to thousands of leaders in higher education, and helped over one hundred campuses conduct collaborative, transparent strategic planning processes.

He is the co-author/author of six books, numerous articles, and several monographs in the fields of strategic planning, leadership, and change management. His most recent books include: *Collaborative Leadership in Action* and *How to Actually Build an Exceptional Team*.

CONTENTS

RESILIENCE

Resilience is the capacity to bounce back from misfortune, disruptive change and failure.

- Rebecca Shambaugh (2010)

The ability to recover from illness, depression, adversity or the like; buoyancy.

- Dictionary.com

RESILIENCE: MOVING FORWARD DESPITE OVERWHELMING ODDS

Currently, leadership "resilience" is a hot topic in the arenas of change management, organizational development and leadership. Hundreds of books and articles have been written about resilience over the last twenty years. We are gaining a deeper understanding of the complexity and power of resilience as it relates to effective leadership—and more importantly, how we might teach resilience to our leaders.

Resilience can be a perplexing and baffling subject to understand:

- Why do some people get paralyzed by challenges and crisis, while others use these same incidents as springboards for change and growth?
- How do some people endure real difficulties over time, yet remain steadfast and quite positive?
- Why do children, who are often valiantly resilient to life's challenges, tend to lose their resilience and "buoyancy" as they get older?
- It seems that resilience can become smaller and smaller and more brittle over time. How do you nurture personal resilience so that it remains with you throughout your lifetime?

Why is resilience so difficult? Steve Snyder (2002) in his *Harvard Business Review* article explores this notion in depth: "It requires courage to confront painful reality—the *faith* that there will be a solution, when one is not immediately evident and the *tenacity* to carry on, despite a nagging gut feeling that the situation is hopeless."

This is the essence of effective leadership, to continue forward despite the seemingly overwhelming odds.

The "adaptive" challenges facing higher education today will continue to be daunting, ambiguous and complex, with no easy solutions. Leaders must learn to lead in a different way, leading while they are learning, in the full view of everyone. It will take resiliency, tenacity and humility to lead our campuses into the future. Resilience will be one of the most important leadership capacities for everyone who aspires to really lead.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS PAPER

In the pages that follow, I will:

- Share some of the most recent research on resilience.
- Begin to identify the critical characteristics of resilient leaders.
- Suggest a set of practical strategies for leaders to consider as they develop their own resilience.
- Share some resources and books that might be helpful to interested leaders who want to continue their own learning journey about resilience.

LEADING IN THE PERMANENT WHITEWATER

But how do you learn to be more resilient while under great stress and while living in the "permanent white water" (Vaill, 1996) that we are experiencing in higher education?

MINI CASE STUDY

I know of one president who had to fire one third of his staff and faculty during the first week of his presidency. How do you continue to lead after that? How do you create hope after that? How do you rebuild trust? How does the campus "bounce back" from that? He will need all the resilience he can muster to deal with the tough difficulties and challenges ahead. It will be a daunting and sticky journey, and the odds are against him in this "turnaround" situation.

> *"A turnaround is a testament of a company's lack of resilience. A turnaround is a transformation tragically delayed."*
>
> - Hamel & Valikangas, 2003

Different fields of study (e.g., urban planning, transportation, politics, climate change, disaster response) define resilience in dramatically different ways. The focus of this paper is on personal resilience. I will use Andrew Zolli's definition of resilience from his wonderful book, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, as a working model to describe the type of leadership resilience this paper will discuss.

> *"Resilience is the capacity of a system, enterprise or person to maintain its* ***core purpose*** *and* ***integrity*** *in the face of* ***dramatically*** *changed circumstances."*
>
> - Zolli, 2013

Zolli goes on to explain that we may never return to our prior environment after experiencing this kind of difficult and powerful change. In fact, we will find ourselves living in a "new normal" where our usual models, frameworks and practices might prove irrelevant and ineffective. How do you then lead under these circumstances, when there are no maps or recipes to help guide the way? It is our capacity for resilience that will enable us to lead under stressful and ambiguous circumstances.

In the enduring whitewater that higher education is trying to navigate, and with a future filled with adaptive challenges, complexity and ambiguity (Sanaghan and Jurow, 2011), we must be able to teach and develop our leadership resilience or we will fail.

Setbacks, failures and mistakes will be inevitable (Farson and Keyes, 2003; Gladwell, 2008; Heifetz, Grashaw and Linsky, 2009; Griswell, 2009). How our leaders deal with these seemingly negative situations will determine their effectiveness and define their leadership.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESILIENT LEADERS

In a seminal *HBR* article, "How Resilience Works" (2002), Diane Coutu identifies three essential characteristics of resilient individuals. Many researchers and practitioners are aligned with her view. Her thinking will provide us with a beginning framework for understanding individual resilience and its implications for leaders.

1. THEY HAVE A STAUNCH ACCEPTANCE OF REALITY

> *"Facing reality is grueling work."*
>
> - Diane Coutu (2002)

Resilient individuals look at a crisis, challenge or failure straight on and don't sugarcoat anything about it. They don't deny how difficult a situation is, nor do they use platitudes (e.g., "never lose the opportunity of a crisis") to explain things away. Yet—and this is an important finding—together with their stark realism, they still have *realistic* faith that things will get better and that they will come out whole on the other end.

This is not a Pollyannaish optimism or a false hope that everything will be okay no matter what, but a deep faith that things will get better, and that they will endure the crisis or challenge. This faith creates a powerful touchstone for resilient individuals and a humble confidence that keeps them moving forward in spite of difficult circumstances.

This staunch acceptance of reality is a pervasive theme in the research on resiliency (Pulley and Wakefield, 2002; Griswell and Jennings, 2009: Siebert, 2005: Maddi, 2005), and is foundational to understanding resilient leadership.

Cortu and others speak about vice admiral Jim Stockdale (one of the most decorated soldiers in modern military history) who endured many years of beatings and torture by the Vietcong in the infamous Hanoi Hilton. Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great* (2001), interviewed Stockdale for his book and asked what coping strategy Stockdale used during his captivity.

"I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted, not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life; which, in retrospect, I would not trade." Stockdale continues: "This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end, which you can never afford to lose, with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality – whatever they might be."

Collins called this way of thinking the *Stockdale Paradox*: deal straight on with the difficult situation or crisis and don't lose faith that you will endure in the end.

2. THEY HAVE A CLEAR SENSE OF PURPOSE AND MEANING

Resilient leaders believe that they are serving something bigger and beyond themselves. This enables them to endure hardship because there is a noble purpose to their lives, and they can see meaning beyond the challenge or crisis. To resilient leaders, suffering is not just punishment or "mean"; difficult experiences hold lessons. These leaders learn valuable life skills, and develop constructive attitudes and methods for coping. They report that these difficulties clarify and deepen their "lived" values and core principles (Pulley and Wakefield: 2001; Griswell and Jenkins, 2009; Zolli, 2013).

This sense of meaning enables resilient individuals to act on the courage of their convictions and take decisive action in ambiguous and uncertain situations. They are clear about who they are and what they are here to do. Their values anchor them through challenging times, and they focus on what matters most.

Their lives become "a search for meaning" (as the famous psychiatrist Victor Frankl might state) through all the distress and adversity. In many ways, difficult challenges become ennobling and help shape the core of the person, even help define who they really are.

> *"A happy life consists not in the absence but in the mastery of hardships."*
>
> - Helen Keller

3. THEY HAVE AN UNCANNY ABILITY TO IMPROVISE

Resilient leaders make do with whatever is at hand. They have what French anthropologist Claude Levi-Straus called *bricolage*, a kind of inventiveness and improvisation where people use whatever tools and resources are available (Coutu, 2002). People who have bricolage don't complain about what they don't have, but use their creativity to solve problems and take risks, dealing with challenges in unconventional ways.

Resilient people possess intellectual curiosity. When they encounter hurdles along the way, they are able to explore possibilities. They realize that there are rarely recipes or formulas for real challenges and problems. And, as Ben Horowitz suggests (2014), they are very good at focusing on the road, not the walls. They don't deny the challenges and blockages, but they aren't overwhelmed by them. They keep their "eyes on the prize" and focus on what they need to accomplish; with their goal(s) clearly in mind, they do whatever is necessary to get through the difficult times.

We need to teach our higher education leaders how to deal with the tough issues head on and be transparent with their communication and their decision making processes. Platitudes and slogans aren't what is needed when a campus is trying to manage a looming crisis. The facts need to be communicated in no uncertain terms, and leaders need to create a collective faith (not a false hope) that we can get through this together.

During a challenge or a crisis, leaders need to create clear goals and objectives that people can understand, and they need to remind people that the work they do serves the mission and values of their institution. A noble purpose is an enabler of courageous action and hard work. Each of our campuses' missions serve honorable and enduring values. In higher education, our communities are already infused with purpose and meaning, and we need to use this as a strategic resource to deal with hardship and onerous challenges.

Lastly, teaching our leaders to take risks, and to be more creative and inventive provides them with the ability to improvise and adapt to dramatically changing circumstances. Developing this skill set takes preparation and practice because it doesn't come naturally to most leaders. The good news is that some of our very best business schools (UCLA, Carnegie Mellon, UVA, UNC, MIT, and Columbia) are already teaching leaders how to improvise (Glazer, 2008).

KEY RESOURCE

Leadership Agility: Using Improv to Build Critical Skills (Kelly, 2012), a white paper from UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School, describes the improvisation courses that many business schools are providing in their leadership programs.

FOCUS QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS:

- How would you rate yourself on your ability to deal with the "reality" of a difficult challenge?
- Do you "tell it like it is," or do you tend to smooth things over? Do you play down the real risks attached to a looming crisis or a difficult situation?
- How do you "keep the faith" when tough things happen? How do you communicate this to your followers?
- Would the people who work with you describe you as having tenacity? Grit? Courage?
- What is your personal sense of purpose and meaning? Why do you lead others? What important purpose do you serve by leading others?
- What are your "lived" values? Do you communicate by word and deed what your personal values are to others? Are you willing to "live" your values when the going gets difficult?
- How would you describe your ability to improvise? Are you able to be creative, try different approaches, and take risks to solve complex and ambiguous problems?

AN INFORMAL RESILIENCE SCORECARD

Many of the researchers and theorists who have studied resilience have identified some common factors resilient people possess. You many want to use the following characteristics as a personal resilience scorecard. Using this scorecard, identify the factors that you currently possess and note where you might want to build a competency or two.

In no particular order of priority, resilient people:

1. **Tend to be generally optimistic** about life and have a positive view of the future (Pulley and Wakefield, 2001; Coutu 2002; Southwick and Charney, 2012; Zolli, 2013; McNulty, 2014).
2. **Are naturally curious** and have a continuous learning journey throughout their lives (Pulley and Wakefield, 2001; Griswell and Jennings, 2009; Siebert, 2005; Neill, 2006).
3. **Have a healthy tolerance for failure** (Farson and Keyes, 2003) and see mistakes as learning opportunities. When they make mistakes, they don't judge themselves harshly (e.g., "Why didn't I see that coming?" or "What was I thinking?"). This forward-looking attitude allows resilient people to search for lessons as they move through difficult situations and challenges (Sanaghan and Jurow, 2011; Zolli, 2013). This search is a proactive process that puts them in the driver's seat rather than leaving them in the position of merely reacting to circumstances. This proactive approach creates a strong sense of self-efficacy and fosters their confidence that they can master their fate (Griswell and Jennings, 2009; Coutu, 2002; Snyder, 2013).
4. **Are good at asking for help!** This might seem counter-intuitive to some people who think asking for help is a sign of weakness. It is not. Resilient people actively seek out the support of others, and these support systems come in handy when challenging times occur (Pulley and Wakefield, 2001; Siebert, 2005; Neill, 2006, Maddi, 2005; Shambaugh, 2010; Reivich and Shatte, 2002).

KEY RESOURCE

There is a short and powerful video entitled "Everyone Needs a Tap Code" from the PBS series *This Emotional Life*. The video describes how prisoners of war in Vietnam supported each other through extraordinarily difficult times by creating a secret communication system for themselves.

5. **Are self-aware and mindful.** Resilient people know who they are. They "live" their values and have a strong sense of emotional intelligence. These capacities enable them to deal constructively with difficult events and to endure over time. Their self-awareness helps them to identify both their appetites and aspirations and make healthy choices and decisions throughout their lives. They often believe they can greatly influence their lives, rather than just react to whatever happens (Goleman, 2000; 2005; Shambaugh, 2010; Griswell and Jennings, 2009).

6. **Have some kind of religious or spiritual connection** and see their faith as both an anchor and a beacon that supports them through trying times. This does not mean that people without faith can't be resilient. It does mean that, for some, faith is an enabler that allows them to move forward (Coutu, 2002; Southwick and Charney, 2002). For example, recent events in South Carolina—in which a madman killed many people during a church service—demonstrate "faithful" resilience at work. As a nation, we witnessed an extraordinary sense of grace from the members of that church who were able to forgive an unspeakable act of violence and to come out the other side with an elegant humanity that takes one's breath away.

7. **Are good problem solvers** who search for solutions and try different approaches when confronted with tough challenges. They are willing to take creative risks and use counter-intuitive solutions to problems they encounter. They don't get caught in "analysis paralysis"; they don't get bogged down trying to create the perfect solution. They move forward. They pay attention to what is going on and adjust in midstream if necessary. They have confidence that their personal resources can produce the solutions needed in uncertain times (Siebert, 2005; Maddi, 2005).

RESILIENCE SCORECARD

Use the characteristics of resilient people as a way to identify your areas of strength and areas of needed development. It is a helpful practice to both score yourself and then invite a colleague or good friend, who knows you well and who will be honest with you, to score you. Then you can compare and contrast the two scores – the one you gave yourself and the one your friend or colleague gave you. This can provide a great reality check and food for an interesting conversation.

How would you rate yourself on the characteristics of resilient people?

Give yourself an **A** = I really have this capacity/skill

B = I have pretty strong capacity but could improve in this area

C = I need real work in this area

Optimism

Curiosity

Failure Tolerance

Asking others for help

Self-awareness?

Sense of Faith

Problem Solving Ability

After you score each characteristic, choose one real strength that you can continue to build on, and choose one area of needed development. You want to avoid trying to improve too much at one time, and you want to avoid focusing only on weaknesses. A balanced approach is essential in order to build up your capacity for resilience.

SOME CLOSE RELATIVES OF RESILIENCE

Interested readers might want to investigate two other characteristics that resilient people often possess – grit and hardiness.

GRIT

"Grit," popularized by Dr. Angela Lee Duckworth of the University of Pennsylvania, describes a personal trait that involves perseverance and passion for achieving long-term goals. People who have "grit" also have great self-control and are able to delay near-term gratification in order to pursue long-term success. These individuals have a deep commitment to their pursuits and just don't let things get in their way. Their passion for improvement and learning carries them through difficult times and challenges, and in the end, their perseverance almost always pays off. Resilient people often possess a great deal of grit.

Duckworth's research has reviewed a wide range of people (from Spelling Bee champions to West Point students), and she and her fellow researchers have found that when you look at two equally talented people, the one who has grit will do better over the long haul.

HARDINESS

Second, "hardiness" is a personality style or a pattern of characteristics shared by people who handle stress well. Two of the pioneers of hardiness research are Suzanne Kobasa & Salvatore Maddi.

Maddi & Kobasa identified three personality traits of managers who dealt with pervasive stress effectively. These managers possess:

1. *Commitment*. Hardy people share an attitude of genuine interest in other people and possess an overall curiosity about people and the world.
2. *Control*. Hardy people believe that control is something that comes from within and that they can influence events that are taking place around them.
3. *Challenge*. Hardy people have the attitude that change is "normal" and that change offers opportunities for growth and development. Change isn't something that should be avoided. Hardy people are committed to facing problems and won't stop until they find solutions. They are unafraid of making mistakes.

Investigating these two powerful concepts—grit and hardiness—will give you a deeper and contextual understanding of resilience. Our leaders will need all the resilience, hardiness, grit, and grace they can gather, if they are to lead thriving campuses in a challenging future.

> *"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strived valiantly; who errs, who comes again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."*
>
> - Theodore Roosevelt

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING YOUR LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE

1. NEVER WALK ALONE

This is one of the prevalent themes in personal resilience research (Pulley & Wakefield, 2001; Goleman, 2000, 2005; Snyder 2013; Zolli, 2013). People who have social support (e.g., friends, allies, team members, confidants) weather the storms of adversity much better than those who don't have that support.

Where do leaders go when dealing with unprecedented change and challenge? Who do they talk to about their doubts? Fears? Hopes and aspirations?

FIND AT LEAST TWO CONFIDANTS

Heifetz and Laurie (2001) were some of the first thinkers to identify these trusted individuals. *Confidants* are people you respect and trust deeply, and who care about you as a person. Most importantly, they will be honest with you, which is a gift to a leader. These are authentic allies who will listen carefully, gently push back on your ideas, and provide wise counsel and feedback. They act as sanctuaries when the storms hit and you don't know where to go next.

It is important that you meet with your confidants on a regular basis, not only when there is a crisis or when things are difficult. Nurture these relationships because they can last a lifetime. Endeavor to be a trusted confidant for others, especially for your own confidants. The reciprocity will build a durable bond that can prove an invaluable asset during trying times.

BUILD A "THOUGHT PARTNER" NETWORK

Thought partners are different from confidants because their role and contribution focuses on making you a smarter leader. This doesn't mean confidants can't do this, but the confidants' gift is the emotional and psychological support they provide.

Thought partners—and you can have many of these—provide you with different perspectives and insights. They can also help you keep up to date on emerging practices, trends and events that could impact your institution. Our thought partners expand our thinking, help slow us down when we get overwhelmed, and prevent us from jumping to solutions too quickly.

They are great resources to tap *before* we make important decisions, because they can provide multiple options and help us with sense making when we are dealing with complexity and ambiguity.

You need to be a good thought partner in return. Read widely, share your insights and really participate in multiple networks. No one appreciates a one-way relationship. You have to actively and meaningfully contribute to add value to these strategic relationships.

FOCUS QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS:

- Who are your thought partners?
- Do you pay attention to these relationships?
- What contributions have you made to your thought partner network?
- Who else needs to be in your thought partner network?
- Who is a very *different* thinker from you? (These people will often see things you can't!)
- Outside your profession/field/industry, who would be interesting to talk with, to build a connection with? To learn from?

FIND A GOOD THERAPIST

A therapist can help you understand your issues about power, how you deal with conflict, and why you procrastinate and delay important decisions. A therapist can help you identify the difference between your appetites and your aspirations, and most importantly, why you want to lead others.

The more self-knowledge you possess, the more effective and resilient you will become (Heifetz and Laurie, 2001; Goleman, 2000, 2005; Snyder, 2013). It takes real courage to examine your inner life, values, motivations and hungers. Too few leaders take this journey, because leaders falsely assume that seeking a therapist somehow conveys that they have a "problem" or aren't smart enough to figure out things for themselves. Both of these insidious notions can prevent leaders from undertaking the work of real learning and self-awareness.

Leaders who lack self-awareness can cast a dark shadow across the campus and can wreak havoc along their journey (Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2006; Griswell and Jennings, 2009; Shambaugh, 2010). I have worked with several "shadowy" leaders in my career. Their aversion to self-reflection was a cowardly act. These kinds of leaders have no place on our campuses.

SEEK OUT OTHER RESILIENT LEADERS

Ask your friends, colleagues, confidants and thought partners about the resilient leaders they know. These leaders are out there; go find them, because they can be an invaluable resource with their insight and wisdom. They have taken the difficult journey, survived and even thrived, and almost always are gracious and willing to share their experiences with you.

If they trust your intentions and believe that you are on an authentic learning journey, then ask them the following questions to help create a powerful conversation:

- What practices do they use to navigate tough challenges?
- Where do they go to be renewed?
- What role, if any, does their faith and religion play in sustaining their leadership resilience?
- Where do they go to seek advice and perspective? Obviously, you don't need them to provide specific names, but find out what qualities their confidants and thought partners possess that make them such a valuable resource.
- What have they learned from their failures and disappointments?

2. SEARCH FOR THE LESSONS

"Failure, as well as success, leaves clues."

- Sanaghan, 2014

I believe that failure, setbacks and disruptive change are inevitable in a world full of ambiguity and complexity. When there are no easy answers or elegant solutions available, leaders will have to take risks, try creative approaches, fumble at times in front of people—and mistakes will be made.

Leaders will need courage to seek the lessons that they can learn from their failures as well as their successes. One is obviously harder than the other but, often, that's where the deepest and most valuable lessons lie. This is both counterintuitive and difficult to do for any leader.

This is where your *confidants* become especially useful. They can provide the emotional support necessary to unpack an uncomfortable situation or a difficult incident. Endeavor to share openly with them. Provide the facts, history and context, and actively seek their advice and perspective. Strive mightily not to be reactive to their responses. Just listen, absorb what they are telling you, and learn.

The following are some probing questions that leaders have found helpful in their learning journey:

- Discuss what *should* have happened and what *actually* happened.
- What are some things you didn't see coming? What signals were there that you ignored?
- What feedback didn't you listen to, or what feedback did you avoid?
- Who provided you with contrary positions and perspectives? What was your reaction and response to those individuals?
- Who should you have listened to but didn't?
- What went unnoticed by you, but was clear to some people?
- Are there any patterns you can identify? (e.g., Has this happened before? Did you shut down contrary opinions? Did you rush for closure?)
- Who helped you during the situation or crisis? Who was not helpful?

- Were there any internal struggles that kept you from taking appropriate actions?
- What politics were at play?
- Did you have any intuition that things weren't going as planned? Did you listen to your intuition? If not, why not?

You get the idea.

Asking the right set of questions can help you reveal deep lessons. Invite your confidants to probe gently but assertively. Dig out the answers in this safe environment. Write them down, review them regularly and never forget them. These lessons were hard earned, and they will help you face the next crisis, challenge or setback. What do you know now that can help you in the future (e.g., ask for help sooner rather than later; involve others in your decision making and don't try to shoulder everything yourself; delaying a decision can often make matters worse; encourage your direct reports to share bad news as soon as possible)?

Try and capture *three* important lessons after discussing the situation or incident with your confidants. Keep the list of lessons to three or four, because brainstorming a long list of lessons will only clutter things up, and it is unnecessary. Three lessons are plenty.

You might find you have a couple of pages of these tough lessons by the end of your career. Share them with other leaders, especially younger and emerging ones. One piece of wisdom can help others avoid a great deal of pain. Here is a short list of my own "lessons learned":

- I tend to shut down when arrogant people try and provide answers and solutions. The lesson for me: even arrogant jerks can have smart ideas; strive mightily to listen to them.
- I value being "decisive." A lot of my biggest mistakes came from rushing to closure on important decisions.
- I need to show my emotions more. I tend to try and be stoic. My people need to hear both my fears and hopes more often.
- Listen until it hurts. I often anticipate what others will say and shut down my listening because I think I've already "got it." In fact, often I didn't "get it."

BUILD REFLECTION TIME INTO YOUR SCHEDULE

Many of the experts on resilience suggest that reflection is a powerful way to build personal resilience (Pulley & Wakefield 2001; Griswell & Jennings, 2009, 2011, 2013). This can be a challenge for busy and overwhelmed leaders. In the enduring whitewater that higher education leaders live in, it is counterintuitive to carve out time to think and reflect. Doing so will take real discipline and commitment, but reflection is an essential protocol to build into your daily and weekly routine.

There are plenty of ways to capture your thoughts and reflections: recording a video, keeping a journal or using apps like Penzu or iDoneThis. Taking the time to reflect will often reveal important, even strategic, information that might not be apparent at first glance (Sanaghan, 2015).

Here are some suggested guiding questions for reflection:

- What challenges keep coming up? Why do they persist?
- Who confides in me? Who seeks my advice? Who do I talk with?
- How are my people feeling? Are they committed? Do they feel supported? Listened to? How do I know this?
- Who gets on my nerves? Why?
- What future challenges do I see? What can I do to prepare for them? Who can I talk with to get different perspective about the future?
- Am I living my values? When and where do I do this?
- What am I proud about? What difference have I made, really?
- What am I avoiding doing? Why?
- What makes me anxious?
- What is something I have learned in the last week?

Review your journal notes with your confidants on a regular basis. This doesn't mean you need to go over every one of these suggested questions in detail, but it is important to share a broad but meaningful summary of your reflections and to ask for feedback.

READ ABOUT RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

In history, there are many resilient leaders who faced dangers, crises, and daunting challenges and who thrived anyway. Leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Indira Gandhi, Winston Churchill, Golda Meir, and James Shackleton all knew the sting of defeat and hardship but somehow endured. Reading about their lives, motivations, doubts and hopes can provide you with a well-tread roadmap to resilience.

Seeking to understand the strategies and practices they employed to endure over time can be a revelation. More importantly, discussing these books and biographies with colleagues creates the deeper opportunity to explore and expand your thinking about truly resilient leadership.

This is where your thought partner network might come into play. Each person in your network can choose a leader to read about and discuss. I have participated in several of these "book club" discussions and have found it worthwhile. Several campuses I work with have a lunch discussion monthly about a specific leadership book. People from all over campus gather to talk about these resilient leaders and to discuss the implications for their own leadership work.

A caution here: Sometimes when people read the biographies of great leaders, they find that these leaders' journeys are daunting, even impossible, to emulate. Emulating them is not the point. The key is to focus not on their accomplishments but to search for the lessons embedded in their journeys.

For example:

- Nelson Mandela never gave up hope for a vision of what his country could become. He spent 27 years in jail, being faithful to an ennobling vision that elevated his country and to a strong belief in the humanity of the people of South Africa. The lesson is the power of a long-term vision, not just endurance of long hardship.
- Winston Churchill fought depression almost his entire life. He lived with the "black dog" of depression even as he led Britain through a war. Yet his tenacity created a leader who would "never give up . . . never, never, never" and who saved Europe. The lesson here is the tenacity.
- Helen Keller, who was both deaf and blind, became an internationally known author, political activist and lecturer. She was the first deaf/blind person to earn a bachelor of arts degree. She modeled grace and perseverance throughout her life and paved the way for the education of people with special needs.
- Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese political activist, endured separation from her family while under house arrest for almost fifteen years. She is now a member of the Burmese Parliament, and she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. Her deep love for her people and country enabled her to deal with hardships and difficulties over a long period of time.

ENDEAVOR TO BUILD A GREAT TEAM

A talented, dedicated group of individuals working together toward a shared purpose, accomplishing the goals they committed to, and supporting each other is a wonderful thing to witness. It's also as rare as blue diamonds (Sanaghan & Eberbach, 2014).

Building and maintaining a high-performing team is a difficult and daunting task. It is not for the faint of heart. It takes a great deal of aspiration and perspiration, courage and discipline to create such a team. Unfortunately, most leaders in higher education have not been taught how to build a team, and they suffer from the myth that if you just put a bunch of talented people together, something magical happens, somehow.

If you really want to build your resiliency muscles, building a team might be the best and hardest way to accomplish that. It is a real challenge to commit the time and effort necessary to build a great or even a pretty good team. You cannot fake this; either you are successful at it, or you're not.

When a crisis hits or a failure seems inevitable and you are standing alone, you are in trouble. But if you have a real team to stand with, the chances of surviving and even thriving are increased. With a real team, you can use the diverse talents and multiple perspectives of its members to solve complex problems. You can also draw upon the emotional support of others and lift the buckets together to put out the fire.

Leading an effective team develops your leadership skills in several ways, because you have to be an:

- Effective communicator
- Great listener
- Trustworthy person who acts with integrity
- Effective decision maker and problem solver
- Results-oriented person
- Relationship builder

All of these skills build your resilience and will prepare you for the inevitable challenges, problems and crises that await all of us. If you can build a high-performing team, you will have accomplished a great and noble task. You will also be well prepared for almost everything. Dedicate yourself to this.

KEY RESOURCE

For some practical strategies, read my paper *"5 Secrets to Developing a High Performing Team in Higher Education"* (Academic Impressions, 2014). In this paper, I:

- Expose 6 potentially destructive myths about teams.
- Help you create a new plan for developing a high-performing team, presenting 5 strategies used by some of the highest performing teams across sectors.

3. BE "ACTIVELY" PROACTIVE

In order to build your leadership resiliency "muscles," a proactive approach is essential to your success. Do not wait for the crisis, challenge or failure to come to you; build a "resilience readiness" to deal with these difficult incidents *before* they happen.

This does not mean trying to predict the future or engaging in scenario thinking about what you "might" do in a crisis or how you "think" you might act. Such practices may be helpful and may possibly prepare you *intellectually*, but you need to prepare yourself *experientially*.

Some of the suggestions in this paper (e.g., building a thought partner network, maintaining a journal) can help you develop resilience. But, being "actively" proactive creates a different stance. You are not waiting; you are seeking ways to learn, grow and develop. Putting yourself out there, actively seeking challenges, placing yourself in unfamiliar situations, working with people you don't normally interact with, can help prepare you for the difficult times ahead.

This is like keeping yourself in good physical condition so that if you experienced a health crisis (e.g., car accident, heart attack, sports injury), your chances of recovery are vastly improved. People who are overweight, smoke or drink too much, often don't survive a heart attack or health crisis. You can't control the occurrence of a health crisis, but you can control your physical condition and degree of readiness for the crisis. Work on getting your resilience "in shape."

SEEK MOBILITY AND "JOB ROTATION"

If you are building your resiliency muscles, you need a *variety* of experiences to broaden your leadership portfolio. In higher education, it is easy to get trapped into a single career path (e.g., financial affairs, budget analyst, controller, chief financial officer). This is not a bad thing, but this functional approach, this way of looking at the world, can lock you into a pattern of problem solving and thinking in certain ways. It can limit you.

Although job rotation is an accepted practice in the corporate sector (Fernandez-Aroaz, Groysberg and Nohria, 2011), it isn't a familiar practice in higher education. By job rotation, I don't mean "visiting" another department for a day to see how they do things. Nor do I mean "shadowing" a leader from a different division or school. Both of these are helpful practices for gaining understanding and perhaps perspective, but you need more than that.

I do mean a significant investment of time (e.g., a semester, or six months) where a leader actually works, not just observes, in a different department, division or school. For example, someone from enrollment management may do a "rotation" in student affairs. Or the financial people may work with the deans or in development. Besides breaking down the silos that exist on most campuses, a leader who rotates would also get to know another group's culture, how they conduct business, how they communicate and problem solve together.

I have interviewed several vice presidents who have had rotation assignments supported by an enlightened president or chancellor. It is a *game changer*. These vice presidents conveyed to me that they now see more of the system and have developed a holistic perspective about how their institutions function. They learned things they never imagined and connected with others across the campus who care deeply about the mission and values of their institution. This connection built a sense of faith in others who are trying to do the right thing in service to the school's vision. Rotation also builds the relational capital necessary to collaborate effectively and achieve meaningful results across institutional boundaries.

These vice presidents return to their former jobs with expanded insight and perspective and share what they have learned about the other group with their colleagues. Almost always, these rotation assignments build powerful resilience skills and enhance their understanding of how the campus actually works.

SEEK DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS

Work with your supervisor to identify developmental or "stretch" assignments in your division or department that will build your skillset and help you develop in new areas.

For example, if you are good at the technical or financial end of things, you might want to be a part of an interdisciplinary or cross-boundary team that is working on an important and complex project or initiative. You can bring your "gifts" to the table, but the key here is that you will also learn from others. Better yet, lobby to head the work group or co-chair it so that you will learn to facilitate a group, build a team and produce meaningful outcomes. Put yourself in a situation where you can't always rely on your current bucket of skills. Use those skills, obviously, but also "stretch" yourself to build new skills and muscles.

Once again, being proactive puts you in the driver's seat and stretches you as a leader. The initial learning curve can be daunting because you may be in an area that you have little experience with. That's where some of the resilience strategies will be helpful. As your learning journey begins its steep climb, having thought partners and confidants, and building time for reflection will be essential strategies for success.

A caution here: you want to "stretch" but not break. Taking on an assignment far beyond your current skillset is foolish. This is where effective supervision comes in. Your supervisor should understand both your strengths and areas of needed development. This can be invaluable as you identify potential opportunities to grow and learn.

EXAMPLE OF A "STRETCH" ASSIGNMENT

Back in the late 1990's, I was part of a change management team for a large, multi-national oil company. They were implementing an enterprise-wide technology platform. The general manager, who I had worked with previously, assigned me to be in charge of the communication plan for the entire change effort. I was not enthused, and I communicated that there were others far more qualified than me to take on this critical responsibility. Besides, I was an "outsider."

He insisted, and he was right. I spent a month running around, meeting with multiple stakeholders, listening to as many people as I could, reading about communication practices and protocols for complex systems. It was exhausting. It was also one of the most powerful learning experiences of my career.

After a month, I knew more about the organizational culture than almost anyone internally because I had crossed multiple boundaries in my learning journey. I found out who the really smart leaders were, how the current communication process was broken, and discovered a bucketful of great ideas for designing and delivering an effective and trusted communication system.

I then worked with several internal leaders and we created a "straw man" for a communication system and presented it to the senior team of twenty-four leaders. Besides a few minor tweaks, it was approved wholeheartedly and was implemented in 30 days. We built in an ongoing assessment process, in which multiple stakeholders evaluated the effectiveness of the communication plan. It was considered a great success, especially by front line workers who had previously felt uninformed.

The key here is this: I could have created a wonderful "theoretical" communication system that would not have worked. The general manager was smart enough to insist on making sure I involved his people in the creation of the new communication system. He also knew that my "stretch" assignment would enable, if not force, me to grow in dramatic ways. Because I "knew" about the company in a deeper way, I was able to help with other strategic change initiatives over the next eighteen months.

BECOME A "CULTURAL TRAVELER"

Cultural travelers: I have written about these unique individuals before (Sanaghan, Goldstein & Jurow, 2001; Sanaghan, 2014, 2015), and about their great contribution to their respective organizations. These are very resilient individuals who understand the multiple cultures (faculty, staff, administration, community members) that exist on every campus.

These people connect with others across the campus and act as bridge builders, translators and problem solvers. They are invaluable because they are deeply trusted by others and because they know how to build the relational capital necessary to conduct effective cross-boundary work.

Cultural travelers always work in service of the vision and mission of the institution and live the stated values of their campus. These are *not* gadflies or gossipmongers flitting all over the place, spreading rumors and stirring things up. They are deeply dedicated to getting things done for all the right reasons. Their reputations precede them and enable them to connect easily and authentically with others. They are a gift to the institutions they serve.

It doesn't take decades to become a cultural traveler, but it doesn't happen overnight. These resilient individuals do several things to build a trusted reputation that enables them to "travel":

- **They are great listeners**, which conveys respect for others and gives them access to information few leaders ever hear.
- **They keep their commitments** and their word. This sounds simple, but it's also very hard to do, especially in the robust political cultures that exist on many campuses. Cultural travelers are consistent across stakeholder groups and don't under-promise to be safe or over-promise to impress. They commit to what they believe they can actually accomplish and are clear about what they cannot do.
- **They are able to keep confidences**, which creates a deep trust and bond with others. When navigating complexity, people will have many doubts and fears that need expression. People know they can share these doubts and fears with the travelers, and that these confidences will not be shared with others. This helps build the relational bridges necessary to accomplish things. Which brings me to my next point . . .
- **Cultural travelers get things done**. They are known for their "can do" attitude and for producing meaningful results. This orientation toward accomplishing things creates the credibility needed to move things forward and sustains their reputation.
- **They are transparent, forthright and authentic**. What you see is what you get. They are seen as serving the common good and are committed to what's best for the institution.

The best way to learn how to be a cultural traveler is to get to know some travelers and spend some time with them. Watch how they weave throughout the campus, building connections, sharing ideas and producing results. Learn from their example. Committing yourself to learning how to become a great "traveler" will build your leadership resilience in dramatic ways.

4. EMBRACE COUNTERINTUITIVE NOTIONS

At first glance, the next few suggestions might seem "odd" or counterintuitive to most leaders. They also might challenge the way leaders normally think about leadership. One characteristic that sets resilient leaders apart is their ability to think differently and try creative approaches to leading others.

BE MORE "FAILURE TOLERANT"

Richard Farson and Ralph Keyes wrote an intriguing and informative book, *Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins* (2003). They looked at some of the most successful companies in the world and found that their leadership has learned that failure is an essential part of the learning and innovation process. Moreover, they discovered that these excellent companies are not afraid of failure. Given the ambiguity, complexity and adaptive challenges currently facing higher education, a little "tolerance for failure" will come in handy.

Resilient leaders see failure as a *resource* that they can learn from, to discover new directions, approaches and solutions to the complex challenges they face. This is counterintuitive for too many of our leaders in higher education. Often, leaders ignore the failure, try and hide it, don't want to discuss it, and keep urging people to "move forward." That is a wasted opportunity.

Farson and Keyes are not talking about lethal failure. That would be foolish. But few of us ever deal with those kinds of devastating experiences. They *do* mean that tolerance for the everyday, inevitable mistakes and failures that will be made is an essential leadership stance. It is part of the learning experience we all must take. It can't be avoided.

The key to failure-tolerant leadership is having the courage and the ability to uncover what happened, as well as how and why it happened, and then to apply the lessons to future endeavors. Failure-tolerant leaders model the way by encouraging questions and having a non-judgmental approach to discovering the clues that failure leaves behind.

This does not mean that making a bunch of mistakes is encouraged; that would damage the credibility of any leader. But searching for the lessons in a safe, supportive environment will help people be smarter and more resilient in the future.

EXPERIMENT WITH "EMBRACING CONFUSION"

This is one of the most powerful concepts I have encountered in my thirty-year consulting career. When dealing with complexity and ambiguity, leaders will often become "confused" and unsure about how to address an adaptive challenge. *This is a normal reaction*.

In an excellent monograph, *Embracing Confusion: What Leaders Do When They Don't Know What To Do* (2005), Barry Jentz and Jerome Murphy discuss this complex leadership dynamic, which they call the "lost leader syndrome." This occurs when a leader faces situations and challenges that simply don't make sense. Unable to discern a clear path forward, the leader can become confused, disoriented and even "lost."

This "confusion" has nothing to do with a leader's intelligence or ability. It is an inevitable element in a world filled with adaptive challenges. Unfortunately, when most leaders find themselves confused, they see this confusion as a *liability*. They hide it, cover it up and pretend to be in charge or to know all the answers. Leaders falsely believe they will lose their credibility and authority if they ever admitted they are "confused."

What Jentz and Murphy suggest is counterintuitive because they see confusion as a *resource* and not as a liability. They believe confusion can be fruitful. Confusion can enable us to test old assumptions and be more creative. Jentz and Murphy look at confusion as "potter's clay," rather than as quicksand that will swallow up a leader.

How many times have you been in a meeting and were unsure, even confused, about where the conversation and the discussion were going? Where momentarily, you got overwhelmed and wondered what was going on? Every once in a while, some brave group member has the courage to say, "I'm not sure where we are going with this discussion" or "I hate to admit this but I'm lost here." When this happens, most group members give a sigh of relief, because that remark has described exactly what they were feeling and thinking. Too often, we hide our confusion and others do also. We then seek quick solutions and fixes to get rid of our confusion and restore our sense of equilibrium. This "jumping to solutions" approach can produce drastic results.

Jentz and Murphy believe that if a leader can share that they are confused, that sharing can promote honesty, build trust, and create mutual respect. This takes a great deal of courage and is quite hard in my experience.

Jentz and Murphy have created a five step process they call Reflective Inquiry and Action (RIA). RIA enables leaders to use their temporary confusion as a resource. These are the five steps:

REFLECTIVE INQUIRY AND ACTION (RIA)

1. Embrace your confusion
2. Assert your need to make sense
3. Structure the conversation
4. Listen reflectively and learn
5. Process your response aloud

1. Embrace your confusion.

Acknowledge to yourself that you are confused. This is the first and most important step. Don't deny the confusion or stuff it down. Just admitting you are confused creates the opportunity for discovery and dialogue.

2. Assert your need to make sense.

Let others know you are currently confused and that you need help making sense of the confusion. For example, use statements like:

- "This new information just doesn't make sense to me."
- "Before I make a decision, I need help understanding the situation and exploring options for dealing with it."
- "I have a few thoughts about this but I don't feel like I have enough, or the right, information yet to make a good decision here."

3. Structure the conversation.

This is a critical step in the process. You want to create the condition for "joint inquiry," where you invite others to join you in the dialogue and discussion. As a leader you want to communicate that being confused is not incapacitating. For example, use statements like:

- "I may not know the course of action presently, and I need your help to identify a next step."

- "Listen, we have *x* minutes/hours to make this decision; between now and then, I am going to talk about what has confused me, and I want you to provide me with information, advice and feedback about what you think needs to be done."

The key idea here is that you are inviting people into the conversation and, almost always, they will want to help.

4. Listen reflectively and learn.

The leader needs to actually listen (not simply react) and clarify what they are hearing and learning, out loud. For example:

- "You seem to be saying *x*, do I have that right?"
- "This is my response to your feedback so far. *X* makes real sense to me, but I am unsure about *y*."

If the people involved in the discussion witness you listening carefully, they will feel heard. This will encourage more discussion and idea sharing.

5. Lastly, process your responses out loud (after listening carefully).

You can say, "This is my reaction to what I have heard" and then summarize where you are right now in the decision making process. For example:

- "I think I am headed toward the third option and this is why."
- "I realize we don't have all the relevant information to make a good decision. I would like us to find the answers to *x*, *y*, *z* and return here tomorrow to make the final decision."
- "I am clearer about what the next step needs to be. Here's what influenced my decision. Does this make sense to you?"

HOW TO GET BETTER AT EMBRACING YOUR CONFUSION:

1. Use this process with a trusted thought partner, confidant or friend first. In a safe environment, you can fumble through the process and develop confidence in it.
2. After you have experimented with RIA in a safe environment, use it with your team members or direct reports. If there is enough trust and respect in the group, you will be able to unpack your confusion and show them how to use the RIA process also. If you don't feel comfortable with your team or direct reports, that's a powerful diagnostic of the level of trust present in the group.

3. Be sensitive to cultural norms on your campus. There are several campuses I have worked on where, if you were to express your "confusion." the critics and curmudgeons would came after you with longswords. Be sensible here. There is an old saying that "one might admire a grasshopper for its courage if it attacks a lawnmower, but one wouldn't respect its intelligence." Use your common sense when deciding whether to use RIA. There is an art and a craft to using RIA. If you, as a leader, are *always* admitting you are confused, you will lose credibility quickly. Use RIA judiciously and when the issues are complex and important.

I have had the opportunity to work with over a hundred college and university presidents over the years. The ones I most admire and would *actually follow* are those who would feel confident enough to "embrace their confusion."

LEARN HOW TO CONDUCT AN AFTER ACTION REVIEW (AAR)

After Action Reviews (AARs) are a learning method developed by the U.S. Army in the 1970's to help soldiers learn from both their mistakes and their achievements. Both successes and failurse leave clues. An effective AAR can produce a powerful database for teams and work groups to review and apply lessons learned to future efforts. The AAR is a structured review process that uses four focus questions to organize the discussion:

AAR REVIEW QUESTIONS

You will want to ask some variation of these four questions:

1. What did we set out to do? (What was our intention?)
2. What actually happened? (What did we do?)
3. What caused our results? (Why did it happen?)
4. What will we sustain/improve? (What can we do better next time?)

Don't be fooled by the simplicity of these four focus questions. When conducted effectively, they will reveal a wealth of information. It is very helpful to have an identified, quality facilitator help the group move through the process and make sure everyone participates. AARs are not gripe sessions or critical reviews, and they are not intended to embarrass anyone. They are a *learning process* that can make groups and teams smarter and can better prepare them for future events and issues.

They are also risky endeavors because they assume that the organizational culture supports honesty, openness, feedback and transparency. If that does not describe your campus culture, don't attempt an AAR, because it could turn into a deeply negative and harmful review in the name of "rigor" and "discipline."

If you are going to build your capacity for conducting an AAR, I would suggest you begin with successes first. Then, if appropriate, migrate to mistakes and missteps, *if* the right conditions exist.

Sometimes AARs are called "post mortems," because they are often conducted after a project is completed. But if you are involved in a long-term change process, you can use an AAR periodically to stop the momentum of an initiative, reflect on what has happened so far, and learn from it as you move forward. This protocol can build learning into the entire process. It will take discipline to do this, but it is well worth the effort.

Today, AARs are used extensively throughout the armed forces and in many corporations. They are only now seeing some use on college campuses, but they can help a campus become smarter and build its institutional resilience if the campus applies what it is learning.

AARs can be conducted in person (my preference) or electronically. The participants answer the four focus questions and solicit input from other group or team members. Individual comments are not shared outside the group, but "lessons learned" from this debrief can be circulated to appropriate parties throughout the campus.

The following are lessons learned from a previous strategic planning process with which I was involved. These lessons were captured in an AAR and sent electronically to all leaders on the campus:

1. Senior leadership's meaningful involvement is critical to success (e.g., attend planning meetings, read the reports and respond, talk about the importance of the planning process).
2. A transparent and robust communication process is important. People need to trust the communication process if they are going to believe that the planning process is credible (e.g., tell the truth during the data gathering process, both our strengths and weaknesses; have a combination of high tech communications, such as newsletters and email updates, and high touch communications, such as town hall meetings, small group discussion, and planning updates throughout the planning process).

3. Make sure you have meaningful engagement of campus stakeholders, especially faculty. Be committed to listening to everyone; capture their ideas and put those ideas into a shared database that others can review. If faculty aren't really involved in creating the plan, you will not get it implemented.

4. Make sure you don't fall into the trap of "listening to yourselves too much." Be disciplined about seeking an external perspective (e.g., look at national issues and trends in higher education, seek the perspectives of external stakeholders).

5. Realize that trust is a "strategic asset." You need to pay attention to building "relational capital" throughout the planning process. You can do this by being transparent with all the data that is gathered throughout the process, defining the "decision rules" (who is going to do what), telling the truth, and listening to multiple perspectives.

You get the idea. We are talking about short, sweet and powerful lessons that any leader on the campus can use in their change initiatives or in future planning efforts.

If you can conduct multiple AARs on your campus, you will build your resiliency muscles. You will prize feedback and learning, open up communication channels throughout the institution, and make people smarter across silos. All of these are powerful capacities to have when a crisis hits or when a tough challenge rears its ugly head.

LEARN ABOUT METAPHORICAL PROBLEM SOLVING

One creative tool that you might consider learning about is the practice of "Metaphorical Problem Solving." This creative approach helps you rethink a problem by making an implied comparison between two seemingly dissimilar things or objects.

Metaphors such as "Life is a like a box of chocolates" or "You have the heart of a lion" can help people visualize the connection, so that they can see that things that don't "seem" alike are in fact quite connected. When solving real problems, you find a metaphor for the problem (perhaps the problem is "like an elusive snake in the grass"). Then you try to solve the metaphorical problem (you could "use a net to catch the snake" or "use a flashlight to see the snake better"). Then you apply the metaphorical solution to the real problem you are dealing with.

For example, "using a flashlight" might mean finding more people who can help you look at the problem in order to "shed more light on it." Similarly, "using a net" might mean defining the scope of the problem more carefully and *limiting* its range so that you can try and solve one piece of it instead of trying to solve the whole thing at once.

MindTools.com has an excellent web page that explains this problem solving approach (along with other techniques) very well, and I encourage you to take a look.

TALK WITH "EDGE THINKERS"

Several theorists and researchers (Hamel & Valikangas, 2003; Ho, 2012; Zolli, 2013) suggest that leaders need to find the creative, different, and "edgy" thinkers who work in their organizations. Every organization has these unique characters who simply see the world differently. Often, these are people who "live on the edge" in their personal lives. Maybe they ride in a motorcycle gang, live in an artist colony, belong to an avant garde theater troupe, or skydive on the weekends.

Building a relationship with these individuals and having conversations with them can stimulate your thinking, help you challenge your assumptions about what is "normal," and keep you intellectually engaged. Seeing the world through someone else's dramatically different lens can help you build your intellectual resiliency in interesting ways. For example, edge thinkers often see the "harbingers" of change before other people do; talking with them can make you "smarter" about what might be coming down the road.

KEY RESOURCE

The Edge Foundation is a group of international intellectuals who contribute to the website edge.org, which explores scientific and intellectual ideas. They really think differently, and there are numerous articles, references and videos that show how "different" and brilliant people think.

Each year they publish a book on one powerful idea. 2015's theme is *What Do You Think about Machines That Think?* Other years covered topics like *What Should We Be Worried About? and What Scientific Idea is Ready for Retirement?* Pretty interesting stuff.

DEEP LESSONS ABOUT RESILIENCE

To review, here are seven "deep lessons" about resilience that deserve your thought and close attention.

1. IT'S HARD WORK

Remember that building your personal resilience is hard work; it usually doesn't come naturally. Dealing with life's inevitable challenges and failures and remaining open to possibilities and alternatives takes courage, risk taking and "grit." Fear, anger, and confusion can often paralyze us. The very good news, though, is that resilience can be learned.

2. RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY

Building authentic relationships and connections with others is essential. Trying to go it alone is not an effective strategy and the idea that effective leaders do so is mostly a myth. Social support is one of the most powerful resources you can have in your personal resilience "toolbox." Resilience thrives on a sense of community. So build a community.

3. IDENTIFY MANAGEABLE STEPS

Create clear and manageable goals and identify simple next steps. It is easy to get overwhelmed and feel incompetent when a crisis hits or a failure occurs. Build a bridge to the future by establishing some achievable goals that will help get you through the present situation. This approach can help dampen your feeling that present circumstances are overwhelming and confusing.

4. LEARN TO IMPROVISE

Try to be inventive, take some risks, and put resources to unfamiliar uses. Build your creative thinking muscles, experiment and don't judge yourself as you learn to improvise and to lead amid complexity and ambiguity.

5. KNOW YOUR "LIVED" VALUES

Identify your "lived" values and guiding principles. What are the handful of meaningful values (not platitudes!) that you consistently exhibit. What are your "non-negotiables"? These can infuse your life with meaning and sustain you through difficult times. This self-awareness is a pervasive theme in the research on resilience. Knowing what you really stand for and what's important to you enables you to weather many storms. Resilience depends on strength of character, and that strength of character is created by a set of authentic values. What are yours?

KEY RESOURCE

There is an excellent HBR article entitled "Make Your Values Mean Something" by Patrick Lencioni (2002). Lencioni talks about the importance of personal and organizational values. His article is well worth the read, and can prompt a great conversation for leaders about the vital importance of "lived" values.

6. REMEMBER THAT THIS IS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Try to remember that leaders are all on a learning journey that doesn't end. Failure and disappointment need to be seen as opportunities to gather feedback for the voyage, because there are no simple answers anymore. All the easy challenges have been solved already, and only the tough ones remain. Mistakes will be inevitable, and how we use those mistakes to learn will determine our level of resilience and will define our leadership effectiveness. The key isn't to learn how to fail, but to learn how to "bounce back" from mistakes.

> *"So the real skill is the resilience to climb out of the hole & bounce back."*
>
> Elizabeth Moss Kanter, 2013.

7. RESILIENCE IS A CHOICE

Resilient people do not let adversity define who they are. They strive to move forward toward meaningful goals, and they realize that patience and persistence enable them to deal with complex, adaptive challenges. They develop constructive responses rather than reactive actions, and they believe that resilience is a choice they make in order to avoid the shadows of defeat.

RESOURCES

STRATEGIC RESOURCES

THE RESILIENCY CENTER

Founded by the late Al Siebert, this center is a helpful resource for information on resilience. They also have a free Resiliency Score tool that individuals can take to measure their personal resilience.

THE HARDINESS INSTITUTE

Founded by Salvatore Maddi, this institute offers relevant research on resilience, as well as a Hardiness Survey Test, which tests stress management and resilience. The tool costs $29.95.

TED TALKS ABOUT LEARNING FROM FAILURE

There are at least eight Ted Talks in which a diverse set of speakers talk about "failing forward" and realizing that failure is an important part of the learning journey.

THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

The APA has an informative online brochure entitled "The Road to Resilience," which provides strategies for building personal resilience.

A LEADER'S GUIDE TO AFTER ACTION REVIEWS (1993)

This guide from the Headquarters Department of the Army will walk you through conducting an AAR.

THE DUCKWORTH LAB

This is an excellent resource for Dr. Angela Lee Duckworth's research on "grit." The lab offers free videos and surveys, as well as extensive information on Duckworth's findings. You can also find a Ted Talk ("The Key to Success? Grit.") by Dr. Duckworth that is both popular and informative.

THE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The Center was established by Martin Seligman, a well-known psychologist, and his colleagues. Their research is focused on the positive aspects of optimism. The mission of the Center is to promote information, research and training on positive psychology, and the Center's web page offers extensive information about positive psychology.

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