

Resilience

How hardy are you?



by Kenneth M. Nowack

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE IN the face of work and life stress experience job burnout, depression, and physical illness, while others remain physically and psychologically healthy? Resilient people seem to confront the demand for long hours and threats to family balance with high performance and well-being.

Three Coping Patterns

We find three distinct coping patterns:

1. Hot reactors: Those who get sick in the battle of stress, change, and challenge. About 1 in 5 people are “hot reactors” on the basis of how they react to stress. Hot reactors are likely to experience physical illness, job burnout, and psychological distress during stressful and challenging projects, assignments, and heavy workloads. They tend to show impatience, irritability, frustration with incompetence, mood swings, and anger. They have a relentless drive for success as well as cynical mistrust of those around them. Hot reactors seem to be wired to react to stress with exaggerated physiological and behavioural responses. They resist changing their coping style, believing that their ability to work long hours, suppress fatigue, and feel energized by stress is a key to their success. They exhibit the classic *fight-or-flight* response, almost to the point of exhaustion and burnout. Most are high risk for long-term cardiovascular disorders, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and heart disease.

2. Sustainers: Those who get sick after the letdown with the battle. People who feel the symptoms of a cold right after a big project or after a vacation are experiencing the clinical *let-down* effect. They shift from a high state of activation to a lower state rapidly, making their immune system let down from its normal high-stress protective state, and making them vulnerable to get sick in the short term. Sustainers are used to prolonged periods of high-stress states, suppress fatigue, and get up for the battle. Their vulnerability comes after the battle. These sustainers eventually pay the price for hanging in during stressful situations.

3. Hardy performers: Those who are resilient and experience stress and challenge free from illness and distress. Hardy and resilient people also experience high levels

of stress, but maintain physical health and psychological well-being. They are less likely to report job burnout, absenteeism due to illness, anxiety, sleep problems, and depression. They utilize coping habits that translate stress into positive challenges that energize rather than compromise the immune system and well-being.

Resilient people experience and report less work and family stress. They maintain high physical activity and exercise, despite travel, work, and family demands. They maintain heart-healthy eating/nutrition habits, are non-smokers, and drink alcohol in moderation. They get adequate sleep and minimize hostile, impatient, and aggressive behaviours associated with the fight-or-flight response. They practice daily mental or physical activity that elicits the *relaxation response*.

Resilient people cultivate a strong social and professional support network by

spending time with friends and avoiding energy-zappers. They possess a hardy outlook on life—viewing change as a challenge, identifying and spending time on their passions, and developing an external set of attributions for failures. They express strong feelings in writing or verbally to others daily. They stop obsessive thoughts that create tension and explore action plans. They minimize the use of self-talk that uses the words *must* or *always*. They express gratitude for their life. They identify and act on their signature strengths to maximize career and life satisfaction.

Hardy people maintain a lifestyle that enables them to balance the demands at work and home while remaining productive and healthy. **PE**

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ACTION: Become a hardy performer.

PHYSICAL • CHANGE

Seven Steps to Personal Change



by Larry Cole and Kay Clowney

YOUR EFFORTS TO IMPROVE YOURSELF can be made much easier by using a sequential seven-step personal-change process.

1. Recognize the need. Accept the fact that remaining as is is not an option. You tap into energy when you see that there are more disadvantages associated with the status quo than there are advantages. You want the energy associated with the disadvantages to be so intense that it pushes you to change.

2. Accept responsibility for your behavior. Pointing fingers to avoid responsibility seems to be the rule rather than the exception. Instead, follow Ghandi’s advice: Be the change you wish to see in this world. Adopt the mantra, “I’m responsible to improve my performance—regardless of what others might be doing.”

3. Know the desired behavior. As you would expect, people need to have a crystal-clear picture of what is expected to improve performance. Everybody is from the “show me” state (Missouri); therefore, a behavioral blueprint allows the desired behaviors to be seen and repeated.

4. Demonstrate willingness to change. You create intense energy when you realize that the advantages of implementing the desired behavior far outweigh those of remaining the same. You want the advantages to be such a strong magnet that you are literally pulled to use the desired behaviors to overcome any resistance associated with the change.

5. See yourself change. What you do is regulated by what you see yourself doing, so you need to see yourself implementing the desired behavior. Ultimately, your behavior will tell others what you see yourself doing.

6. Change through practice. Seek multiple opportunities to practice change—in a classroom, through visual imagery, and realizing everyday is a practice day. The more you practice the behavior, the faster you learn.

7. Seek feedback for continuous learning. Monitor your performance and continually learn from your successes and setbacks. Just as the blindfolded marksman depends upon feedback to hit the target, you must take advantage of the power of immediate feedback to continuously guide your performance.

This personal-change process is an effective way to increase your personal motivation and ability to change. This tool works when you work the tool. **PE**

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ACTION: Try this personal change process.

