

# @work

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YOUR GET AHEAD GUIDE TO CAREER & FINANCIAL SUCCESS

## SURVIVAL

### *skills*

In today's high-pressure workforce, there's one attribute that could futureproof your career



It's Monday morning. You didn't sleep last night because you were so worried about the work piling up on your desk, and now you're anxiously trying to reply to some emails before breakfast.

On top of that, there's a new person in your team who's younger than you and already knows how to use Slack more efficiently. Oh, and the project you're working on is about to have a budget cut so you might have to redo all the work you've done ...

If this is the sort of list that runs through your head on a regular basis, you're not alone. "The global workforce is increasingly anxious," confirms Stuart Taylor, founder and CEO at Springfox. Their Global Resilience Diagnostic Report surveyed more than 26,000 employees and found "55 per cent of workers are operating with excessive worry, and 45 per cent are experiencing distress symptoms".

According to a Gallup survey, 50 per cent of Millennials and 44 per cent of Gen X cite a lack of work/life balance and unclear job expectations as contributing to their stress, with 71 per cent of workers saying they feel disengaged.

Survival in the modern workplace isn't easy, but there's a skill set that can help you immensely. It's an attribute that people across the world use daily, regardless of their occupation, age, gender or social status – resilience.

"Resilience is the ability to recover from tough situations," says Taylor. "In general, resilient people are fulfilled at work; they are focused, decisive and have an optimistic outlook. In times of stress or sudden change, resilient people will be able to stay positive and think in a structured way that isn't swayed hugely by emotion. Being

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resilient at work means you can adapt to change with ease. Developing resilience also sharpens and focuses your ability to bounce back, steer through adversity and work at a level of sustainable high performance."

The good news? Women are particularly good at becoming resilient, especially as we get older. "Resilience tends to increase with age, specifically in categories that require focus and decisiveness [such as learning new technologies]," says Taylor. "Significant life events shape who we are, and this improves our ability to adapt, change, and grow. Women show the most improvement during their older years."

The even-better news is that you can train yourself to become resilient. "Resilience has four key factors, explains Taylor. "Bounce, courage, connection and creativity. Awareness of these is key to overcoming stresses about your ability to meet challenges."

Here's how to develop these skills and make them work for you:

FACT

55%

OF WORKERS WORRY EXCESSIVELY, AND 45 PER CENT EXPERIENCE DISTRESS SYMPTOMS, ACCORDING TO THE SPRINGFOX GLOBAL RESILIENCE DIAGNOSTIC REPORT

## 1. BOUNCE

### WHAT IT IS

"Bouncing back is your ability to recover, to adapt to change and grow," explains Taylor. "It's also the ability to bounce *forward*, by choosing your emotions and understanding your motivation."

### HOW TO GET IT

"Resilient people choose their thoughts and emotions like they choose their clothes each morning," says Michelle Bihary, consultant at Workplace Resilience Australia. "They make a choice to focus on what they can control, and let go of what is outside of their control."

This sort of positive thinking rewires your brain to become more resilient. "Habituated positive thinking allows our neural pathways to default to thinking this way," she says.

To cultivate this outlook, start by making it a daily habit

to appreciate the small things. "Consciously look for the positives in each situation," advises Bihary. "Think about what's working well. This can help problems seem smaller and allow you to stay motivated. Leaving notes next to your bed, in your car or on your phone can help remind you to shift your thinking to a positive mindset."

When executive manager, Hannah\*, 36, was tasked with managing a negative and cynical staff member, she used these skills to increase her resilience to the situation and build strength of character.

"Initially I felt frustrated to have a disengaged employee," she says. "But I started to realise it was a learning opportunity; I had to learn new skills in order to manage her. After a couple of months she is more open and engaged, and I feel I've achieved something, too. I no longer dread dealing with her." ▷



## 2. COURAGE

### WHAT IT IS

“Your ability to be enthused by challenges and change,” says Taylor.

### HOW TO GET IT

“Annoying colleagues and stress at work create opportunities to grow and develop,” says Bihary. “It’s important to see your career (and other aspects of your life) as a lifelong learning process. Focusing on the learning – rather than feeling frustrated by the situation – cultivates courage and adaptability. Being a lifelong learner means failing and falling at times. What is important is getting up – not the fact that we have fallen. It helps us find the lessons, see the opportunities, and shift our focus and attention to what we are learning.”

Prompt yourself to do this by asking: “What have I learnt this week? What are my challenges and how are they learning opportunities?”

“Remind yourself of previous accomplishments – both big and small,” suggests Taylor. “Ask: ‘When have I had success dealing with a problem in the past?’ Can you use those strategies to help the current issue? This type of thinking can give you the confidence to become resilient.”

Emma Bannister, founder of Presentation Studio, drew on these techniques to launch her own business and lead a successful team.

“One of the hardest things I’ve struggled with is being an introvert,” she says. “It was a big challenge to step out from behind my computer and be a figurehead. But I learnt that trusting in the people around me wasn’t a failure – it was a strength. Once I had the courage to identify my own strengths and weaknesses, my business took off.”



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PHOTOGRAPHED BY GETTY IMAGES. TEXT BY KATHERINE CHATFIELD.  
“THE ROI OF A SUCCESSFUL WORKPLACE.” CENEREA

### 3. CONNECTION

**WHAT IT IS**

“Your level of respect and care for others, and yourself,” says Taylor.

**HOW TO GET IT**

“Kindness for yourself and others is what builds resilience,” explains Bihary. “This is achieved by looking after our physical and mental wellbeing.”

Former university student advisor Miranda Murray, 43, realised that treating colleagues with empathy and respect increased both her team’s and her own resilience. “I used to feel annoyed when colleagues had unrealistic expectations that felt disrespectful to my position and workload,” she says. “But by approaching the situation with curiosity instead of offence or judgement, I asked myself what else could be going on with that person to drive their behaviour. There was a chance it wasn’t all about me. The premise of my new attitude allowed me to set my ego aside; consequently, I experienced fewer conflicts and misunderstandings, and I think it made me much more resilient in my job.”



THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF A WORKPLACE WITH LOW LEVELS OF RESPECT CAN BE ENORMOUS, THROUGH LOST PRODUCTIVITY, HIGH EMPLOYEE TURNOVER, AND CHALLENGES ATTRACTING TALENT\*

### 4. CREATIVITY

**WHAT IT IS**

“Your ability to develop your talents and create opportunities,” says Taylor.

**HOW TO GET IT**

“Building our strengths and skills fuels creativity, which generates opportunity and builds resilience,” says Bihary. First things first, “if you think you have a skills gap, be proactive and take steps to learn directly from your peers, or challenge yourself to take on broader training and study,” says Taylor. “Break issues down to smaller goals, so it’s easier to see progress. This can motivate you to persist through challenges.” Instead

of feeling overwhelmed when learning something new, Simone Milasas, author of *Joy of Business*, uses creative ways to improve her skill set, and in turn bring about opportunities. “When I’m learning new technology I ask three people who love the tech for their top three tips,” she says. “This gives me a practical and unique perspective, and creates different opportunities from simply reading the manual.”

Bihary adds: “To build your talent and creativity, name three key things that happened today, and what strengths you used to deal with them. Then ask three trusted people to give you feedback about your talents and strengths. Use this to think about what opportunities they give you.” □

## WHY WE NEED RESILIENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

If a workplace doesn’t support resilience in its employees, it can be in trouble. “When employees aren’t resilient, this can result in underperforming companies,” says Taylor. “Worrying about not being able to perform with the latest methods and technologies can lead to absenteeism and attention loss. At a basic level, resilience is the absence of fear. When leadership fails to show resilience, this is reflected in an underperforming workforce.”

While we must take personal responsibility for developing our own resilience, we should also expect the organisation we work for to help us foster this, believes Taylor. “Leaders must shape, promote and model resilience in the workplace to be truly effective for the business.”

## HOW RESILIENT IS YOURS?

**ASK YOURSELF IF IT:**

- Creates manageable and achievable goals and expectations.
- Provides the necessary resources and time to achieve goals.
- Ensures that workplace culture is based on kindness and respect.
- Quickly and appropriately deals with harassment, bullying or discrimination.
- Encourages the safety to learn – if people fear asking questions or contributing differing viewpoints, there will be no innovation, and the workplace gets a limited version of each staff member.