

## How Workplaces Can Strengthen Resilience

By Patricia Morgan

Years ago I counselled Rachel, who had been laid off from her receptionist job and was presenting poorly at job interviews. It didn't help that her previous employer had called her "Lazy" and her husband called her "Fat broad." It wasn't until she left her verbally offensive partner and created a supportive network that she was able to focus on retraining which led to a rewarding career. Contrast Rachel's situation to when I worked under psychologist, James McPhail. When he told me that my report had an error in it and would need editing, I heard an old childhood echo in my head that said "Stupid!" But James laughed and reminded me that we all make mistakes. I was supported and thrived under his watch. What was different from Rachel's situation and mine? An environment that nurtured resilience.

*Resiliency is the ability to spring back from, and successfully adapt to, adversity.*  
Nan Henderson

In a conversation with Nan Henderson, international speaker and author of ***Resiliency in Action***, she mentioned that all environments--families, schools, communities and work places can help strengthen resilience or weaken it. She said that the "**100 Best Companies to Work For**" named by **Fortune Magazine** are organizations that provide environments where resilience can be seen in action.

Here is what some researchers (Nan Henderson, Robert Brooks, Tyrone Donnon, Wayne Hammond and others) describe as **conditions that nurture resilience**:

1. Opportunities for meaningful participation
2. High expectations for success
3. Opportunities to connect with others
4. Those in authority provide healthy role models
5. Available guidance and help
6. A safe place to express feelings, concerns and to have fun
7. A place where making mistakes is safe and provides learning
8. Communication is clear with consistent expectations and boundaries
9. Personal strengths are acknowledged and supported
10. Accomplishments are celebrated

Nan Henderson's comments about **Fortune Magazine's "The 100 Best Companies to Work For"** and resilience spurred me to visit the magazine's website. This is what I learned. Each year they examine the procedures and the practices of applicant companies and feedback from employees. They compile their data into four areas: credibility (communication to employees), respect (opportunities and benefits), fairness (compensation, diversity), and

pride/camaraderie (philanthropy, celebrations). Some of the aspects addressed include:

1. Communication is open, clear and consistent
2. Professional development is supported
3. Appreciation is expressed
4. Employees connect with a sense of *family* or team
5. Management listens
6. Management accepts and supports employee's personal lives
7. There are opportunities to use talents
8. Employees receive unbiased feedback
9. There are opportunities to learn from mistakes
10. There are opportunities to make a difference
11. The company cares about the community, country or/and environment
12. Differences are valued

This list was adapted from Fortune Magazine and The Trust Model from The Great Place to Work<sup>®</sup> Institute, Inc.

Of course there is considerable data about the importance of strengthening your own internal world for optimum resilience. If you are clear that you are not the primary source of your workplace distress, refer to the above list to discern if your place of employment helps sustain health and the ability to bounce back, or not. If not, make a plan to address the distressful work environment and, if need be, leave for a more aware and employee friendly employer. Take charge of your well being. As poet Maya Angelou said, "Nothing will work unless you do."

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