

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

BUILDING RESILIENCE: “REAL” WAYS TO THRIVE DURING TOUGH TIMES

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

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THE GOAL:

Build resilience in yourself and your team.

NANO TOOL:

Resilience — the capacity to bounce back from setbacks or to thrive during times of challenge or change — is not a fixed trait. It actually grows out of a set of “learnable” behaviors with results that interact to make you and your team less vulnerable to stress. Whether you’re dealing with the acute stress of sudden challenges, or the chronic stress of daily life, simple daily actions can increase your resilience.

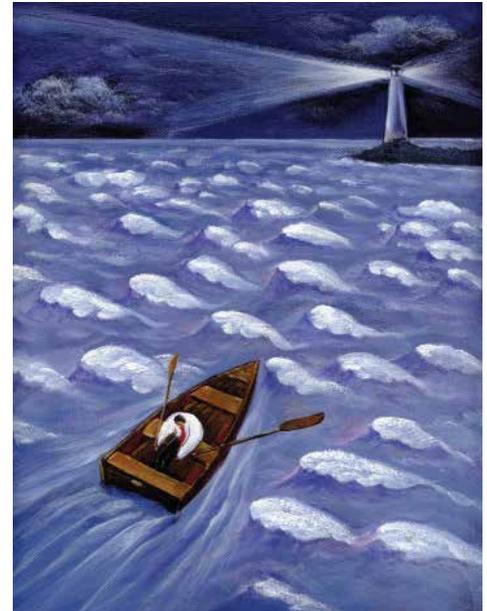
We are all resilient to varying degrees, yet everyone can become even more resilient. A wealth of research points to four factors that help people — and teams, and organizations, and countries — become more agile and effective under times of stress. The acronym REAL serves as a mnemonic: Relationships, Efficacy, Affect, and Learning. Strengthening one or more of these factors can significantly improve individual and team performance.

R = relationships. We are far more resilient when we are engaged and supported and motivated with and by others. Our ties to others make us stronger, happier, more creative — and more resilient to challenges.

E = efficacy. Believing that we make a difference, that we have control and that our actions matter, also builds resilience. Efficacy is about having goals and aspirations and the confidence that we can reach them.

A = (positive) affect. When we experience positive emotions (such as happiness, joy, optimism, satisfaction, gratitude, peace, and humor), our bodies relax. Our physical stress, including blood pressure, decreases. Positive affect makes us more creative and better able to find solutions and cope with stress.

L = learning. When we find lessons — meaning and peace — in our traumas, injuries, and stress, we are better able to move on, understanding that we have grown, matured, and strengthened as a result of the challenges we have faced.



HOW COMPANIES USE IT:

- Southwest Airlines has shown tremendous resilience through numerous financial and national challenges, most notably the terrorist attack of 9-11. With 40 consecutive years of profitability in a business sector where profits can be excruciatingly tough to come by, the company continues to build resilience through a focus on Relationships and Affect. It demonstrates a deep commitment to its employees, holding firm to its no-layoffs policy, even after 9-11 when every other airline cut its workforce, and during the most recent recession. The company turns to its employees to find innovative cost-cutting measures, and doesn't penalize them when an initiative fails. In a culture that celebrates humor and positivity, it encourages employees to have fun on the job.
- Rwanda's recovery after the horrific genocide of 1994 has been nothing short of extraordinary. Hutus and Tutsis live together in peace, and the country has one of the world's fastest-growing economies. At least 1 million Rwandans have been lifted out of poverty in just five years. Although Rwanda still faces exceptional challenges, its resilience can be attributed in part to two of the four resiliency factors: Learning and Efficacy.

President Paul Kagame has been remarkably effective (a) in shaping the lessons citizens have learned from the trauma and tragedy of the genocide (We are all in this together as Rwandans, We must practice forgiveness and acceptance and live together peacefully, We cannot count on other countries to save us but must forge our own path) and (b) in building citizens' sense of self-efficacy for themselves and their country (the creation — through a highly participative process — of Vision 2020 — a document that spells out in great detail Rwanda's goal to become "a middle-income nation in which Rwandans are healthier, educated, and more prosperous. The Rwanda we seek is one that is united and competitive both regionally and globally").

ACTION STEPS:

Here are just a few of the many ways that leaders can build resilience in themselves and others. As you read the examples, think of other ways that you could expand your own strengths, or the strengths of your team, in each of the four key areas.

R = relationships. Think of the people you turn to during times of stress, or potential mentors who you would like to be able to consult, and look for ways to build and strengthen those relationships. Could you set up regular phone calls, or a monthly lunch date just to check in? Look for ways that you can add value to the relationship. You can also coach or mentor the people on your team, and encourage them to build their own network of supportive relationships. Coaching others builds your own resilience.

E = efficacy. To enhance efficacy in your team allow them to share their ideas, set inspiring goals for themselves and provide the means for them to take action. Have them keep an "Accomplishment Log" of their goals, progress and successes. Try keeping your own Accomplishment Log too, and turn to it as an energizer whenever you hit a roadblock. It will remind you of all the times you've made it past roadblocks before.

A = (positive) affect. Look for ways to spark positive emotions in your team and coworkers. Whether it's through praise, humor, or a fun surprise at a team meeting, the positive emotions your team feels will make them more energized, productive, and resourceful. Make a list of your own energizers too, and fill your day with them. It could be pictures of your loved ones on your desk, your favorite music, closing your eyes for a 2-minute mini vacation to your favorite place to relax, or even pausing to take one slow, deep breath. Mindfulness is one of the best antidotes to stress.

L = learning. After-action reviews (AARs) can help your team learn from its missteps and take positive actions to avoid similar outcomes in the future. [Read this Nano Tool to learn seven action steps for AARs.] They also help you celebrate your team's successes. At the end of each day or week, open a journal and reflect on your successes and challenges, what you've learned, how it impacted you and others, and what you plan to do differently in the future.

SHARE YOUR BEST PRACTICES:

Do you have a best practice for increasing resilience? If so, please share it on our blog at Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. <http://whartonleadership.wordpress.com/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- "Psychological Resilience, Positive Emotions, and Successful Adaptation to Stress in Later Life," Anthony D. Ong, C. S. Bergeman, Toni L. Bisconti, and Kimberly A. Wallace, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2006, Vol. 91, No. 4, 730–749. Reveals the findings of three studies which indicate that the occurrence of daily positive emotions serves to moderate stress reactivity and mediate stress recovery, and that over time the experience of positive emotions functions to assist high-resilient individuals in their ability to recover effectively from daily stress.
- "The Science of Resilience: Implications for the Prevention and Treatment of Depression," Steven M. Southwick and Dennis S. Charney, *Science Magazine*, Vol. 338, October 5, 2012, 79-82. Describes the wide variety of human responses to stress and trauma, and many strategies and interventions designed to increase resilience for the prevention and treatment of depression.
- "To Build Resilience: Leader Influence on Mental Hardiness," Paul T. Bartone, Charles L. Barry, and Robert E. Armstrong, *Defense Horizons*, No. 69, November 2009, 1-8. Provides suggestions for increasing hardiness and stress resilience in organizations, primarily through leader actions and policies. By setting the conditions that increase mental hardiness, leaders at all levels can enhance human health and performance, while preventing many stress-related problems before they occur.
- "Developing Sustainable Leaders Through Coaching and Compassion," Richard E. Boyatzis, Melvin L. Smith, and Nancy Blaize, *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, March 2006, Vol. 5, Issue 1, 8-24. Suggests that to sustain their effectiveness, leaders should emphasize coaching as a key part of their role and behavioral habits.
- Southwest Airlines Culture, as described by founder and former CEO, Herb Kelleher:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7b391n_TnY
- Rwanda Vision 2020: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPJiT1-Yo3w>

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools' Academic Director is John Paul MacDuffie, Wharton Associate Professor of Management.