

PowerTalk has been especially designed for women leaders who want to leverage Return on Investment (ROI) in their careers and life experiences and take the next leap. Each issue of PowerTalk focuses on key strategies that will increase your leadership effectiveness. Answer questions posed, review the suggestions and write down ways you can implement. Use these suggested strategies today to enhance your tool kit or even rewrite the script for your future.

Leadership Resiliency

The focus of this issue is Leadership Resiliency. Now that the summer and Labor Day are behind us, I hope you feel reenergized to begin another busy fall season. To get you off to a good start and keep you focused on your most important goals, this column offers some tips for increasing your leadership resilience.

In June I attended a global conference on leadership resiliency sponsored by the Wharton School of Business. Although the main thrust was on resiliency in the face of adversity, we also discussed becoming more resilient in dealing with day-to-day stressors. As you pick up the pace this fall, why not take some steps to increase your leadership resiliency for a more productive, less stressful year?

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Five Steps to a More Resilient You

Let's take a closer look at what it means to be resilient. We find a variety of dictionary definitions for resilience or resiliency. It can be defined, for instance, as the ability to recover from, or adjust easily to change or setbacks. So how can you increase this ability?

1. **Keep your eye on the big picture.** The most resilient people are those who are strategic and disciplined in their approach to achieving their goal. When you take a long-term view, you are less likely to succumb to the stressors of day-to-day setbacks. And even when the need for a course change arises, it's less likely to throw you off because you will either align it with your big picture and keep moving towards your goal, alter your course or eliminate the goal if it no longer passes the alignment test.
2. **Make time for reflection.** But often just finding the time for reflection appears impossible. Jim Collins, the keynote speaker at the Wharton conference, suggested creating "pockets of tranquility." These are similar to the "white space" on the calendar I always encourage my clients to create. These are dedicated times when you are not multitasking, responding to email or reacting to daily events. Since "white space" is not easily available during the workweek, it may mean getting up an hour earlier once or twice a week, or using Saturday morning, a long flight or a vacation day. You could also schedule a mini sabbatical or stay an extra night after a conference. Take a look at your calendar now and schedule some "white space" when you can think more creatively about the future, a complex issue, or your long or short-term goals. Solutions and creative thought come much easier when you're not multitasking. But if you don't schedule the necessary "white space," it's probably not going to happen.
3. **Learn to say no.** Another definition of resilience is the capacity to respond to daily stressors in healthy and productive ways. Develop the discipline to say no. Don't look at the additional demands as "just more of the same." Saying yes in the adrenalin rush of being asked to help is not always healthy and productive in the long run. Rather, examine the complexity and urgency of the extra work you are being asked to do. Is it aligned with your priorities? What is involved? Is it really necessary? Can someone else do it? One of the opposites of resilience is inflexibility. Do you always insist on doing everything yourself because you are a perfectionist? Work on letting go of control and becoming more flexible so you can delegate comfortably and accept someone else's performance, even if it's less than your definition of perfect.

4. **Decide what really matters.** Even when you are being offered a new, prestigious position or opportunity, saying no may be the healthiest response. One of my clients, a professor, recently called and asked for my advice. She had been offered a high-level administrative position and was tempted by the offer. As we talked, she realized that she really valued having summers off for research, taking time off around the holidays, and having discretionary time for community volunteer work. Taking the position would have meant losing the free time to engage in a variety of activities she valued. As she considered the pros and cons, she recognized that an administrative position was just not right for her. It may be a great feeling to be needed, but before you jump at an offer, reframe the request in terms of how it relates to your long-term goals, career, relationships and life. Say no if it's just not right for you.
5. **Align goals and activities.** In physics, resilience is the property of a material to assume its original shape or position after being bent, stretched or compressed. Another way to keep everyday stressors from compressing or stretching you out of shape is to create what Jim Collins called "the stop doing list," or, in Peter Drucker's terms, practice "purposeful abandonment." I discussed this in detail in the last column, but here are the basics. Take a good look at all your tasks and identify those that pull you away from your real choices and from the activities that are aligned with your goals. Rather than battling with the daily to-do list, focus on the outcomes you really want to achieve and on the activities that will get you there. Drop or delegate the rest. Then, even when something happens that bends your plans, it will be much easier for you to resume your original path.

That's what resilience is all about: the ability to adjust easily to daily changes and setbacks, and to respond with productive, proactive steps that will keep you moving toward your goal. Make it your fall resolution to become more resilient!

Your Thoughts Are Invited

I'm just beginning my research for an article on leadership resilience in women. What do you think differentiates women leaders who maintain their resilience? What are the characteristics that let them deal with stress and adversity? How do they maintain a healthy but pragmatic optimism and continue moving toward their goal rather than getting stuck or thrown off course? Please email me with your insights at drbarbkaufman@earthlink.net.

Additional Resources:

- [Click here to review more articles by Dr. Barbara Kaufman](#)
 - [An Elixir for Burnout](#)
 - *Get Out of Your Own Way: The 5 Keys to Surpassing Everyone's Expectations*, by Robert K. Cooper, Ph.D., Crown Business, 2006.
 - *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert, Ph.D., Random House, 2006.
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Your comments and questions are invited: info@roiconsultinggroup.com

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