

The three key ingredients of any "resilience recipe"

Thursday, 17 February 2022 12:47pm

Burnout is becoming increasingly common among leaders and employees, but wellbeing advice is adding to rather than solving the problem, a high-performance specialist says.

"We want good balance, health and wellbeing, but stay stuck frantically pedalling our hamster wheel and juggling multiple balls in the air," says [Fleur Heazlewood](#).

"In our race for more, we are reducing ourselves to less. And, for many of us, our health and wellbeing is the 'less', and the 'more' is an endless cycle of busyness, pursuit and stress."

She notes that in light of the pandemic, employers have increased the focus on wellbeing, offering a plethora of [information and activities across numerous platforms](#), however in some cases employees are "drowning in a sea of information pollution on wellbeing", which is in turn driving a [sense of overwhelm](#).

If you keep drawing on your energy without refuelling or recharging, your system will keep slowing down until you eventually come to a stop.

Fleur Heazlewood



Fleur Heazlewood

"Google 'how do I improve my wellbeing?' and around 149 million results are returned," she explains.

"Many of us hope or expect a one-size-fits-all approach to wellbeing, and when we don't find it quickly, we give up."

The solution, Heazlewood says, is to focus on resilience first.

"Why focus on resilience? Think of resilience as the mask, snorkel and flippers that will help propel you to the surface," she says in her latest book, [Resilience Recipes](#).

Emotional agility

A resilience recipe has three core ingredients, Heazlewood says, and the first is emotional agility.

Where emotional rigidity means people "get hooked by thoughts", emotional agility "is the ability to experience your thoughts and emotions in a helpful, values-aligned way", she says.

Further, those who experience emotional rigidity can be "hijacked" by this state, becoming trapped by "black-and-white opinions and behaviours that limit our ability to connect, solve and compromise".

"For example, a driver cuts you off in traffic, causing you to veer and hit your side mirror on a pole to avoid hitting them. They give you a casual wave and accelerate away, uncaring of the damage to your car resulting from their reckless behaviour.

"Consumed with rage, you stew, fume, tell and retell the story. You become your story, and it ruins your day. Or, consumed with rage, you race after them, tailgating them. They pull up at the lights, get out of their car and charge back to you with their fists up, ready to fight."

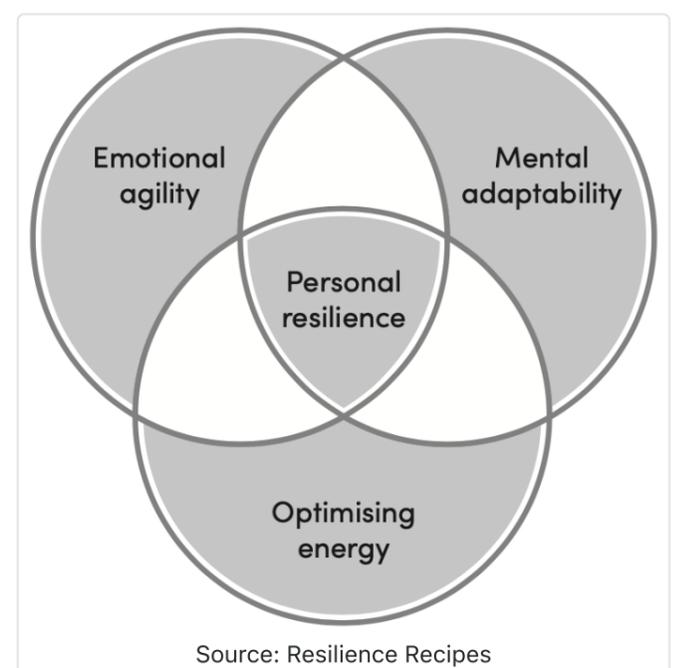
Creating [separation between an event and any emotions](#) means an employee can choose how to respond, therefore coping better with complex challenges.

In Heazlewood's example, an emotionally agile response might involve lodging a police report and "choosing to put it behind you and move forward with the rest of your day".

"You can choose to stay caught up in the rips, the pull and churn of the waves, or you can choose to find the calmness on the ocean floor," says Heazlewood.

"Developing emotional agility helps you to transform storms brewing on the horizon by dropping the winds and creating a more soothing ocean sunset."

Mental adaptability



Source: Resilience Recipes

Heazlewood describes mental adaptability as the roadmap that contains emotional data points and signposts.

Similar to emotional agility, it offers a broader perspective of a challenge, where "the more options you can see, the more options you have available to you".

"Mental adaptability means managing changing priorities, thinking on your feet, bouncing forward through life's challenges with a positive attitude and knowing that whatever happens, you will be okay," she says.

"However, for many people, this is much easier said than done. They are like an animal crossing the road at night that freezes instead of fleeing from the headlights of an oncoming car. Our brain likes certainty and patterns, and we can sometimes get fixed in our way of thinking and struggle to accept new ideas and adopt different ways of doing things."

To cultivate this adaptability, Heazlewood says employees and leaders need to [practise mindfulness](#), identify what they can and can't control, and learn to see a challenge "from both the balcony and the dance floor".

In particular, she notes that in ambiguous and uncertain scenarios – such as the pandemic – shaping a sense of control is crucial.

"Picture your car getting bogged in quicksand. The harder you press on the accelerator, the more the wheels spin, the quicker you sink and more stuck you get," she explains.

"It is important to take positive action on the things that are within your control. So, rather than spinning your wheels, call for help, get out of the car to reduce the weight, and look for branches or wood that you can put under the wheels to slow the rate of sinking.

"When situations and events are outside of your control, it is important to recognise when you don't have influence and let go. Don't overinvest your time and energy."

Optimising energy

Balancing support and investment across emotional, mental and physical health is key to optimising energy at work, says Heazlewood.

"Many of us are feeling exhausted by overwork, constant connectivity and continual distractions. And we are not completing the self-care maintenance needed to sustain our energy and wellbeing," she adds.

"If you keep drawing on your energy without refuelling or recharging, your system will keep slowing down until you eventually come to a stop... It's not possible to drive around with an empty tank for more than a few kilometres."

Having optimal energy means [setting boundaries](#) and "completing tasks that are important to you and to do them when you want to do them", but too many employees treat energy as a "time equation".

To boost productivity, Heazlewood says it's time to flip the equation.

"Energy, not time, is your fundamental source of efficiency and performance. So, optimising energy is about prioritising and protecting what fuels your wellbeing."

Although research shows that [by prioritising wellbeing first, employees become more creative, innovative and productive](#), a common pushback when implementing the change is, "I know all this stuff already".

"But the reality is that 90% of the time... they realise that while they know what they should be doing, they aren't actually doing it," she says.

"Much of [this] feels basic, like going back to preschool, but we aren't doing it. This is why you need to periodically revisit how you are spending your time each day and recalibrate when you slip out of balance.

"Make your unconscious time-wasters conscious, and actively choose. Choose your balance and create boundaries, rather than staying stuck on the same busyness treadmill."

Do you have news to share about your workplace? [Email the HR Daily team](#) with your comments, information or tips.

Related links

- ➔ [Webcast: Best and emerging practices in employee wellbeing](#)
- ➔ [Meditation having major impact on workplace stress levels](#)
- ➔ [Poor boundary management undermining organisations' resilience](#)
- ➔ [Six focus areas help buffer stress for peak performance](#)
- ➔ [New world of work calls for 'psychological flexibility'](#)
- ➔ ["Looking under the hood" helps leaders outsmart overwhelm](#)

