Adversity & Resilience

Adversity is a fact of life in public service and leaders who have cultivated resiliency have a better chance of recovering from it. This paper makes the point that it is in every leader’s self-interest to strengthen this critical skill.

Resilience has long been regarded as an innate quality; you were either resilient or not. But contemporary research suggests that it is better understood as a three-part process known as Response Flexibility; a collection of knowledge and skills shown to be effective in responding to adversity and enabling resiliency.

Part A of this paper deals with adversity, the precursor condition that forms the context for resilience. It stresses the importance of discerning the true nature of adversity, so you have a solid point of departure for a resilient response.

Part B offers ideas on building personal resilience by first understanding how you characterize and explain adversity to yourself, and to others, and then by developing the critical meta-skill of Response Flexibility: the ability to pause, step back, refocus and reflect, shift perspective to reinterpret your situation, and then make better choices about how to respond to adversity.

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**Adversity & Resilience**

Resilience is the ability to recover from adversity. It is a learned set of skills that helps you deal well with daily speed bumps as well as life-changing events or longer-term conditions. Part A of the paper deals with adversity; situations that form the context for resilience and Part B offers ideas about building resilience.

**Why is this important?**

No matter what you do, it is in your self-interest to become more resilient. Life without adversity would be unbalanced. It would be undeniably placid, and your passage through it no doubt calm and serene. But likely you’d also be bored. Adversity is like spice; a little goes a long way, and it can enhance a meal. But adversity can also give you heartburn, so it is in your self-interest to decide how much you want for your life to be in equilibrium, what too much looks like, and what you can do when this happens.

As a leader, you have special responsibilities in challenging times. Whatever style of leader you are, people will look to you in adversity to see what it means for them. They will listen to what you say about the situation and take their cues from your response. At a minimum, they’ll expect you to have some ideas and guide them through what may be an unsettling or even frightening period. If you make it evident you have no idea what to do, the organization can stall and make a wrong move just when good judgment and perseverence is essential. Worse, your credibility will be damaged. Recovery from this condition is not impossible, but it isn’t very easy.

**What does a Resilient Leader Look Like?**

Leaders who recover quickly from adversity have a strong sense of who they are, comfort with what that means, and confidence in their ability to exert positive influence. They are level-headed and use patience and humour to deal with adversity.

Resilient leaders are action-oriented and know the value of personal as well as organizational momentum. They don’t get stuck. They keep moving forward even if it is only the smallest of steps. They use their prior experience with adversity to adapt and convert lessons from the past into effective responses to the present.

Resilient leaders are pragmatic glass-half-full people. Unlike pessimists who see adverse events as personal, pervasive and permanent, resilient leaders see adversity as transient, specific, and impersonal. They explain events positively and add energy to problem-solve adverse situations. They have a realistic and well-founded faith in their ability to deal with things and a network of strong relationships to draw on for support.

Above all, resilient leaders know themselves. They know their strengths and weaknesses and their blind spots and over-done strengths. Much of this insight is hard-won from earlier experience with adversity that did not go so well. They learned whatever lesson was to be learned from it and added it to their repertoire so they have a comprehensive skill set that works for them when things go south. This paper is about becoming that kind of leader.
**Part A: Leading in Adversity**

This part of the paper establishes the context for resilience. Because adversity appears in many forms, it is helpful to recognize different conditions as they present themselves so that your response is proportionate. This idea is introduced below, and it establishes a point of departure for ideas about leading in adversity.

**The Adversity Spectrum**

The term adversity covers a range of situations, and it is useful to think of it as occurring across a spectrum defined by time. At one end, there are temporary setbacks, the kind of speed bump we encounter almost daily and know, mostly, how to navigate around them. In the middle are adverse conditions, a longer-term situation that demands a different kind of response. And at the other end, there is chronic suffering, an unhealthy long-term situation that may cause harm. Understanding the distinction between the three types is important because each requires a different personal response and also a different leadership response.

A setback is a single event or specific series of events that temporarily impede forward momentum. They are usually one-time, one-of-a-kind occurrences. Not making the short-list for a promotion or the unanticipated departure of a critical member of your management team qualify as setbacks. The event(s) has made you pause, perhaps checked your stride, and perhaps caused you to pull back, but it has not stopped you.

An adverse condition is a continuous unfavourable situation that is harder to work through. It exists over a longer time frame and in a broader context. It is more complicated; with more factors and actors whose actions and interests need to be understood. An example of an adverse situation would be an ongoing crushing workload as you try to analyze and advise on a policy priority that keeps changing. Another would be a long-standing internal conflict between two branches of the same department that causes morale to decline and momentum to be lost. Another would be the experience of working with a bad boss.

Adverse conditions can become chronic. For example, if the workload referred to above or the experience of working with a bad boss extends over months or years, adversity can become chronic. Long-standing adversity is suffering, and it may cause serious harm, such as moral injury and personal trauma. It can lead to derailing. Suffering marks you and recovery is a long and difficult process that may require professional help.

**Leading in Adversity**

As you may expect, each type of adversity requires a different leadership response, and an accurate size-up of the situation will help you to identify correctly what you are facing. It’s a question of perceiving the true scale and scope of the event accurately and discerning its possible implications, often in a complex and fluid environment.

A setback may require a quick and or specific response. It’s as if something suddenly appeared in your path, and you decide to side-step and go around it. If it’s a significant setback, it may cause you to pause and reflect on the best way to deal with it. It may take effort and skill to stay on track and moving past whatever has happened. The effects of setbacks, however, are limited: once dealt with, you can move on.
An adverse condition is more like driving a car in bad winter weather: you’ll need to concentrate on your driving and keep your focus on the road until the journey ends and the situation resolves. Your goal is to get safely to the end of the trip. That’s what leaders do: keep things moving steadily forward through difficulties and bring their organization through a tough period.

Why Bother?

It may seem that nearly every day has setbacks and that adversity has become the new “normal,” raising this question; if this is what the world is like all the time, why try to fix it? The answer is that it’s not OK to accept the status quo for some good reasons:

- **Ensure Public Confidence**: In public service, a fundamental assumption is that the public continues to trust and believe in what the organization does. Responding well to adversity helps maintain public confidence. By continuing to perform and achieve results, often in the harsh glare of public scrutiny, it confirms that you are leading an effective organization that has demonstrated the resolution, competence, and commitment to carry on that validates and sustains the public trust.

- **Sustain Morale**: If the organization or the team is to continue to do good work, the workforce must sustain its commitment to the mission. Morale and employee engagement matter in adversity because they are the source of motivation and enable the extra effort needed to recover.

- **Maintain Faith**: It is not enough to prevent despair and a descent into darkness. Setbacks and adversity are where real leadership shows itself. If you have faith in a better future and can keep things moving, your organization will be more likely to follow you because they know you are committed to getting everyone through the situation.

- **Keep a Balanced Perspective**: Your organization’s purpose is to serve the public in whatever way legislation or policy requires. When faced with setbacks or adversity, it’s vital to balance the distraction of today’s misfortunes with the continuing pursuit of your organization’s vision and fulfillment of its public service mission. Both are important, and a degree of equilibrium between them is essential.

- **Maintain Momentum**: Personal and organizational momentum are precious because they enable the flexibility and agility that allows resilience. Adversity can deflect, slow or stop an organization from moving forward, and even send it backwards. No matter how difficult life may be, organizations need to keep moving. Being paralyzed by adversity is not a good thing. The time and effort required to re-start a stalled organization can require resources that may not always be available.

Responding to Adversity

When and how should a leader work to overcome setbacks and adverse conditions? The question here is one of time, rather than timing. Setbacks and adverse conditions develop over different time frames and require different kinds of response:
• **Setbacks: Find and Fix the Root Cause:** Action to recover from a setback should usually be immediate and focused on side-stepping or removing the obstacle or reversing the situation, whatever it is. What can you do to turn things around? If something you’ve worked for simply isn’t going to happen, find a new goal that’s related to the one that just got away. When the situation is reversible, quickly try to turn it around. If your approach isn’t working, determine what’s holding you back. Find the root cause: the approach itself, the way you’re implementing it, cultural differences between staff and constituents, and fix it as quickly as possible. Whatever it is, fix it before momentum is lost.

• **Adverse Conditions: Maintain Momentum and Push On:** With adverse conditions, your focus needs to expand so that the time horizon is further out, and you can plan recovery action for the immediate as well as longer-term. You’re working to overcome a set of conditions: it may take a while and call for different approaches. Slow and steady generally works here, with preservation of momentum a priority. Your actions as a leader should focus on keeping the organization moving toward its long-term goals while working through the adverse condition. The critical leadership factors here are commitment, willpower and perseverance to push through and keep at it until things improve.

**Good Leadership Practice in Adversity**

Adversity is an individual experience, and each of us responds in our own way. Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all strategy, it would be more helpful for a leader to apply some general principles and decide for themselves how to adapt them to the situation:

• **Be Visible:** When times are tough, people look to leaders for meaning and intentions. As a leader, you want to be at the centre of the social mass in your organization, the place where informal networks intersect. From this nexus, become a rallying point for the organization. With skill, you can convert the rallying point to a pivot, refocus the organization and or redirect it through adversity.

• **Be Prepared:** Even if it’s only a bare-bones outline, a rough plan is better than an ad hoc response. Adversity is not the time for a seat-of-the-pants strategy but remember that postponing a response until all the dots are connected can bleed precious momentum. Use the 80/20 rule and go with what is good enough. Have faith in a positive end-state and a plan that can get you headed in the right direction.

• **Take Action:** People need to see that someone credible is taking charge and is moving confidently to address the situation. Leaders need to set a tone that demonstrates that they understand the event is serious, that action is being taken, and that the organization is expected to engage in a recovery strategy.

• **Communicate:** Let everyone know what’s going on and what you intend to do. If you don’t communicate, gossip and rumours will take the place of real information, and the narrative that will develop will make your job of explaining the condition and sustaining morale that much harder. Your message does not have to be precise or prescriptive, but it should be enough for people to feel assured that you are in charge and understand the event and know what it means for the organization.

• **Engage Everyone:** None of us is as smart as all of us and making the response to adversity an all-hands affair will engage more talent and produce better ideas. People feel less helpless when they can be part of a solution. If asked for ideas or advice, chances are they’ll take some ownership and remain engaged.
- **Reach Out**: If you don’t have the expertise or knowledge within the organization to address the situation, there are others out there who can help. This situation is where the real value of a professional network becomes evident. Probably, somebody you know has had a similar experience and drawing on their expertise for advice will provide fresh insight as well as possibly generating more support for your efforts.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Like any other challenge, leaders make choices about how to respond to adversity. Approach setbacks as teachable moments. See adversity as an opportunity for growth. Remember that the Chinese symbol for “crisis” is made up of the symbols for “danger” and “opportunity.” You may not be in crisis, but any setback or adverse situation presents both danger and an opportunity to learn about yourself and the organization you are leading. If you keep both in mind, you have more choices to make. And that’s a good thing.
PART B: BECOMING MORE RESILIENT

In its essence, resilience is your ability to adapt and recover from adversity. Although often thought of as an inherent quality, research suggests that resilience is something that can be developed. As much as it is a disposition toward life, it is also a set of skills that can serve you well. This part of the paper unpacks the meta-skill of Response Flexibility so that you can use some of these ideas to become more resilient.

Why is this Important?

From a personal perspective, resilience can have a positive impact on your emotional wellbeing. It helps to reduce burnout, increase empathy and compassion, reconnect with your life purpose, and improve your physical and mental health.

Resilient people are aware of their emotional reactions to adversity and understand what is causing them and why. By becoming more self-aware, resilient people maintain better control of how they respond to a situation and have more choices about solving a problem.

As a leader, building a resilient organizational culture makes good sense. A 2014 Study by Price Waterhouse Coopers concluded that fostering resiliency and mental health in a workforce returned $2.30 for every dollar spent — with the return coming in the form of lower health care costs, higher productivity, lower absenteeism and decreased turnover.

Resilience begins with how you explain adversity to yourself

It’s natural to want an explanation for whatever situation we are in. If we have a reasonable explanation for an adverse situation, we can make better sense of it and be more flexible in how we respond.

How you consistently describe the cause(s) of adversity and explain the condition to yourself (and to others) is known as your Explanatory Style (Seligman 1995).

Explanations begin with causes and proceed toward solutions. A useful way to establish this process is through something called the Ladder of Inference (Argyris and Schon, 1974). This idea blends understanding and action in a model that describes a logical mental pathway along which we move from observation of a condition through evaluation to a decision to take action. It is a great way to become more disciplined in thinking clearly about adverse events. The stages of the ladder as they might apply to adversity are shown in the box opposite.

“Between a stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom. The last of human freedoms is to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”


Ladder of Inference in Adversity

- You observe or experience adversity and;
- Select relevant aspects of it so that you can;
- Add meaning to the situation, and;
- Make assumptions based on what it means to you;
- So that you can draw conclusions about it, and;
- Adopt beliefs about the situation and its context, and then;
- Take actions based on your beliefs.
The point about using something like the ladder of inference is that it can prevent you from jumping to conclusions and or over-thinking your situation – the ladder may help you conclude that sometimes a duck is just a duck and not a raptor intent on attacking you. It can help you to classify adversity so that you can establish a logical reason(s) why something is adverse. In turn, this can help you to explain a situation more clearly to yourself and put it in perspective so that you can make better choices about how to move forward.

The ladder of inference is useful as a management tool in several ways. First, when you are leading a group and want to slow down their thinking and take it to a deeper level. In many cases, the rush to judgement that plagues many committees often results in superficial decisions that fall apart when better information emerges later and reveals inconsistencies. Asking a group to walk you through a logical chain of reasoning, perhaps with something like the ladder of inference, can show how they reached their conclusions and reveal poor assumptions or logical fallacies.

In a second way, if you are briefing up on a complicated issue, the ladder of inference can help you structure your brief in a coherent way so that a story line unfolds that is easy to follow and which leads naturally to a conclusion that can be evaluated. A logical flow will give others confidence that have your ducks properly lined and have done some thinking about the issue being briefed. You can make your assumptions clear and highlight critical factors such as risk that need to be considered before adopting a recommendation.

**Explanatory Style**

Explanatory Style refers to your predisposition to be optimistic or pessimistic in the way you explain something. This tendency influences your emotional state in the face of adversity and shapes your behaviours. Pessimistic explanatory styles suck energy out of human interaction. Optimistic styles add energy. Both styles shape how a briefing is received and will colour your interactions with others.

A pessimistic explanatory style is characterized by describing the cause(s) of adversity as permanent, pervasive and personal. For example, explaining a failed project by saying that all projects fail, that the failures are permanent, and that you had a hand in their failure. Conversely, optimistic explanatory styles explain the causes of adversity as transient, specific and caused by external forces. Using the same example as above, this particular project failed because of, say, a planning error that happened because oversight by the project team was incomplete.

Explanatory Style is influenced two things; first, how you explain adversity using the ladder of inference described above and; second, through something called your Locus of Control. This characteristic describes the extent to which you believe you influence external events or how these events influence you (Rotter, 1966). People with an internal locus of control believe their environment is responsive to their actions and those with an external locus of control believe that the world shapes their actions. The choice between the two is not binary but influenced by how one perceives an adverse situation within a context. Things like situational awareness become important here because it will shape how you see your locus of control.

The Ladder of Inference, your Locus of Control and your Explanatory Style are foundational elements of your resiliency. In effect, they describe the pivot on which the fulcrum of Response Flexibility rests. All three are elements of self-awareness and incorporating them in your leadership repertoire will serve you well as you confront adversity.
What is Resilience?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015) defines resilience as the ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity and stress. The term broadly describes the ability of systems, enterprises, and individuals to recover from adversity. The focus here is on the resilience of individual leaders.

Note that the definition has three parts: withstand, adapt and recover. Taken together, they suggest that resilience is best understood not as a single activity, but rather as a process consisting of separate but interdependent behaviours. Each requires something different from an individual, and this lends weight to the idea that resilience is a learned skill or, more properly, a collection of learned skills that come together under the heading of Response Flexibility.

Unpacking Response Flexibility

In the literature, Response Flexibility is a meta-capability that is seen as the fulcrum of resilience. Thought leader Linda Graham introduces the idea that adversity can be seen as a change imposed by an event or a set of conditions (Graham, 2010). She suggests that to cope with the change implied in adversity, we have to change the way we cope. She describes Response Flexibility as the set of skills that allows one to stop, hold the adverse experience in the mind, to step back, consciously think about the situation, reflect, evaluate, and then, choose wisely to respond and act. The more flexible someone can be in responding to adversity, the more options they can identify, and the more resilient they can be in the face of real or implied change. So, Response Flexibility is the key to being more resilient and learning about it can help you to adapt and recover from adversity.

What does Response Flexibility look like?

Unpacking the idea of resilience is a challenge because there is no broadly accepted set of components. Still, the American Psychological Association (APA) has identified the following collection of characteristics that describe someone who has developed Response Flexibility:

- **Optimism**: those who are optimistic tend to be more resilient since they are more likely to stay positive about the future even when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Optimists usually have a positive explanatory style that can help others to understand adversity's true nature.

- **Altruism**: the most resilient among us often turn to help others when they need to relieve stress and boost their self-assurance. This quality is about reaching out for support and is a good part of the reason why a robust network is an essential professional asset.

- **Moral Compass**: people with a strong moral compass or steadfast set of beliefs about right and wrong generally have an easier time recovering, but there are obvious limits to this. It's a means/end thing. A moral compass with a rigid end that is fixed firmly on north requires some flexibility in means if it is to provide useful guidance.
• **Faith and Spirituality:** while not a required factor for resilience, people often find their faith helpful in surviving challenges because it gives them a basis for hope that this condition will end and that they can emerge stronger and wiser on the other side.

• **Humour:** people who have a healthy sense of humour and can laugh at their misfortune have an advantage when it comes to recovery. But, the kind of humour matters. Irony or sarcasm is unhelpful because it conveys the opposite of the literal meaning in the phrase used, and so introduces ambiguity at a time when clarity is important. Self-deprecation works better because it is directed inward, and its impact on others is more natural to moderate.

• **Having a Role Model:** this is also not a requirement for resilience, but those who have a role model in mind can draw strength from their desire to emulate this person. We all know someone who has weathered a crisis or survived an adverse condition. If you can, reach out and ask how they did it.

• **Social Supports:** unsurprisingly, social support is essential when it comes to resilience; those with strong social networks are better equipped to bounce back from loss or disappointment.

• **Facing Fear:** this is not so much a characteristic as an inclination to act, but people who are willing to leave their comfort zone and confront their fears are more likely to overcome their challenges and grow.

• **Meaning or Purpose in Life:** it shouldn’t be surprising that those who feel they have a specific purpose in life are more likely to recover from failure or disappointment. When you believe you have a purpose, you are less likely to give up when adversity imposes a loss.

**How Resilient Am I?**

It may be useful to know your present level of resilience so that you can identify areas for personal development. Research on resiliency has produced assessment tools such as the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). Validated by an extensive set of studies, and compared to eight other scales by the APA, the CD-RISC is considered one of the higher scoring scales in the psychometric evaluation of resilience (Windle, Bennett, & Noyes, 2011). The CD-RISC measures resilience as a function of five interrelated components:

• **Personal Competence:** Personal competence plays a critical role in emotional intelligence. It consists of two key attributes:
  - **Self-Awareness:** This is your ability to recognize your own emotions, their effects on your behaviours and their impact on other people. Self-awareness means that you understand how you feel and can accurately assess your emotional state. To do this, you need emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence.
  - **Self-Management:** The ability to act on self-awareness to ensure emotions don’t dominate behaviours in a given situation. It involves using what you know about your feelings to manage these emotions and motivate oneself.
  - **Acceptance of Change:** When an adverse event occurs, the natural response is often resistance to the change that is implicit in the adverse event. While a degree of resistance is necessary so that you reserve...
your strengths for situations that truly merit them, resistance only works for you up to a certain point. Remember that the more one resists adversity, the harder it is to adapt to it and recover. So, resilience depends on accurately understanding the true nature of adversity and then accepting the reality of your situation and being open to making changes so that you can recover. It’s somewhat of a paradox: the best way to deal with adverse change is to accept change.

- **Secure Relationships**: A secure relationship is a human connection where the people involved trust each other. Those in a secure relationship are not anxious or afraid and believe the other person has emotional regard for them. These connections provide a degree of emotional stability and assurance, and they enable self-confidence.

- **Trust/Tolerance/Stress**: Resilience is seen as a function of the degree of trust in your instincts when adversity threatens. In this sense, trust is a product of self-awareness and self-confidence, that has reliably shown that what you see and feel by way of apprehended adversity is confirmed by practical experience. Included in this is the development of tolerance for stress; how the subjective experience of past negative emotions strengthens your present ability to perceive adversity accurately. It also includes the strengthening effects of stress in which you incorporate lessons learned from dealing with adversity to improve your ability to respond to it.

- **Control**: Resilience kicks in when we think we might lose personal control in the face of an event. Maintaining personal control is the aim of steps you take to strengthen resilience. Once control is lost, and stress takes hold, other interventions, such withdrawal from the situation, become relevant. Resilience is about ensuring that personal control is not lost. There are three areas of focus:

  - **Control over oneself**: The control over oneself is rooted in self-awareness. Someone who is self-aware opens themselves up to the potential for understanding other people and why they do the things they do. Understanding others in this way maintains personal control when faced with unusual events; other peoples' responses and behaviours can be more readily understood from the perspective of knowing oneself. A degree of prediction of what others will do helps in maintaining personal control in potentially ambiguous situations.

  - **Control in the face of potentially threatening events**: This control is rooted in organizing oneself in chaotic situations. Someone who can organize themselves in fluid and unpredictable situations also can be flexible and adaptable and can use these techniques to respond to a broad range of events.

  - **Control in the face of potentially threatening interaction with other people**: This control is rooted in the ability to negotiate effectively with others. Someone with the skills to interact with others that produce reciprocal behaviour and can persuade others to do things they might otherwise not wish to do, without causing distress, can negotiate effectively in most adverse situations.

- **Spiritual influences**: Resilience is also seen as influenced by faith in a better future and hope that it will come to pass. Influence, in this sense, is the effect of deeper elemental forces within one's personality that manifest themselves as positive conviction and intention that enables the use of willpower to respond to adversity.
Being Resilient

As you encounter adversity and use Response Flexibility to adapt and recover, you also use the personal insight and apply the practical skills you gained from experience with similar situations. Below are ten traits that describe being resilient. All of them can be learned or strengthened.

- **Develop and maintain Situational Awareness:** Resilient people are aware of their situation. They maintain perspective, perceive adverse events and discern their meaning accurately. They may be checked by an event but are not blind-sided. When the facts on the ground change, they change their frame of reference and up their game.

- **Be Self-Aware:** Resilient people understand their emotional make-up. They know who they are. They recognize their feelings about adversity and use this insight to manage their emotional response to it.

- **Have Self-Regard:** They see themselves in a positive light and are confident in their abilities. Resilient people don’t see themselves as victims or view adversity as a negative reflection of themselves. They are self-assured and confident in their abilities to work through adverse conditions.

- **Practice Self-Care:** Resilient people understand the physical toll that comes with adversity and they look after their physical condition through proper rest, sleep, diet and exercise so that they have the necessary physical resources to adapt and cope with adversity.

- **Exercise Self-Control:** Resilient people act within that which constrains them. They control their impulses. They recognize what they can’t change and focus on situations and events they have control over.

- **Be Committed:** Resilient people are committed to their lives and their professional goals. They are focused and have a compelling reason to get out of bed in the morning.

- **Believe in your Personal Impact:** Resilient people believe they can influence events. They have an internal locus of control and make deliberate practical choices about how to respond to adversity based on experience in similar situations. They can make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out.

- **Have Strong Relational Skills:** Resilient people are empathetic and compassionate. They are skilled communicators with a positive explanatory style. While seeking feedback, they are not constrained by what others think of them.

- **Good Social Connections:** They have supportive professional and domestic relationships, good social skills and a robust network of professional connections they can draw on for advice and emotional support.

- **Skilled Problem-Solvers:** Resilient individuals are good problem solvers. They understand the idea of a ladder of inference and do not rush to judgement. They can look at a problem and envision a successful solution. They resist tunnel vision and adjust their frame of reference to focus on the process as well as the content.
Willpower and Resilience

It seems possible for a person to have all of the traits listed above and still not be resilient. Someone can have great self-awareness and self-confidence and can be optimistic with a strong moral compass supported by faith, and yet fall apart when adverse conditions become established.

Even with all of the characteristics and competencies we have listed, it seems something is missing — there is a gap between resilience capability and being resilient. I think what's missing is willpower — the quality that enables someone to change their perspective deliberately and apply their skills intentionally in a given situation. When adversity develops and the facts of your situation change, willpower is the secret sauce that enables you to change your mind and take action to initiate recovery.

Willpower consists of five elements shown below as they relate to resiliency:

- **Intention**: Having a commitment to being resilient and choosing to respond well to adversity.
- **Attention**: Being mindful of adverse conditions and keeping this knowledge at the forefront of your consciousness.
- **Cognition**: Making the right call about the true nature of adversity, understanding your goal to respond, evaluating options and choosing the best response.
- **Emotion**: Realistic but optimistic feelings about adversity can motivate you to achieve your goal.
- **Persistence**: Sustaining your commitment to responding to adversity and lead others through it.

Given that resilience is a process consisting of resistance, adaptation and recovery, it is evident that willpower takes a different form depending on where you are in the process. For example, cognition and emotion are essential in the early stages of the process, intention would be necessary for the middle, and persistence would probably play a more significant role in recovery. An accurate assessment of where you are in the process is helpful so that you can apply appropriate tools.

Concluding Thoughts

The real measure of your leadership becomes apparent when things aren't going well. How you handle adversity and the stresses and strains that come with it says a lot about the kind of person you are.

As a leader, be mindful of how you appear to others in adversity. Be present and engaged. Strive to be calm. Practice compassion and empathy. Cultivate a leadership presence that projects faith, certainty, composure, confidence and competence. Communicate transparently and with authenticity. Provide timely and practical emotional support to help people who are not dealing well with their situation. Preserve momentum; it is a priceless asset. Keep the organization focused on the future and moving toward it and use leadership reach to involve everyone in problem-solving that finds new solutions, maintains momentum and enables recovery.