

Think resilience

What makes us resilient and high-performance? And how do we change our thinking to be resilient for the future?

Dr Etienne van der Walt, neurologist and an authority in applied behavioural neuroscience, recently unpacked some of the answers to these questions in a Glacier webinar.



The source of what and how we think

How we think is determined by our opinions and perceptions of the world, and we attach values to what we interpret through our senses.

Acknowledgement of the values we attach to these cues is critical. We need to be conscious of what we know and what we've learned. Etienne points out that assigning the right values to the right kinds of things ensures resilience. This is also the mark of leadership, he says.

"We use our knowledge, skills and expertise to allocate resources together and distribute these resources fairly in order to stay alive, survive and thrive in life".

Living happens at a cellular and biological level, like taking breath. Survival happens through procreation. Thriving means that you are safe (in a relaxed, physiological state) and everything that we do should help us get back to that state of safety – whether it's physical, social or financial.

How much can you take before you break?

Resilience is not tenacity or grit. It is an innate neurobiological capacity which exists in everyone. It's what our ancestors had to help them adapt to change. It is the ability to bounce back and bounce forward. Resilience allows us all to overcome challenges.

If the challenges come too thick and fast, they may override our resilience and we will break. Breaking means the stress is too much – too much energy being assigned to tasks. Excessive, chronic stress causes a leakage of energy, and this constant leakage causes illness. Resilience is

the body and brain's capacity to prevent implosion in the presence of chronic stress. It allows us to learn and grow through stressful situations and enables us to bounce forward.

COVID-19 changed everything, and we had to adapt to its challenges.

Five high-performance domains to build resilience

Etienne lists 'five big things' that help build resilience:

1. Connectors result in social safety. This involves bonding with others (built on trust) and belonging (feeling a sense of connection).
2. Transformers – a shift in mindset. This means moving from an individual competitive mindset to a collaborative competitive one. It involves engaging the part of the brain that sees the bigger picture, not just the details.
3. Energy. This is finite and allows us to think, learn, allocate resources and work together. The key to having energy is optimising the energy we have. Humour, curiosity, optimism and enthusiasm help increase energy.
4. Rhythms. Being conscious or mindful of rhythms such as nutrition, exercise, movement and breathing.
5. Innovators. This means cultivating learning and innovation and being a life-long learner.

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