

Change Fatigue at Work – Four Ways to Foster Personal Resilience

By John Izzo

Change fatigue is a term I am hearing more and more these days from my clients. I recently spent a day with over one hundred senior VP's of Human Resources in San Francisco. When asked what the biggest challenge they faced in their organization, all of them pretty much said the ability to create constant change and drive innovation. They also talked about a pervasive feeling that there is so much change in their organizations that it has become increasingly difficult to keep people motivated and productive. That may be why I have heard companies such as DuPont say that "resilience" is really the biggest challenge we face-how individuals can be more resilient and how the organization can be adaptable.

Resilience is an interesting term. The dictionary says resilience is "the ability to recover quickly from illness, change, or misfortune; buoyancy or the property of a material that enables it to resume its original shape or position after being bent, stretched, or compressed; elasticity." If stretched, bent and compressed aren't words that describe your workplace at all count yourself as fortunate.

As leaders we should be worried about how resilient our people are and whether we can do anything to enhance their resilience. Scientific evidence demonstrates a link between fatigue and declines in cognitive functioning, such as poor judgment, poor performance on skilled tasks and slower reaction times. There is even evidence that the "mood" of a physician has a meaningful impact on their ability to make correct diagnosis so there is a good chance that leaders and most of our team members are at risk for reduced performance.

For the individual, research is increasingly showing that when we take care of ourselves and our own happiness we are more resilient and able to deal with so called change fatigue. This is about people learning to "manage" their own happiness rather than being merely the victim of external circumstances.

Here are four proven ways to increase personal resilience:

- **Focus on your job purpose.** Research shows that the more we see our job as a calling instead of a set of tasks the more productive we are, the longer we can work without fatigue and the more committed we are at work. Helping ourselves and others remember WHY we are going through all this change is important.

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- **Reserve 20-30 minutes every day for wellbeing.** Studies have shown that by devoting just 20-30 minutes every day to something that makes you happier has an impact on the rest of your day.
- **Stay focused on gratitude.** University of Michigan studies have shown that when MBA students were asked to journal what they are grateful for every day and others were asked to journal problems they had every day, the difference in resilience were quite significant. Focusing on what is working makes us more resilient (and more likely to keep embracing change). In fact, the students even had a more positive antibody response to a flu shot after six months of journaling gratitude! How much do leaders in your organization focus on what is working vs. what is not working.
- **Learn how to handle stress.** Studies of mice and rats show that stress really doesn't kill us or debilitate us. In fact, mice in stressful situations where they also exercised lived longer and were more alert than mice in low stress situations. Many leading companies are now training people in meditation as a matter of course often with great results.

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