



CARM Reflections

SERIES:
MINDSET
The Link to Behaviour

This Edition: “Emotional Resilience... for when the going gets tough”

Hi,

There’s nothing comfortable about conflict....but then where would we be without it? If you believe in Darwin’s theory of natural selection then you would relate to the fact that conflict is in our DNA as it is in all species. Without it, whose view would we adopt? Whose decisions would we accept? How would we react if things didn’t work out as planned? Conflict is often seen as chaos because of our focus on the *Problem*. However conflict can also carry with it the opportunity to challenge current thinking, leverage creativity and bring about change. But in order to achieve this, we must first embrace it with a mindset and focus on *Outcomes* (mutual needs) as opposed to *Positional Thinking* (self needs).

Our *ability* to move through conflict and with it change can certainly be defining moments for all of us. Consider for a moment, how do *you* respond when challenged? When people are nasty...do you switch off and wonder: “*Why bother, this person doesn’t deserve my help, let alone my respect....no way.*” Do you become emotionally compromised in the face of adversity or do you exercise “emotional resilience” and accept what is happening and proactively seek to improve outcomes?

Admiral Stockdale, a senior American naval officer captured during the Vietnam War in 1965 and imprisoned in the Hoa Lo Prison for 7 years as a POW perhaps illustrates emotional resilience in a most powerful way. His psychological coping strategy was to “never lose faith” that he would prevail in the long run and that this would be a “defining moment” in his life. He managed to keep his life in perspective and accept the reality of his current situation, whilst at the same time enduring what could only be described as brutal personal hardship.

In another form, business leaders recognise the importance of resilience, because in the business life cycle there will no doubt be good and prosperous times, as well as tough and challenging times. No truer example of this, than the impact of the global economic crisis. In a similar way, interpersonal relationships experience challenges, phases and difficult moments. We know we are not always going to agree with someone or them with us. We also know that we are going to experience resistance from others in terms of our own perspective, needs, ideas and values and in the more difficult circumstances we may find others words or actions challenging and difficult to tolerate.

It is perhaps emotional resilience that will importantly contribute to the “defining moments” of any conflict. When you think of emotional resilience, you are likely to think of such qualities as patience, tolerance, resourcefulness, improvisation, understanding and a capacity to endure and work through frustration. Typically however, “*when people are put under pressure they tend to regress to their most habituated ways of responding*”[^]. There is a reality to human behaviour which is imprinted in our DNA, which can make our resilience qualities difficult to access when the going gets tough? Like Admiral Stockdale’s experience however you may find that emotional resilience resides strongly amongst some people enabling them to see difficulties as “*moments in time*” through which they will adapt, prevail, learn and prosper.

It is not how we behave when all is good that becomes our yardstick to measure good character. It is not the outcomes we achieve through communication when all is well that defines our communication capability when in conflict. It is rather the nature of our thoughts and behaviour through the less pleasant moments that are our defining qualities. Emotional Resilience is about our ability to endure and work through unpleasant and challenging moments rather than becoming emotionally compromised.

It keeps us moving forward towards more equitable and appropriate outcomes and improves our ability to defer a more immediate need for self gratification. If to the contrary, you see yourself as a victim and you find yourself throwing up your hands and thinking “*how can this be happening to me*”, *how it should have been, who is to blame or whose fault it was, how you don’t deserve this and how you deserve better*, then your capacity for emotional resilience may need consideration. Otherwise you may find that you are limiting your ability to achieve good interpersonal outcomes in difficult circumstances and getting caught in the realm of negative emotions and self interest.

Experiencing unpleasant things is perhaps an important part of helping us to develop a deeper sense of appreciation for the more pleasant things. In contrast, relationships with people are going to have both good times and bad as well as smooth and rough periods. Situations will sometimes provide reward whilst at other times they will be the opposite. Not everything others do, want or say at any given time is always going to suit our own personal needs. Therefore we need to develop a sense of “hardiness” within ourselves to help us address these everyday challenges in life.

Without exercising emotional resilience, we might not have a capacity to work through the challenges of conflict or have the ability to endure difference. We might not be able to develop our capacity for patience and tolerance; after all, emotional challenges can get very uncomfortable. Rather we might seek solace in our need for “immediate gratification” which can take many forms i.e. avoidance / withdrawal - walking away to evade dealing with the challenge or not engage in dialogue to prevent mediating difference, not take the time to see the value in another’s opinion, not seek to understand another’s perspective, but rather get frustrated when things don’t go our way or when people oppose us.

Embrace “Emotional Resilience” as a characteristic trait to be admired, fostered and developed. In communicating it is what enables us to tolerate hardship, without abandoning faith, whilst continuing to pave the way forward for mutual benefit.

Emotional resilience provides us with a capacity to be more robust under conditions of stress particularly where we are personally challenged. It’s an important life / work skill and one that is worthy of us all considering and developing. And the good news is we all can, with a little focus and attention on two key “emotional intelligence competencies”:-

1. Your sense of “*Self Awareness*” – having a balanced and honest view of your own personality and character traits particularly under stress and your ability to sense how emotions and behaviours affect both you and others
2. Your capacity for “*Self Control*” – your ability and willpower to control your emotions particularly under stress and your thinking and behaviour, especially in terms of your feelings and reactions towards impulses, desires and wants.

In summary three key points to help you build “Emotional Resilience”:-

- Practice **tolerating** difficult behaviour and opposing opinions, recognise that having your ideas, views and values challenged is part of human behaviour and life. Rather than focusing on the differences in positions, seek to **value** others views, show respect and establish common ground upon which to build.
- Try to exercise **patience** by remaining receptive, open and outcome focused and seek to **improve** as opposed to getting bogged down. Focus more on proactively looking forwards and seeking mutual outcomes rather than looking back and apportioning blame or feeling like a victim.
- Focus on being **respectful** towards others in the way you communicate with them, through what you say and the characteristics of your behaviour. This is particularly the case when opinions differ from yours.

[^] Karl E. Weick Professor Organizational Behaviour University of Michigan Business School

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The CARM Team

**When outcomes
are critical**



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