

leadership instalments

The Choice Between Resiliency And Surrender

By Dan Gaynor

RESILIENCY, THAT POWERFUL QUALITY THAT

enables us to adapt - to get back up after a setback and go back at the challenges life brings - while most of us value it in good times, it moves into the "must have" category in times of challenge and uncertainty. It is not a universal characteristic. Resiliency, for many people is a response to good leadership.

Experience convinces me that people meet with challenge in one of three ways. There are those who just seem hard-wired to be resilient, it doesn't matter what the circumstances are they just keep getting up. These people seem to thrive on adversity. On the other end of the spectrum there are those who seem born to see the gloomy side of everything and it doesn't seem to matter what we do, they are most comfortable seeing the world through this lens. The big group though sits somewhere in the middle. These people can swing to either side depending on the influences around them. The majority of the people who populate our businesses and organizations fit this description. The choice they make between resiliency and surrender can have a dramatic effect on the way organizations move through challenging periods.

For this group resilience is a product of leadership. Hope is the root from which resiliency grows and so the leader must become a source of hope. This is a large part of every leader's job. At these times people want and need strong leadership. They want to believe their leader knows the way through the storm. If the leader is fearful or defeated he or she will have a devastating impact on the team. While leaders are not superhuman - and they have fears - they cannot reveal them at these times, this is just part of good leadership. No team was ever better off because its leader revealed fear and doubt when the team needed strength and confidence.

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In the middle of a storm all eyes turn to the leader. Whether leaders realize it or not, they are watched much more closely during these periods. I saw this first hand during the eight months I led the Calgary Herald through a challenging labour dispute. While 150 or so people walked picket lines and tried to stop publication of the newspaper, over 500 crossed those same lines each day to come to work. The daily experience was challenging and felt threatening at times. I knew people were watching my reaction to each new challenge closely. So leaders must appreciate the power of their example. The first step is to harness this opportunity by being more visible. These are times to lead from the front. Leaders should be on the shop floor and not hidden in their offices. They should spend a lot of time talking to the troops. In every conversation they must be hope-full.

It's also important to have a plan and communicate it. Turmoil is a time to ramp up the staff meetings. Lots of short meetings to talk about the plan, the progress, the assignments and the adjustments send the message the leader is taking charge. This too, builds hope.

Become a leader who brings hope and you will build resilience. You will not overcome those few who seem bent on seeing the darker side of things. You don't need to, but you will create the resiliency, focus and even determination a team needs to get safely through the storm and emerge stronger than they were when they entered it.

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