

WHY RESILIENCE MATTERS FOR LEADERS

by Glenn Williams



Resilience matters for leaders. It's not just some abstract concept. It's about our capacity to cope with and grow from life's toughest challenges. Think of it as a set of skills that help us navigate what may be incredibly traumatic and life-changing events.

Resilience is a complex, layered, and nuanced concept. Researchers have identified many forms of resilience across individuals, families, and communities. While this might sound academic, resilience theory across cultures makes for insightful and fascinating reading. It's like unraveling the secrets of how some people bounce back while others get stuck.

Our ability to bounce back has a significant bearing on our mental health. Part of the current mental health crisis, particularly in younger generations, is directly linked to a lack of resilience. When we, with the best of intentions, shield our kids from hardship or having to deal with anything stressful, we deprive them of the opportunity to build a resilient character.

The great news is that resilience isn't fixed; it is a character trait that can be nurtured throughout our lives. Our resilience muscles strengthen every time we respond thoughtfully instead of reacting impulsively to stressful situations. If we're willing to learn from perceived failure, disappointment, loss, and grief, we become more resilient.

Why does this matter for leaders? The ability to bounce back and process these inevitable life challenges significantly impacts our lives and the lives of everyone around us, including those we lead.

When Leaders Are Lost

Often, it's not until we're blindsided that we find out just how resilient we are. I discovered this for myself during a tough leadership transition, which I wrote about in my book [*When Leaders Are Lost: Moving Beyond Disappointment, Failure, and Hurt to Redefine Success*](#).

"It's important to acknowledge that our perspectives on such situations are precisely that, perspectives. Flawed or otherwise, the CEO and I both had a perspective that became our reality. My challenge was not to prove I was in the right, the victim, or even to seek restitution. Instead, it was to sit in the reality of how the situation affected me and the opportunities now before me.

Would I be resilient enough to learn from this experience and use it to grow as a person and leader? Over time, I discovered it also takes humility, no small amount of patience, and the ability to forgive, perhaps the most challenging thing to do."

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Resilience is foundational to successful leadership. It's not just knowing what's important to you; it's about holding onto those values when you're under pressure to compromise them.

When a leader's character is questioned, it raises concerns about their reliability and, ultimately, their resilience. It makes us wonder if this person can be counted on, especially when the going gets tough. And let's face it: once you step into a leadership role, sooner or later, your principles will also be put to the test.

But here's the thing: building resilience as a character trait is a lifelong process. As leaders, we know how hard it can be to make tough decisions that impact those close to us, the people we work with, and the organizations we lead. That's where courage comes in; it's one of the ingredients of a resilient character.

How thankful are you?

Gratitude is another key component in developing a resilient character. Research has found that those people who can see the good or the potential for good in even dire situations develop traits that will help them in the future. These traits are protective.

So, how else can leaders develop a resilient character?

Beyond the crucible

I recently had the pleasure of talking with Warwick Fairfax on his podcast, [Beyond the Crucible](#). We explored the connection between character, values, relationships, and resilience during our conversation. Below is a portion of my response to Warwick's probing questions.

We talk about the importance of character, values, and resilience, and the interesting thing is that if you've got clarity around the values that are important to you, that enables you to be more resilient. If you don't have those values, you get thrown around from one place to another, and it's difficult to be resilient when there's no stability or consistency there – and that's what those values can bring.

We also need to be very intentional about making decisions. The question is, do we have a fixed mindset or a growth mindset?

A fixed mindset says, "This is what it is, and it's too bad – but I'm not willing to change, learn, or adapt." A growth mindset, on the other hand, says, "What can I learn from this? How can I grow from this?"

Other questions you might ask include: how can I lead differently? How has this crisis informed and contributed to my life? What's the legacy that I can extend as a result of that? Then, you get to create a whole new trajectory and model a way forward, model success in a way that may have been different to

any other time in your life.

I can tell you that if you can achieve that, you'll end up modelling a success that is refreshing to other people. You'll model and carry out a success that will challenge people to even think about how they might look at success and need to redefine that and revisit that in their own life."

You can watch the entire episode at [Beyond the Crucible meets When Leaders Are Lost](#).

Resilience is critical to healthy longevity for leaders

The keys to healthy longevity in leadership revolve around building resilience and capacity. However, they can only be achieved in the context of identity and relational integrity.

Pain is part of the fabric of life. It just is. Storms will inevitably come, and how we choose to view them determines our response. A resilient person understands that their darkest moments don't define future success.

So, how do we tap into resilience in the moment? We do it by leveraging our whole story, not just the parts we believe are successful or what others may want to hear.

From LCP Global's work with leaders worldwide, we've identified [The 5 Leadership Anchors™](#) that, if deployed, will help leaders navigate times of great challenge while continuing to lead themselves and others well.

1. The quality of your relationships
2. A clear definition of success and an understanding of motivational drivers
3. A commitment to personal character that builds resilience and confidence
4. Training your personal script so you can make better decisions
5. Creating a new success trajectory, personally, professionally, and corporately. These goals are not mutually exclusive.

[The 5 Leadership Anchors™](#) create a great framework with simple questions leaders can ask themselves. We call them anchors because they're foundational. They become an intrinsic part of life and help us weather the inevitable storms of life.



No one is an island

In the same way that it's impossible to lead outside of connection, it's impossible to develop a resilient character in isolation. We need others to help us gain perspective, learn, and grow. We need people on our team. And we need to be there for others in their time of need.

Invest heavily in relationships that are important to you. If you don't have a cheer squad around you, get one! If you don't have accountability relationships, find people you can be accountable to who are committed to your growth and want to cheer you on no matter what.

¹ Williams, G. *When Leaders Are Lost: Moving Beyond Disappointment, Failure, and Hurt to Redefine Success*, (2023), p33